

**Panel report of the external review of the
Kosovo¹ Accreditation Agency (KAA)
(final version 10 April 2014)**

¹ The designation 'Kosovo' is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

This is the report of the review of Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) undertaken in January 2014 for the purpose of determining whether the agency meets the criteria for Full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

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1. Background and outline of the review process, and executive summary

Background

The Statutes of ENQA require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they fulfil the membership provisions.

In November 2004, the General Assembly of ENQA agreed that the third part of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) should be incorporated into the membership provisions of its (then) regulations (now statutes). Substantial compliance with the ESG thus became the principal criterion for membership of ENQA. The ESG were subsequently adopted at the Bergen ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in 2005. The third part of the ESG covers the cyclical external review of quality assurance and accreditation agencies.

Outline of the review

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) has been affiliate member of ENQA since 2011. KAA submitted a request to become Full Member of ENQA in 2013. The external review of KAA was conducted in line with the process described in the Guidelines for External Reviews of Quality Assurance Agencies in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference of the Review Panel.

The review panel for the external review of KAA was composed of:

- Ossi V. Lindqvist, professor emeritus, University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio, Finland (Chairman),
- Obe de Vries, retired inspector of higher education, Netherlands (Secretary),
- Dionyssi Kladis, professor emeritus, Higher Education Policy, University of the Peloponnese, Greece (nominated by EUA),
- Rositsa Doneva, professor in Computer Science, Plovdiv University, Bulgaria,
- Kotryna Peilakauskaite, student, Vilnius University, Lithuania (nominated by ESU).

KAA produced a self-evaluation report (SER) that provided a substantial portion of the evidence that the panel used to form its conclusions. The panel conducted a site-visit on 19-21 January 2014 in Pristina (Annex 18). The review panel produced the final report on the basis of the self-evaluation report, the site-visit and its findings. KAA was also invited to give comments on the factual accuracy of the draft report. The review panel was given full access to all documents and persons it wished to consult throughout the review process. Overall, the site visit was well organised by the staff of KAA, the discussions were open and informative, and the entire meeting took place in good spirit and in a businesslike manner.

Executive summary

The review panel concludes that there is full compliance with four out of the eight ENQA membership criteria, and substantial compliance with the other four. As regards the composite ENQA criterion 1 (Activities), the panel finds that three out of ten sub-criteria are fully complied with, six substantially and one partially. For an overview of the findings by the panel, see Chapter 5, Conclusion and Development, Table 1 (p. 30).

The review panel is of the firm opinion that KAA has done a very good job since its start in 2008. Kosovo is developing fast to fit its Higher Education into European frameworks. KAA has played an important role as regards quality assurance of higher education by adhering to strict procedures of external quality assurance based on European standards. It is also fulfilling a widely appreciated role in harmonizing the field of higher education in the country. In doing so it has benefitted from the

support role of external development agencies, in particular from Austria, the Great Britain, and the USA. The fact that both institutional and programme evaluations have been carried out entirely by experts from abroad has contributed to its international orientation. KAA serves as an example of good practice in the field of higher education in Kosovo.

Apart from the current chapter the review report consists of:

2. Glossary in which acronyms, used in this report, are explained.
3. Contextual information on KAA, the review and the (inter-)national situation
4. Findings on compliance with ENQA-membership criteria
5. Conclusion and development
6. Annexes, with internet references to documents and details of the site visit.

2. Glossary

CEEN/CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network for Quality Assurance
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
ESU	European Students Union
EUA	European University Association
evalag	Evaluationsagentur Baden-Württemberg
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICJ	International Court of Justice
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
KAA	Kosovo Accreditation Agency
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NQC	National Quality Council (= Board of KAA)
QA	Quality Assurance
QAU	Quality Assurance Unit (in a HEI)
SER	Self Evaluation Report
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UoP	University of Pristina
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WUS	World University Service

3. Contextual information

In this chapter some contextual information is provided: the reason for commissioning the review; the place of KAA in the quality assurance structure; the main functions of KAA; engagement with ENQA membership provisions/ESG; the review process; the national and international context of the review; higher education in Kosovo.

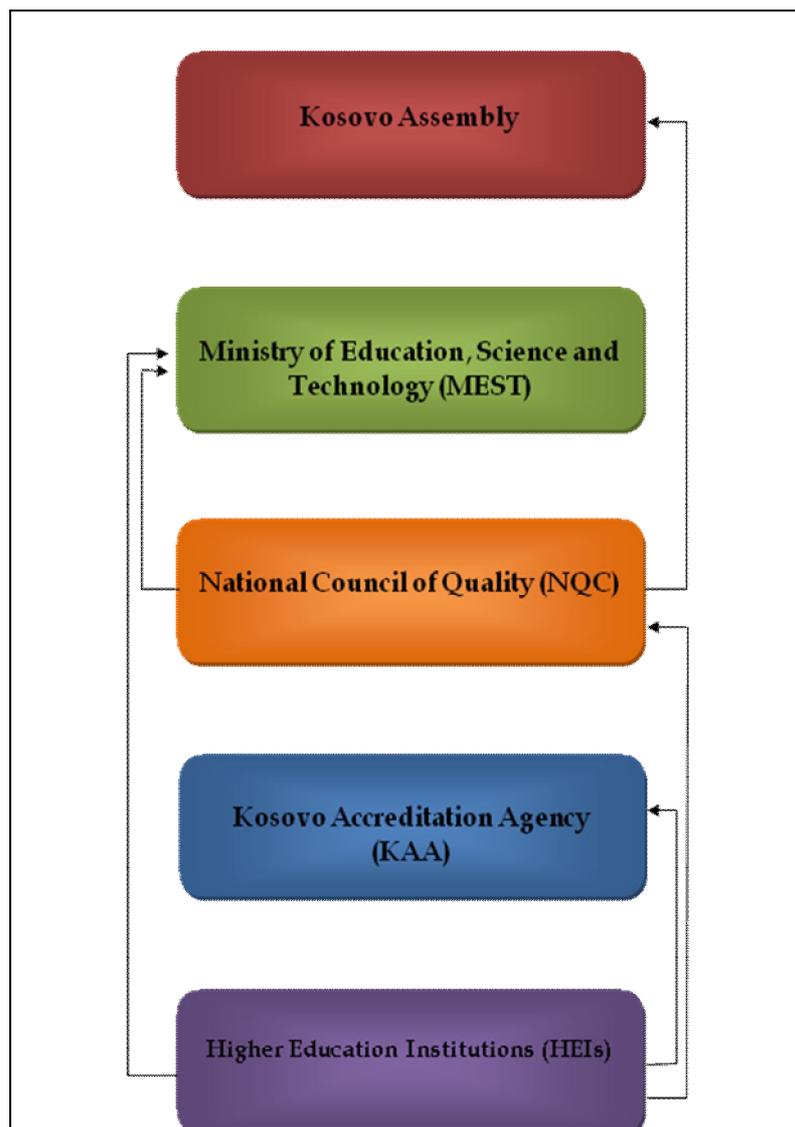
Reason for commissioning the review

KAA existed since 2008. It has been an affiliate member of ENQA since 2011 and felt ready for full membership in 2013. KAA is motivated to become active at the international platform that ENQA provides, in order to contribute to it and to benefit from it.

