Needs and analysis report on Quality Assurance at the private higher education institutions in Albania and Kosova

INTRODUCTION

By definition quality assurance can be understood as all actions taken to ensure that standards and procedures are adhered to and that delivered products or services meet performance requirements. In particular for higher education institutions this definition implies, that quality assurance is a continuous process of improvement accompanying the development of knowledge and experience in a given discipline, the requirements of the market and the stakeholders and the national and international legislative demands.

In other words, higher education institutions have to provide state-of-the-art education enabling the graduates to be competitive at the national and international labour market. Quality assurance therefore addresses several levels:

   a) Quality of teaching and learning
   b) Quality of research and development
   c) Quality of (student) services
   d) Quality of management

The aim of the report is to get an overview of the current situation at the private higher education institutions in Albania and Kosova (EPOKA University, EUROPEAN University of Tirana, University MARIN BARLETI, University of NEW YORK Tirana, POLIS University, *and* PJETER BUDI College, *whereas AKADEMIA EVOLUCION did not answer to the questionnaire)* with regard to quality assurance processes and mechanisms. The results will serve as a basis for a better organization of the content of the study visits, trainings, workshops and planning of the overall project activities.

1. Quality of teaching and learning:

- **How many curricula does your institution offer?**
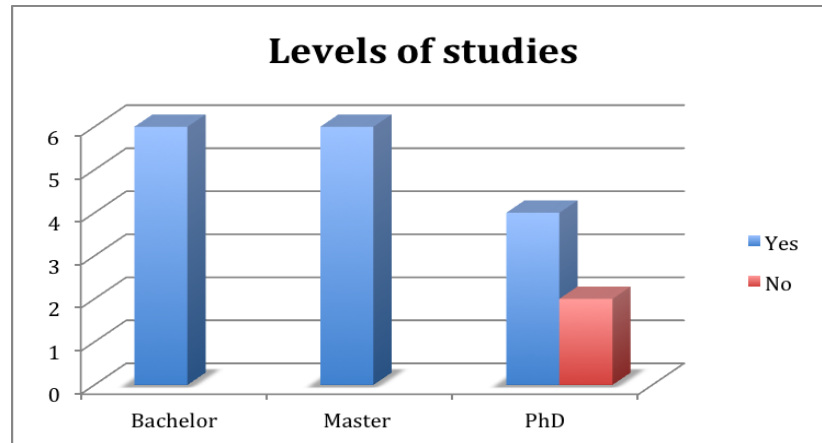
Six institutions, offer studies in Bachelor and Master level, whereas 4 of them offer PhD studies, as well. Number of study programs varies according to the institution, from 9 to 36 study programs.

- **Are these curricula structured according to the Bologna Process?**

In all of the institutions, the study programs are structured according to Bologna Process.

- **Are these curricula based on the requirements of the market? If yes, please comment on the procedures of stakeholder involvement!**
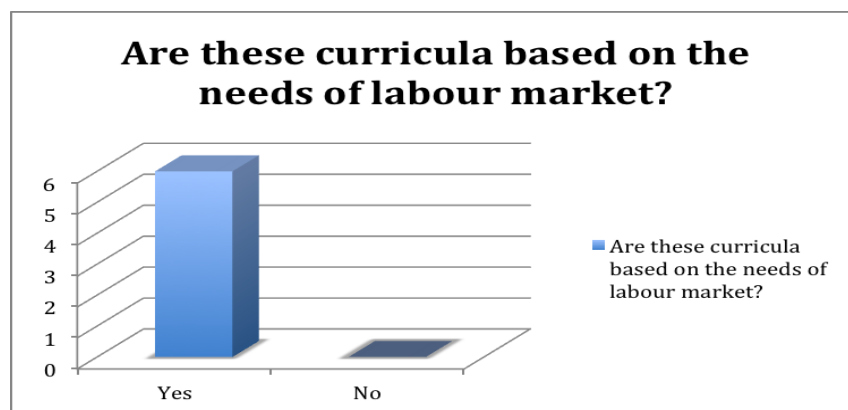

All of the institutions do carry out labour market research in different forms: via consultation with the main stakeholders, alumni interview, organization of focus groups etc.

- **Teaching personnel:**

- **What are the criteria for recruitment of teaching personnel?**

Most of the institutions in the questionnaire have made more a general description of recruitment criteria on their staff.

- Does your institution offer permanent or temporary positions? In case both applies, please comment on the percentage of permanent versus temporary positions!
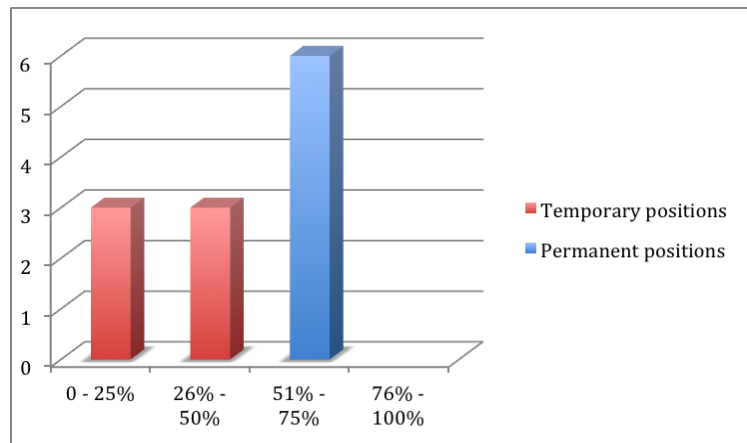

Accordding to the responses received, for the three institutions temporary staff constitutes minimum 10% up to 25%, whereas for the other three institutions the temporary positions constitutes from 26% up to 50%. At the 6 institutions permanent staff consitutes from 51% to 75%.

- **Does your institution require Ph.D. title for professors and/or other categories of teaching personnel?**

In all of the institutions for the category of Professor, PhD degree is required. Further, this issue is regulated with national laws in both countries. According to the profile of the course and study program, a lecturer can be also someone holding only Master degree.

- Does your institution publicly advertise teaching appointments?

Public advertisement of teaching appointment
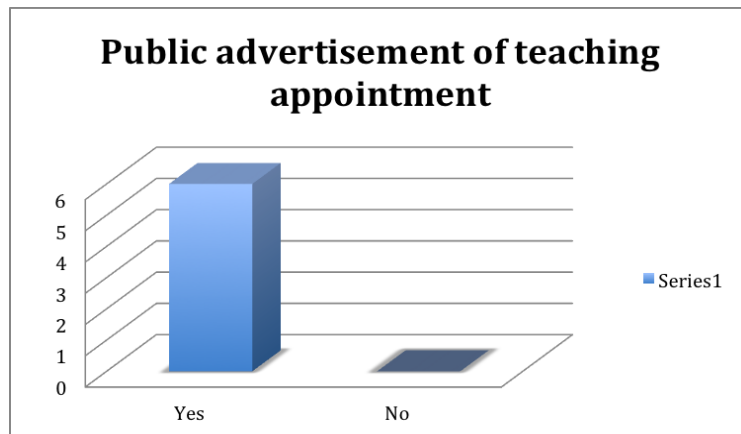