The place of KAA in the quality assurance structure

KAA is a public agency established in 2008 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). It is by Law the only agency in the country responsible for accreditation of HEIs and their study programmes. Only after the decision on accreditation, then MEST can recognize an HEI and its study programme(s). The legislative structure within which KAA operates is shown in Diagram 1:

Diagram 1: The relevant bodies in the HE system in Kosovo (Source: SER)



The functions of HE and KAA, as described by the Law, is determined by the National Assembly. KAA is governed by the National Quality Council (NQC), which serves as the KAA Board. NQC is responsible for the final decision-making on accreditations. The members of NQC are appointed by MEST. NQC has nine members; by Law (at least) three of them should be international members. The President of NQC is elected for a 5-year period. An Executive Director and (presently) five administrative staff take care of the smooth running of KAA. The Executive Director is also appointed by MEST. HEIs submit requests for accreditation to KAA and produce self-evaluation reports (SER). The evaluations of HEIs and the study programmes are carried out by teams consisting entirely of external, international experts on the basis of the self-evaluation reports provided and the site visits. Decisions on accreditation are presented to MEST, which then grants the formal recognition.

According to the Law the mandate of KAA is:

- To carry out the accreditation and reaccreditation of public and private institutions of higher education, and their academic and research programmes;
- To perform follow-up of the quality at the accredited institutions.

The legal duties of KAA also include setting guidelines and quality standards for accreditation; developing instruments for reviewing on a regular basis whether these requirements are met by accredited institutions; participating actively in international cooperation projects in the field of accreditation; quality assurance and submitting an annual report on its own activities to the Minister and to the Assembly.

The principles underpinning the work of KAA, as determined by the Law, include, among others, maintaining international quality standards, collaboration of international experts, orientation towards educational policy developments in Kosovo and Europe and cooperation with international partners, in order to become a member of international networks and panels in the field of quality assurance. Decisions should be made independently and justified in a consistent and verifiable manner. Accountability to the public and political decision makers should be observed by means of an effective information policy.

The main functions of KAA

KAA's primary activities concern:

- The accreditation of public and private institutions of higher education;
- The accreditation of new institutions of higher education and their programmes (preliminary accreditation);
- The accreditation of new programmes at those institutions of higher education that are already accredited;
- Continuous control of quality at accredited institutions and their programmes (including re-accreditation).

In carrying out these activities KAA aims, among others, at opening up the sector of Higher Education to new providers from Kosovo and abroad; to promote, improve and develop the quality and quality assurance of the HE sector; and to create transparency and comparability in the interest of providers, students and the labour market. KAA aims to encourage innovative forms and content in higher education and to ensure the comparability of degrees from Kosovo HEIs with those awarded by international programmes.

The strategic priorities of KAA for the years 2014-2018 are indicated as:

- Consolidation of KAA's independence;
- Dissemination of a culture of quality;
- Internationalization;
- Building up of resources and capacities.

There is pressure on KAA to function also as an advisory body, but this is not part of the strategic plan. It may also be a matter of the resources available.

The start of KAA in 2008 was strongly supported by three outside donor-agencies: the Austrian Development Cooperation, the British Council, and USAID. One of the first acts was to publish a report that described which HEIs would qualify as a University. At that time a proliferation of (private) HEIs was taking place. The first round of evaluations in 2009 harmonized the field of higher education further. Up till the beginning of 2014 some 380 evaluation reports have been accepted by NQC as basis for accreditation. They are all published in English and Albanese language on KAA's website (www.akreditimi-ks.org/). In the beginning there was sometimes resistance to certain non-accreditation-decisions. During the site visit the donor-agencies recalled that at that time they were flooded with e-mails full of complaints, on which they of course did not react. This has calmed down now, and rapidly the field of HE has come to appreciate the work of KAA. Statements that the panel heard during the site visit were of the type: "The KAA is the best that has happened to Kosovo since the war". "Crucial role in harmonizing the system", "Without KAA we would not have been where we are now". NQC also accepts evaluation reports from international QA-agencies that operate in Kosovo. So far this has happened once: an evaluation by the ENQA-member and EQAR-registered German evaluation agency *evalag*. In this case KAA was also closely involved in the review process.

The funding of KAA mainly comes from two sources:

- Funds from MEST: the annual budget is proposed by KAA based on the planned activities. The KAA budget is a separate budget line managed by MEST, which also provides administrative services for the financial management of KAA. KAA acknowledges that a significant proportion of resources set aside by MEST for the promotion of quality in higher education are made available thanks to the support of international donor countries;
- Income generated from its activities in the form of accreditation fees and taxes paid by the HEIs using the Agency's services. A proportion of the income generated by KAA goes to the State budget rather than to the KAA budget. KAA has been maintaining a discussion with the Ministry in order to review a better sharing of these resources and thus make it easier to the Agency to plan and use its available budget.

Engagement with ENQA membership provisions/ESG

One of KAA's aims is the integration of Kosovo into the European Higher Education Area. Since its establishment in 2008, KAA has received support from accreditation bodies of different countries in Europe. Thanks to this cooperation KAA has come closer to the existing QA networks in Europe:

- 2009 member of CEEN (Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), now CEENQA;
- 2011 affiliate member to ENQA, aspiring for full membership in the following years;
- 2013 membership in INQAAHE.

In the past years KAA has made visits to other QA agencies in European countries (Austria, Ireland, UK, Albania, Bulgaria) and also the USA. In order to support its HEIs to establish and strengthen the QA systems along the lines of ESG, KAA also participated as a partner in projects run by Tempus, WUS of Austria, WUS in Kosovo and others.

KAA participates in the European Quality Assurance Forum, in ENQA and EUA conferences and seminars. Two members of KAA are members of ENQA working groups. In 2014, KAA is going to be the host of the CEENQA annual meeting. KAA considers the engagement of international experts in accreditation processes in Kosovo as one of the strongest element towards internationalization of its work.

The review process

The review process started in September 2013 with the appointment of the Review Panel and ended with this report. A timetable of the review process is provided in Box 1.

Box 1: The review process

September 2013	Composition of the panel
Sept/October	Initial communication between KAA, ENQA review coordinator and panel on date of site visit and logistics
November	Panel receives SER
Nov/December	Panel formulates comments on SER for internal use
10 December	Panel has a 1 hr telephone conference, conducted by the ENQA review coordinator
11 December	Panel asks KAA for some further information and presents wishes for the interview schedule
Dec/January	Detailed analysis of SER and additional information by panel members
19 January 2014	Panel has a kickoff meeting in Pristina, Kosovo
20 January	First day of site visit with 9 interviews and internal panel discussions
21 January	Second day of site visit with 4 more interviews, consensus-forming panel meeting and briefing of the KAA-Board
2 March	First draft to panel members
17 March	Final draft to KAA
31 March	Reaction of KAA on draft report: no errors of fact found

In order to prepare for the review KAA produced an extensive Self Evaluation Report (78 pages, excluding the Annexes). This SER was well structured and informative. Apart from a General Introduction and chapters on HE in Kosovo, KAA's accreditation activities and KAA's Strategic Development Plan, the SER provided a detailed self-evaluation on KAA's compliance on ESG Parts 2 and 3. Initially the SER did not refer to ENQA criterion 8 (Consistency, appeals system, contribution to ENQA aims), but after a request by the panel, KAA supplied also a clarification of SER on this aspect, well in advance of the site visit.

The site visit was well structured and informative. It provided for 13 interviews: the SER team, NQC (the KAA Board), MEST, some Donor Agencies, representatives Rectors and Heads of HEIs, representatives of the QAU in HEIs, teachers, students and external stakeholders. Also discussion with the evaluation experts and KAA staff took place. The panel had offered an opportunity for outsiders to inform the panel, an offer that was made public at the KAA-website well before the site visit. One person from the business sector volunteered to participate.

Consensus forming by the panel took place first of all on 21 January, after the final interview. At that time consensus was reached on conclusions about seven (out of eight) ENQA membership criteria. On the composite ENQA criterion 1 there was consensus on nine (out of the ten) sub-criteria. After the site visit a 'first draft report' was prepared on the basis of notes taken by the secretary and another panel member. Further consensus was then reached by e-mail correspondence, resulting in a final draft. Since KAA found no errors of fact in the final draft report, the present final version is the same as the final draft report, apart from some technical changes.

Kosovo's international and national situation

Kosovo covers an area of roughly 11,000 km² and has a population of around 1.9 million people, of whom 92% belong to the Albanese ethnic group. The percentage of youth in the population is highest in Europe. The capital Pristina has a population of roughly 0.5 million. After the conflict with Serbia, from 1991 until 1999, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)

was in charge of creating the formal institutions and authorities in Kosovo, such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. In 2008 Kosovo declared independency. The designation 'Kosovo' is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. Currently Kosovo finds itself in a post-conflict transition phase. It receives support from the international community in many fields, among them in combating corruption. Its gross domestic product is \$ 6.247 billion (2012 estimate), with a real growth rate of 2.1% (2012 estimate). The unemployment rate is given at 30% (2013 estimate), but there is a large informal sector that may not be reflected in these data. One-third of the population is estimated to live below the poverty line (2010 estimate).

Higher education in Kosovo

Presently higher education in Kosovo includes four types of HEIs with a total of 28 accredited institutions and a total student body of 115,000. These four types of HEIs are:

- **Universities:** there are three accredited universities (all state universities) with a total of 75,023 students (2013 est.) and one university (Mitrovica), which operates under the Serbia legislation. The University of Pristina (UoP) is the oldest university (est. 1970) and has the largest number of students (53,785, according to a 2012 estimate). In terms of world rankings UoP has a ranking of approximately 3000. The other universities have been established more-recently. Apart from that there is one faculty of Islamic Studies (236 students).
- **Colleges:** there are 22 accredited colleges with a total of 35,269 students (2013 estimate). Many of them started in the first decade of 2000. Twenty of them are private.
- **Higher professional schools:** there are five higher professional schools, two of which are accredited. They offer professional courses in one or more professional field(s), and have a total of 3,364 students (2013 estimate)
- **Academy:** presently there is one accredited academy only, offering higher education in specific arts, sports and other professional areas to 326 students.

All four types of HEIs offer Bachelor programmes. The universities and colleges can also offer Master programmes. Only the universities offer Doctoral programmes. HEIs of a fifth type (University Colleges), as mentioned in the Law of Higher Education, do not exist yet.

The unemployment rate among the graduates of HEIs is low, which at least partly explains the current high demand for HE.

Kosovo is not a member of EHEA. It applied to become one in 2008, but at that time this was refused because of Kosovo's special 'status'. It now strives to become a member in 2015. However, the Bologna Process is officially embedded in the education system, thanks to far-reaching engagement with Tempus-projects. According to a recent Tempus-report (2012) the learning outcomes of students are defined in national steering documents and implemented through Laws and Regulations. More than 75% of institutions and programmes are using ECTS for both credit transfer and accumulation purposes. There is a partial and gradual introduction of the Bologna Diploma Supplement.

In the field of higher education a 'Rectors/Heads Conference' or a 'Council of Higher Education' do not exist. Whereas in individual HEIs one can find student organizations and/or a student parliament, there is no national student organization. There are some teacher organizations though, mainly focusing on specific teaching subjects. In 2009 Quality Assurance Units became mandatory for all HEIs, but before that UoP had already established a QAU in 2007.

4. Findings

In this chapter KAA's compliance with the eight ENQA-membership criteria is investigated (Paragraph 4.1 - 4.8). The structure of each paragraph is: Standard and Guidelines, Evidence, Analysis, Conclusion, and - whenever felt appropriate- Recommendation.

Paragraph 4.1. is special, as ENQA criterion 1 consists of ten sub-criteria: the eight criteria ESG 2.1 - 2.8 (External quality assurance processes), ESG 3.1 (= Summary of ESG Part 2) and ESG 3.3 (Activities). In Paragraph 4.1 these 10 sub-criteria are discussed separately (4.1.1 - 4.1.10). In 4.1.11. the panel's overall conclusion on KAA's compliance with ENQA criterion 1 is then presented. An overall view on KAA's compliance with all (sub-)criteria will be presented in Chapter 5, Conclusion and Development, Table 1 (p. 30).

4.1 ENQA 1 Activities

4.1.1 ESG 2.1. Use of internal quality assurance procedures

Standard:

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Guidelines:

The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met. If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

Evidence

As prescribed by the Law KAA's accreditation system includes both Institutional and Programme accreditation. According to SER in both cases the process is based on the effectiveness of internal QA mechanisms of HEIs as described in ESG Part 1. The QA units of HEIs that are compulsory by the Law are meant to safeguard attention to ESG part 1.

Discussing this with Rectors/Heads of HEIs and representatives of QAUs it became clear that attention to internal quality assurance has grown tremendously over the past five years. Teachers and students confirmed this finding. In the evaluation reports, which form the basis for KAA's decision-making, the panel also found that generally speaking the seven topics of ESG part 1 are covered fairly well, in line with the criteria of the frame of reference which expert panels use.

However, the panel found that one of these topics, namely student assessment, was not satisfactorily covered in a number of programme evaluation reports, randomly selected by the panel. In these cases no or only superficial mention was made of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance of student assessment. Representatives from QAUs, teachers and students informed the panel that within the HEIs control mechanisms on the quality of student assessment certainly exist. The international evaluation experts informed the panel that the issue of student assessment is certainly looked into during institutional and programme evaluations, but that it is not always easy to go into details for the international evaluation experts, who generally have no or little command of the Albanese language in which most of the student assessments take place. Therefore sometimes

panel members face some difficulty in investigating the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance of student assessment in detail. The time pressure during site visits adds to the problem of not going much into details.

Analysis

The panel considers that in general during expert evaluations the effectiveness of internal quality assurance within institutions and programmes is taken into account adequately, but that there is insufficient evidence in the evaluation reports for the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance of student assessments. Even though various informants told the panel that in the internal quality assurance of HEIs student assessment is covered, the panel considers it vital that the evaluation experts have a chance to check its effectiveness and report on their findings adequately.

The panel considers the fact that evaluation experts do generally not have sufficient command of the Albanese language to go into the details of this topic as an insufficient reason for limited coverage in the evaluation reports, in particularly so as professional and fair student assessments are vital for the credibility of degrees. Even though the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance on most topics is generally covered well, the panel can therefore not conclude full compliance.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant.

Recommendation

KAA is recommended to ensure that the international, non-Albanese speaking evaluation experts are able to gain sufficient insight in the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance of student assessment.

4.1.2 ESG 2.2. Development of external quality assurance processes

Standard:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

Guidelines:

In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used.

As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

Evidence

As described in SER, KAA has developed and made public on its website the procedures and processes before the first external evaluation process started. KAA also delivered and still delivers training seminars for HEIs, with the aim to better inform HEIs about the standards, criteria and procedures and the self-evaluation process.

During the site visit the panel found that, according to representatives of the HEIs, standards and processes were indeed described at an early stage and found acceptable at the time. In the absence of a national student body, the students, in a way the most important stakeholders were not involved in a systematic way. Of teachers' involvement the panel learned that professors in the beginning sometimes felt overwhelmed by the demands of establishing a quality processes and culture, but that they have accepted it now. In the discussion with external stakeholders their early involvement with procedures setting was not discussed, but some employers launched complaints about the present learning outcomes of graduates when they leave Colleges and Universities. In particular the graduates' lack of actual practice meant that they sometimes needed ½ - 1 year additional in-company-training before coming to actual work. Students agreed with this finding. It would suggest that the external quality assurance procedures not always yield the outcomes that one would expect.

Analysis

The panel concludes that KAA has done its best to communicate standards and procedures with HEIs, but that crucial stakeholders, like students had no systematic involvement in the design of the processes. Also there seems to be a certain degree of unease with some of the learning outcomes of graduates, suggesting that external quality assurance would be in need of review of procedures. Students, employers and teachers would also need to be involved then.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant.

Recommendation

In view of the rapidly changing needs of the Kosovo society and HE, KAA is recommended to involve all relevant stakeholders, including students, teachers and employers, in the process of further developing the QA procedures.

4.1.3 ESG 2.3. Criteria for decisions

Standard:

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

Guidelines:

Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

Evidence

KAA's formal decision-making process refers explicitly to defined quality standards that are published and easily accessible (e.g. at the website) to all KAA stakeholders and to the general public. In the SER it is also maintained that decisions are implemented consistently and that no complaint was received from HEIs. Although during the site visit this last statement was contradicted by the donor agencies (which initially received numerous complaints) and by the evaluation experts (who spoke of harsh fights with HEIs) this does not say much of the presence or lack of consistency in decision-making. To investigate this matter further the panel studied evaluation reports written by the international experts and the decisions made by KAA.

As will be discussed in 4.1.5. (Reporting) the “recorded evidence” in these evaluation reports proved to be of fluctuating quality. Asking the Board how they could apply consistent decision-making on the basis of this varying quality the Board informed the panel that they sometimes recognized weak spots in the reports. However, the Board itself had thorough background knowledge of the field of HE in Kosovo (‘Kosovo is not such a big place’), which would compensate for that. Board members analyze all the relevant documents and form their independent conclusion on the report. Each report is open to discussion between the Board members before the voting takes place. The international membership in the Board would guarantee that consistency in decision-making is maintained. Consistency is also helped by the presence of a member of the KAA-secretariat at all site visits and the summary that then is prepared for the Board. In the end, not a single court case has taken place to oppose a perceived inconsistency in decision-making.

Analysis

The panel considers that the requirement of public announcement of criteria is fulfilled. The panel accepts the explanation of the Board on how consistency is reached.

Conclusion

Fully compliant.

4.1.4 ESG 2.4. Processes fit for purpose

Standard:

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

Guidelines:

Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes. Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance.

Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task*
- the exercise of care in the selection of experts*
- the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts*
- the use of international experts*
- participation of students*
- ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached*
- the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review*
- recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.*

Evidence

According to SER, KAA carries out initial accreditation and re-accreditation at institutional and at programme levels. Both processes include the use of a self-evaluation, site visit, draft report, published report, and follow-up procedure. During the initial accreditation an expert panel is

composed of international experts, including in some cases a student member. This expert panel evaluates if the minimum threshold of the criteria of quality are met for accreditation of a new HEI or a new study programme. In doing this, the expert panel provides recommendations. The HEIs are required to produce an improvement plan on these recommendations.

Also described in SER and confirmed during the site visit, in the re-accreditation process the focus of the expert panel is to evaluate to what extent the given recommendations in the previous process were fulfilled by the HEI and how this had an impact on quality. A programme re-accreditation may take place after 3 years, for an institution after 5 years. As will be discussed under 4.1.6 there is some debate on the length of the re-accreditation periods as well as on the lack of immediate follow-up of improvement plans by KAA staff.

As required by the Law, the panels consist entirely of external, international members, often liaised to other evaluation agencies in Europe. The student member of the panel is an international student, proposed by the ESU. However, students take part in institutional evaluations only, not in programme evaluations.

Analysis

The panel considers that the processes are generally fit for purpose, that is: in initial accreditation for threshold determination, and in re-accreditation for improvement, irrespective discussion on the length of the 3- and 5 year cycle and the lack of immediate action after the improvement plan (see 4.1.6). The international membership of panels is a strong point, but the lack of student participation in programme (re-)accreditation is a serious omission.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant.

Recommendation

Students should take part in panels on the (re-)accreditation of study programmes.

4.1.5 ESG 2.5. Reporting

Standard:

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find

Guidelines:

In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone.

In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations.

There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers. Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

Evidence

According to SER, KAA publishes all the Evaluation reports and the Accreditation decisions by the NOC on its website after the process is finalized. They can be seen and read by anyone interested.

The Expert reports are adjusted to the structure of Self-Evaluation Report by the applicant HEI and are published without any intervention by KAA.

The panel has studied the website and concludes that the reports and decisions are presented in English and Albanian language, and that they are easily accessible. During the site visit the panel learned that soon also translations into Serbian language would be added.

Although the decisions are clear, there is a considerable variety in the quality of the reports, even to the extent that some are written in a very informal, personal style. The Board told the panel that it has rejected a number of reports, because of insufficient quality and also omitted experts from the list because of their poor report writing, but that the reports that were accepted had sufficient content to base the decisions upon. The experts claimed that it is not always possible to write good reports, when one has to start with poor SERs received from HEIs. The Board Chair told the panel that KAA has found it useful to compare the Expert reports with the report that was written by the German accreditation agency *evalag* on one of the colleges.

Analysis

The panel considers that a more critical analysis of reports submitted by experts is needed, and this regardless of the quality of the SERs received from the HEIs. The Reports should have good quality irrespective of the starting position. But the panel accepts the experts' view that there should be a close scrutiny of SERs by the KAA-bureau on technical grounds, before the SERs are sent through to the experts.

Panel conclusion

Substantially compliant.

Recommendation

KAA is recommended:

- to be more strict on the coverage and acceptance of the self-evaluation reports as provided by HEIs, in order to facilitate the work of the external evaluators.
- to be more critical at the reports produced by the evaluation experts, and compare the standards of report writing with those of established external evaluation agencies.

4.1.6 ESG 2.6. Follow up-procedures

Standard:

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

Guidelines:

Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: it should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

Evidence

According to SER, the external evaluation of a HEI or a study programme always contains a set of recommendations for improvement. In the accreditation decision issued by KAA it is required that the HEIs submit an Improvement plan in the light of the recommendations in the Evaluation report.

The plan includes the time frame, the actions required and the resources. In case the accreditation decision is negative, there is no need for submission of an improvement plan. If the accreditation is conditional, KAA will set a time limit to the institution to fulfil the given condition. The fulfilment of the condition is checked by a team set for this purpose, or must be proven in written form.

However, KAA has not yet in place a mechanism to check out if there is an improvement of quality, before the next accreditation round. According to SER, and also confirmed during the site visit, KAA is aware that further work on the follow up procedure has to be done to make them more clear and transparent for the HEIs.

The panel saw examples of positive and negative accreditation reports and decisions, of recommendations made in reports, and of improvement plans. The apparent lack of immediate follow-up by the KAA staff is now a weak point, in particular as regards the five-year re-accreditation period for institutions. As regards both the institutional and programme evaluations, the panel was informed by external stakeholders about their wish to have a more immediate follow up for re-accreditation, even a one-year cycle. Thus improvements would then be made more quickly. Rectors and Heads of HEIs however opposed to this idea, and pleaded for 5-year cycles also in programme accreditations. In the future KAA plans to organize quality audits of the HEIs as a mid-term evaluation between two accreditation periods.

Analysis

The panel considers that more work needs to be done towards a consistent and effective system of follow-up, and the lack of immediate monitoring of the improvement plans is a somewhat weak point. Also consideration of the length of re-accreditation cycles should be taken up. The concept of conditional (re-)accreditation, which is already an option for the Board could be applied more stringently, comparable to a mere 'yellow card' system.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant.

Recommendation

KAA is recommended to further develop the follow-up procedures, in particular the follow-up on improvement plans and the length of re-accreditation cycles, and to become more specific on conditional (re-)accreditations.

4.1.7 ESG 2.7. Periodic reviews

Standard:

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

Guidelines:

Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not 'once in a lifetime'. It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

Evidence

KAA carries out external quality assurance for HEI's and their programs periodically. The periodical evaluation of institutions of higher education to be a maximum of 5 years. The external evaluation of quality of study programmes is organized in 3-year cycles. According to reports that were studied by the panel remarks made during an earlier accreditation had been subject to investigations during the re-accreditation.

As discussed above (see 4.1.6) during the site visit the panel learned that there is debate as to the length of the reaccreditation cycle. However, the periodicity as such is not disputed.

Analysis

The panel concludes that periodicity is fully complied with.

Panel conclusion

Fully compliant.

4.1.8 ESG 2.8. System-wide analysis**Standard:**

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analyzing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

Guidelines:

All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas

Evidence

In 2009 KAA published a system-wide analysis after the first process of external evaluation of quality of existing HEIs. The last two years KAA has produced Annual Reports of its work for the Minister of Education and the Assembly. The reports contain information about KAA activities, findings and outcomes of the processes, and recommendation for enhancement of quality. In the future KAA plans to analyze all the processes of external evaluation of quality conducted so far in order to produce a comprehensive system-wide analyses report of the HE system in Kosovo.

KAA's own conclusion in its SER is, that KAA is partly compliant with this standard. During the site visit the panel heard similar statements and considerations from the Board as described in SER, adding that the current pressure of work is the main obstacle to engage in system-wide analyses.

Analysis

The panel considers the work done in 2009 as a good achievement, which however already dates 5 years back. The panel also notices that first steps on system-wide analysis have been taken and agrees with the Boards' own judgement that much more can be done in this respect in the future.

Conclusion

Partially compliant.

Recommendation

KAA is recommended to carry out regular in-depth system-wide analyses, eventually also with help of independent outsiders.

4.1.9 ESG 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures

Standard:

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Guidelines:

These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

Evidence

As shown above, quality assurance is the major activity of KAA and the goals and objectives of KAA's work are clearly presented to everybody involved.

Analysis

Analyzing the evidence as presented above the panel concludes that KAA is fully compliant on two criteria of ESG Part 2, substantially compliant on five criteria and partially compliant on one criterion.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant.

4.1.10 ESG 3.3 Activities

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

Guidelines:

These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

Evidence

As already indicated in Chapter 3, KAA's main activities include the initial accreditation and re-accreditation. Initial accreditation is meant to indicate threshold quality. Re-accreditation is oriented towards quality improvement. Re-accreditation is carried out on a regular basis (in 3 to 5-year cycles).

Analysis

Details of initial accreditation and re-accreditation processes have been discussed above (e.g. 4.1.4 and 4.1.6)

Conclusion

Fully compliant.

4.1.11 Overall analysis ENQA 1 Activities

Evidence

As presented in 4.1.1- 4.1.10.

Analysis

In view of the presented evidence and the analyses based upon this evidence the panel concludes that KAA has come very far in complying fully with ENQA Standard 1 (Activities). However, on a number of aspects (use of internal QA processes, development of QA processes, fitness for purpose of the processes, reporting and follow-up procedures) there is still more room for improvement. One of the common denominators that arise seems to be more involvement of stakeholders, in particular the students. System-wide analyses could be improved and utilized significantly, again with students as the major beneficiaries. The panel concludes that KAA complies substantially with ENQA Criterion 1 Activities.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant.

4.2 ENQA 2 (ESG 3.2) Official status

Standard:

Agencies should be formally recognized by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

Evidence

KAA was established in 2008 by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MEST) as an independent agency responsible for assessing and promoting quality of higher education in Kosovo. The relevant KAA independence in making accreditation decisions is guaranteed by this Law and was fostered further by the adoption of the new Law in 2011. Documents as regards the official status of KAA are:

- *Law on Higher Education in Kosovo (No. 2002/3)* (Annex 1). The responsibilities and procedures, as well as the role of the National Quality Council as KAA's governing and decision-making body are regulated by articles 7 and 15 of this Law.

- *Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo (No.04/L-037) (2011)* (Annex 2).

During the site visit the panel learned from the KAA Board and MEST that a new Law is in preparation to strengthen the position of KAA in the field of HE even further.

Besides activities in carrying out external evaluation of quality of HEIs, KAA is involved in other activities such as in participation in working groups for the development of legal documents on HE, development of the National Qualification Framework, cooperation with the Parliamentary Commission for HE, and participation in international conferences and workshops.

As already indicated in Chapter 3, in 2009 KAA became a member of CEEN (Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), now CEENQA. In 2011 KAA became affiliate member to ENQA and in 2013 KAA a member of INQAAHE. KAA regularly participates in meetings, conferences and other QA activities at European level.

Analysis

The panel considers that the official status of KAA is well embedded in the Kosovo Law and will be strengthened even further in near future. KAA is also recognized as the representative of Kosovo in the field of external quality assurance in EHEA.

Conclusion

Fully compliant.

4.3 ENQA 3 (ESG 3.4 + ENQA addition) Resources

Standard:

*Agencies should have adequate and proportionate resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organize and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures **and staff**.*

Evidence

KAA human resources used to be limited and overloaded in the first years of its existence, but the Ministry of Finance has enabled KAA to increase the number of its staff. KAA presently has six full time employees who constitute the administrative part of the office. The KAA office is managed by the Executive Director. The Director is responsible for planning and organizing the external quality assurance processes. All staff members hold a university degree adequate to their position. The duties of the staff members are determined by the Director, whereas the staff selection process is managed by MEST; the Ministry appoints a committee to interview the applicants and makes selection based on the published criteria. The KAA Director is always a member of this committee. Most of the staff has undergone appropriate training in the country or abroad in his/her field of duty.

With regard to financial resources, KAA is funded by MEST, which received money from external donors for the purpose of supporting KAA, and by the income it generates from accreditation fees and taxes HEIs pay for accreditation process. Each calendar year KAA proposes the annual budget that is based on a previous year, and which has to be approved by the Ministry of Finances. KAA's budget is a separate budget line in the MEST account. The budget is managed by the Director of KAA who also signs on behalf of the Agency. The amount of the self-generated income that KAA can use itself is determined by the Ministry of Finance. A considerable percentage of the budget is spent on expenses for international members of the review panels. This occasionally creates some cash flow difficulties, especially when transfers from the Ministry are made available with delay, as KAA sometimes cannot pay its international experts in time.

The external donor agencies indicated that they will gradually withdraw funding for KAA, as the start-up phase is over now. Representatives of MEST indicated that funding of KAA will not be affected in a negative way and that an approved increase of staff will be materialized soon.

The KAA Board informed that, in line with the increase of staff, also the amount of working space in the building would increase. E.g., the present office space is not well fitted to allow entrance of physically impaired visitors. Also the availability of proper meeting facilities is somewhat limited.

Analysis

Although the current KAA staff apparently is able to perform its very basic duties as of now, the envisioned needs and the increase of new developmental and other tasks, including a need for system-wide analyses as well as the expected change in its functional environment with the donors,

will put new demands on it not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. For these demands KAA has to be prepared early enough.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant.

Recommendation

KAA is recommended to act according its strategic plans and at the same time regularly monitor the workload of its staff in view of the many activities that it intends to carry out.

4.4 ENQA 4 (ESG 3.5.) Mission statement

Standard:

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

Guidelines:

These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

Evidence

The mission of KAA is to assess and promote the quality of higher education in Kosovo. The mission has been published widely (e.g. on KAA's website), with sometimes slightly different wordings, and has been consistent since the early beginnings. The mission takes into account a division of labour with HEIs, which are by the Law required to establish their own internal quality assurance system. It also takes into consideration that in the young country that Kosovo is, a proliferation of HEIs is in need of harmonization in order to ensure overall quality, and the higher education in Kosovo meets the demands and expectations of ENQA. The external quality assurance process is the major activity of KAA and a systematic approach to achieve KAA's goals and objectives seems to be in place. It is clear the external evaluation processes undertaken by KAA during the period 2009-2013 contributed strongly to the development of a culture of quality and continuous quality enhancement in higher education in Kosovo.

In line with its mission, KAA has developed its Strategy for the period 2014-2018. In this Strategy the following priorities are formulated:

- Consolidation of the Agency's independence
- Dissemination of a culture of quality
- Internationalization
- Building up of resources and capacities

According to SER and also confirmed by interviewees during the site visit, the involvement of international experts in review panels has made KAA to be an example of good practice, not only in Kosovo but in the Western Balkan Region at large. In the coming years KAA intends to update its mission statement in order to further benchmark its work with best practices in QA in Europe and beyond.

Analysis

The panel considers that the mission statement is widely known and accepted, and that KAA has chosen a prudent path for developing its activities.

Conclusion

Fully compliant.

4.5 ENQA 5 (ESG 3.6.) Independence

Standard:

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

Guidelines:

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- *its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts)*
- *the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence*
- *while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.*

Evidence

As SER indicates the independence of KAA is reflected in all its activities, starting from the planning and organization of external evaluation process to the selection of members of expert panels and to the decision-making on (re-)accreditation decisions. Independence is among others based on the *Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo (No.04/ L-037)* article 7 (Annex 2), the *Administrative Instruction on Establishment of Kosovo Accreditation Agency (No.11/2004)* (Annex 3), the *Administrative Instruction for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo (No. 02/2013)* (Annex 4), *The Statute of Kosovo Accreditation Agency* (Annex 6) and *The Regulation of National Quality Council* (Annex 7). The decision making body of KAA is the National Quality Council, which takes its decisions by a majority vote of its members on the basis of the Evaluation Reports received from the international expert panels, and independently from the HEIs and MEST. The procedures for the involvement of international experts in Review Panels are based on *Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo (No.04/ L-037)* article 15 (Annex 2).

However, as SER explains and the KAA Board also confirmed during the site visit, although KAA considers the current situation as quite good, it is aware that its independence may remain fragile and needs to be further consolidated and anchored, as the young Republic of Kosovo consolidates its independence from outside donors and keeps on building on its democratic/political institutions. For this reason in KAA's strategic plan indicates that the consolidation of the Agency's independence is one of the key strategic priorities and objectives in the period 2014-2018.

During the site visit the panel heard from many independent sources that KAA is definitely seen as an independent decision-making body. Many interviewees expressed their appreciation for this, and

saw it as an example for Kosovo's Higher Education at large, as the risk of nepotism is still around and corruption unfortunately not yet fully eradicated.

However, during the site visit both the KAA Board and the Executive Director expressed their concern about being embedded too much in MEST and about in certain logistic constraints by the Ministry of Finance. Although understandable as an expression of anti-corruption measures, the freedom needed for a kind of entrepreneurial activity by KAA is felt as being too limited.

Analysis

In view of SER and the statements made by the KAA Board, MEST and relevant stakeholders, the panel considers the autonomous independence of KAA well assured.

Conclusion

Fully compliant.

4.6 ENQA 6 (ESG 3.7.) External QA criteria and processes used

Standard:

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available.

These processes will normally be expected to include:

- *a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process*
- *an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency*
- *publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes*
- *a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.*

Guidelines:

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes.

Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

Evidence

KAA has developed its processes, criteria and procedures independent from the government and HEIs and with the support from international Board members and experts. As described before, the KAA accreditation procedure has four steps:

- Submission of the application: self-assessment by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- An external assessment by a group of experts, including a student member, and a site visit at the HEI;
- Decision by National Quality Council and publication of the Expert's report;
- Follow up: an improvement plan in the light of any recommendations given by the expert panel in the report.

Members of the panel are selected on the basis of published criteria from a list of international experienced evaluators who are experts in a certain disciplines of studies or qualified for institutional evaluations. The Expert panel compiles a joint report on fulfilment of the quality standards defined by KAA. Based on the Experts report and other relevant documents, the National Quality Council takes its decision on accreditation. This can be a positive answer for accreditation when the minimum quality criteria are fulfilled, or a negative one, when the minimum quality criteria are not met. As a consequence of a negative decision, HEI will not be issued a license by MEST to perform HE activities. NQC members can decide on conditional accreditation if the Expert panel recommended fulfilment of a given condition before the accreditation period starts.

Since the accreditation decision has a formal consequence, KAA has put in place an internal appeal procedure in addition to the legal right to Appeal administrative decisions in Court as defined by the *Law on Administrative procedures Nr. 02/L-28*. Pursuant to Section IX, article 126 of this law, an institution that is not satisfied with the administrative decision may file an appeal in the form of request for reconsideration to the authority that has taken the decision, within 30 days after receiving it.

In addition to this general legal provision, the Board has decided to set up an internal Appeals Committee which will receive and review the appeals and prepare, in cooperation with the Secretariat, a recommendation for approval or rejection that will be submitted to the NQC. This new Committee includes two Board members (one national, one international). The Committee will have to develop its own regulations, bearing in mind the need to provide a reasoned answer to the various points referred to in the appeal and to respond within a short time (which will require online work and Board decisions). The work of this Committee will be of great importance, both as a necessary step in KAA's procedures and as an answer to the "culture of appeal" that seems to be developing in the Kosovo higher education.

Analysis

Many of the criteria and processes of external quality assurance as presented by KAA and supported by stakeholders are in line with ESG. However, some weaknesses remain: first, the lack of student participation in panels that review study programmes (4.1.4), and furthermore, the lack of immediate follow-up of improvement plans submitted by HEIs. Also the nature of the appeals provision is a matter of concern. It is understandable that the newly established Appeals Committee is considered to be an answer to the prevailing 'culture of appeals' of which donor agencies had given the panel already an interesting example before, but an appeals committee where two Board members take a seat may threaten the independence and therefore credibility of the process. This should be an interim practice only as the true culture of quality and appeals is being developed.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant.

Recommendation

KAA is recommended to revise the composition of the Appeals Committee in the direction of committee members being without links to the KAA Board.

4.7 ENQA 7 (ESG 3.8. + ENQA addition) Accountability procedures

Standard:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability

Guidelines:

These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. *A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website.*
2. *Documentation which demonstrates that:*
 - *the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance*
 - *the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts*
 - *the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties*
 - *the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/Board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.*
3. *A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years **which includes a report on its conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA**.*

Evidence

According to SER KAA has in place the procedures for its own accountability, including those described by *The Statute of Kosovo Accreditation Agency* (Annex 6) and *The Regulation of National Quality Council* (Annex 7). These documents are published and available to the public.

KAA has also in place, and guaranteed by the *Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo* (No.04/L-037), policies to avoid conflict of interest in the work of its external experts (e.g. *KAA Selection Procedure and Criteria for Selecting Experts*, Annex 13). External experts act according to the published *KAA Code of Good Practice for Site-Visits* (Annex 16).

According to SER, internally KAA has reflection mechanisms consisting of the following:

- questionnaires sent to HEI's and experts, in order to learn and to compile an improvement plan based on the feedback from stakeholders and meetings with representatives of HEIs.
- SWOT-analysis. The SWOT analysis served the KAA to set up its strategic priorities for the years 2014-2018. The administrative staff and the NQC members were involved in the SWOT analysis and in the review of KAA documents and procedures.

As regards the questionnaires: this was a survey with about 500 questionnaires sent to HEIs (rectors, vice rectors, deans, vice deans, academic staff and students), and 146 questionnaires sent to experts (members of evaluation panels). A total number of 268 participants (52%) from HEIs and 68 from members of the expert panels (47%) returned the survey. A large majority answered that clarity of application procedures, professionalism of communication and contribution to quality development were very good or good, and only a very small percentage said that it was poor or very poor. Also the vast majority of responding experts expressed satisfaction with KAA's processes.

During the site visit, stakeholders informed that KAA was very easy to approach. The frequent public appearances of the Chair (interviews in the press, presentations etc.) helped to sustain this openness.

Analysis

KAA is conscious about its own functions and the ways and means to improve on them. A number of documents support its internal quality assurance. Overall satisfaction of relevant stakeholders reinforces the way KAA is functioning.

Conclusion

Fully compliant.

4.8 ENQA 8 Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contributions to aims of ENQA

This is a composite criterion consisting of three different issues: consistency, appeals and contribution to ENQA aims.

Criterion:

i. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgments and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups;

ii. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency;

iii. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

Evidence

In an addition to the initial SER, KAA explained that utmost attention is paid to KAA's principles, professional management and consistency of decision-making. The evidence for these aspects has been presented already before (e.g. 4.1.3 and 4.7).

As regards the handling of appeals evidence has presented and discussed in 4.6. According to SER, KAA itself recognizes that it is necessary in addition to the legal right to Appeal administrative decisions in Court, to put in place an internal appeal procedure by establishing an internal Appeals Committee. The KAA sees the future work of this Committee as very important for developing 'culture of appeal' in the Kosovo higher education.

As shown in Chapter 3, KAA is active within ENQA and other international forums and it definitely wants to continue on these lines.

Analysis

Given the many activities in which KAA already participates the panel is convinced that KAA will be an active and constructive member of ENQA. The processes conducted by KAA are generally in line with European Standards and Guidelines, with a few aspects to improve upon, student participation in programme-panels being one of them. However, as it was discussed already in 4.6, the panel analyzed the newly established Appeals Committee as being vulnerable, because of the composition of this Committee.

Conclusion

Substantially compliant.

5. Conclusion and development

In the light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the Review Panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, KAA is in compliance with the ENQA Membership Provisions. The Panel therefore recommends to the Board of ENQA that KAA should have its Full Membership of ENQA confirmed for a period of five years.

The panel comes to this conclusion on the basis of detailed analysis of which the outcome is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of findings by the panel

ENQA Criterion	Topic	Explanation and/or sub-topic	Compliance with sub-criterion	Compliance with ENQA criterion
1	Activities	ENQA criterion 1 in general		S
		ESG 2.1 Use of Internal QA processes	S	
		ESG 2.2 Development of External QA processes	S	
		ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions	F	
		ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose	S	
		ESG 2.5 Reporting	S	
		ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures	S	
		ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews	F	
		ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis	P	
		ESG 3.1 Use of External QA procedures	S	
		ESG 3.3 Activities	F	
2	Official status	ESG 3.2		F
3	Resources	ESG 3.4 (+ENQA-addition)		S
4	Mission Statement	ESG 3.5		F
5	Independence	ESG 3.6		F
6	External QA criteria and processes	ESG 3.7		S
7	Accountability procedures	ESG 3.8 (+ ENQA-addition)		F
8	Consistency, appeals system, contribution to ENQA aims			S

F = full compliance, S = substantial compliance, P = partial compliance

On most of the ENQA criteria KAA is substantially compliant, on a few fully compliant, and on only one sub-criterion partially compliant. More broadly speaking the panel is of the opinion that KAA has done a very good job in the short period of its existence and in the difficult economic and political context in Kosovo. It has indicated thresholds of quality for higher education institutions and programmes. It has enhanced the quality of HEIs. It has harmonized the system of HE. The panel also applauds KAA's international orientation.

The panel is also of the opinion that improvements in the functioning of KAA are still possible. For that matter the recommendations made by the panel are grouped together here in Box 2.

Box 2: Overview of recommendations

1. KAA is recommended to ensure that the international, non-Albanese speaking evaluation experts are able to gain sufficient insight in the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance of student assessment.
2. In view of the rapidly changing needs of the Kosovo society and HE, KAA is recommended to involve all relevant stakeholders, including students, teachers and employers, in the process of further developing the QA procedures.
3. Students should take part in panels on the (re-)accreditation of study-programmes.
4. KAA is recommended to be more strict on the coverage and acceptance of the self-evaluation reports as provided by HEIs, in order to facilitate the work of the external evaluators.
5. KAA is recommended to be more critical at the reports produced by the evaluation experts, and compare the standards of report writing with those of established external evaluation agencies.
6. KAA is recommended to further develop the follow-up procedures, in particular the follow-up on improvement plans and the length of re-accreditation cycles, and to become more specific on conditional (re-)accreditations.
7. KAA is recommended to carry out regular in-depth system-wide analyses, eventually also with help of independent outsiders.
8. KAA is recommended to act according its strategic plans and at the same time regularly monitor the workload of its staff in view of the many activities that it intends to carry out.
9. KAA is recommended to revise the composition of the Appeals Committee in the direction of committee members being without links to the KAA Board.

6. Annexes

Note: there are 18 Annexes. For Annex 1-17, apply Ctr + click when using internet.

Laws & Bylaws

- Annex 1 [Law on Higher Education in Kosovo \(No. 2002/3\)](#)
- Annex 2 [Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo \(No. 04/ L-037\)](#)
- Annex 3 [Administrative Instruction on Establishment of Kosova Accreditation Agency \(No. 11/2004\)](#)
- Annex 4 [Administrative Instruction for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo \(No. 02/2013\)](#)
- Annex 5 [Administrative Instruction on Licensing of Private Bearers of Higher Education in Kosova \(No. 25/2012\)](#)

KAA general and internal administrative acts

- Annex 6 [Statute of Kosovo Accreditation Agency](#)
- Annex 7 [Regulation of National Quality Council](#)
- Annex 9 [KAA Standards](#)
- Annex 10 [KAA Application and procedure for accreditation](#)
- Annex 11 [KAA G1 - Guideline on drafting the SER \(Institution\)](#)
- Annex 12 [KAA G2 - Guideline on drafting the SER \(Program\)](#)
- Annex 13 [KAA Selection Procedure and Criteria for Selecting Experts](#)
- Annex 14 [KAA Guidelines for experts \(Institution\)](#)
- Annex 15 [KAA Guidelines for experts \(Program\)](#)
- Annex 16 [KAA Code of Good Practice for Site-Visits](#)

Others

- Annex 17 [Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011-2016](#)
- Annex 18 Programme of the site visit (see page 32 - 35)

Annex 18: Programme of the Site Visit KAA, 19 - 21 January 2014

19 January 2014		
15:00 - 18.30	<i>Private meeting of the review panel</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
19:30	<i>Dinner</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
20 January 2014		
8:30 - 9:00	Meeting 1	Briefing on KAA, SER-process and site visit <i>Prof. Dr. Ferdije Zhushi Etemi, president of NOC</i> <i>Mr. Basri Muja, director of KAA</i> <i>Ms. Furtuna Mehmeti, KAA expert for evaluation and accreditation</i>
09:00 - 10:00	Meeting 2	A representation of the Board of KAA. <i>Prof. Dr. Ferdije Zhushi Etemi, president of NOC</i> <i>Dr. Guy Haug</i> <i>Prof. Dr. Sabri Hamiti</i> <i>Prof. Dr. Bajram Kosumi</i> <i>Prof. Dr. Sadik Idriz</i> <i>Mr. Ylber Hysa</i> <i>Mr. Isa Haxhiu</i>
10:00 - 10:15	<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
10:15 - 10:45	Meeting 3	Representatives of MEST. <i>Mr. Xhavit Dakaj, Secretary General of MEST</i> <i>Ms. Drita Kadriu/ Adviser to Minister</i> <i>Ms. Selvije Halimi/ Adviser to Minister</i> <i>Mr. Bekim Samadraxha/ Director of HED in MEST</i>
10:45 - 11:15	Meeting 4	Representatives of donor-agencies/-countries <i>Ms. Sophie Beaumont, The European Union Office in Kosovo</i> <i>Mr. Christian Geosits, The Austrian Development Corporation</i> <i>Ms. Arjeta Emra, The British Council</i>

11:15 - 11:30	<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
11:30 - 12:30	Meeting 5	<p>Representatives Rectors of Universities and Heads of Colleges.</p> <p><i>Prof. asoc. Dr. Abdullah Alija, Vice rector for research at University of Prishtina</i></p> <p><i>Prof. Ass. Dr. Haxhi Gashi, head of board of University of Peja</i></p> <p><i>Prof. Dr. Zahadin Shemsedini, rector of the public University of Prizren</i></p> <p><i>Prof. Dr. Edmond Hajrizi, rector of UBT College</i></p> <p><i>Prof. Dr. Shemsedin Vehapi, vice rector for teaching of AAB College</i></p> <p><i>Dr. Bekim Marmullaku/ representative of FAMA College</i></p>
12:30 - 13:30	<i>Internal review panel discussion with lunch</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
13:30 - 14:00	Meeting 6	<p>Representatives QA-units Universities and Colleges</p> <p><i>Prof. Dr. Hysen Bytyqi/ QA Office of University of Prishtina</i></p> <p><i>Ms. Mimoza Luta/ QA Office of University of Peja</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Jasmin Jusufi/ QA Office of University of Prizren</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Xhavit Rexhaj/ QA Office of the AAB College</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Lulzim Beqiri/ QA Office of the UBT College</i></p>
14:00 - 15:00	Meeting 7	<p>Representatives of teachers</p> <p><i>Ms. Lindita Rugova/ Teacher representative of University of Prishtina</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Bashkim Nurboja/ Teacher representative of University of Peja</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Behxhet Brajshori/ Teacher representative of University of Prizren</i></p> <p><i>Ms. Fatbardha Qehaja/ Teacher representative of UBT College</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Enver Buqaj/ Teacher representative of FAMA College</i></p> <p><i>Ms. Venera Llunji/ Teacher representative of AAB College</i></p>

15:00 - 15:15	<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
15:15 - 16:15	Meeting 8	<p>Representatives of students</p> <p>Mr. Kestrim Avdimetaj/ Student representative of University of Peja</p> <p>Ms. Demine Haxhimurati/ Student representative of University of Prizren</p> <p>Mr. Salih Ninaj/ Student representative of AAB College</p> <p>Ms. Lirigzona Morina/ Student representative of UBT College</p> <p>Ms. Shyhrete Brajshori/ Student representative of FAMA College</p>
16:15 - 16:30	<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
16:30 - 17:30	Meeting 9	<p>Representatives of stakeholders (KAA to decide who they consider to be KAA-stakeholders)</p> <p><i>Mr. Safet Gerxhaliu, Head of the Kosovo Economic Chamber</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Bujar Gallopeni, HED of MEST</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Milot Hasanzhekaj, Kosovo Qualification Framework</i></p> <p><i>Mr. But Dedaj, Head of WUS Kosovo</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Leon Malazogu, Head of D4D Institute</i></p> <p><i>Ms. Vjollca Gjinolli, Representative of STIK</i></p>
17:45 - 18:30	<i>Review panel meeting to summarize outcomes of day one</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
19:30	<i>Dinner</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
21 January 2014		
8:30 - 9.30	Meeting 10	<p>Representatives of expert panels, including student members (= experts on both institutional and programme accreditation)</p> <p><i>Prof. Dr. Reinhard Meyers, Munenster University, Germany</i></p> <p><i>Prof. Dr. Volker Gehmlich, University of Osnabrueck, Germany</i></p> <p><i>Prof. Dr. Balint Bachman, Pecs University, Hungary</i></p>

		<p><i>Prof. Dr. Markus Paulmichl, Paracelsus Medical University Salzburg</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Benoit Gaillard, Swiss Student Union, Switzerland</i></p> <p><i>Mag. Doris Carstensen, MBA Higher Education Consulting Vienna, Austria</i></p>
9.30 - 10.30	Meeting 11	<p>Director and staff of KAA-bureau. (KAA should ensure examples of documentation of some concrete agency external quality assurance procedures at institutional or programme level on the review panel disposal)</p> <p><i>Mr. Basri Muja, Director of KAA</i></p> <p><i>Ms. Furtuna Mehmeti, Expert for Evaluation and Accreditation</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Elmi Kelmendi, Senior Legal Officer</i></p> <p><i>Ms. Leona Kovaci, Officer for Administration and Personnel</i></p> <p><i>Ms. Ileana Hoxha, Officer for Budget and Finances</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Sokol Daka, Office for IT, Web and Publication</i></p>
10:30 - 10:45	<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
10:45 - 11.15	Meeting 12	<p>Optional meeting: Voluntary Informants</p> <p><i>Mr. Besnik Limaj/ Logic Plus</i></p>
11:15 - 11:30	<i>Coffee break with internal review panel discussion</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
11:30 - 12:00	Meeting 13	Meeting with the Chair for remaining questions
12:00 - 14:45	<i>Final discussion of review panel to agree outcomes and to discuss main lines of the report with lunch</i>	<i>Review panel only</i>
14.45 - 15:15	Meeting 14	Briefing of the Board
15:15 -	<i>Informal gathering and departure</i>	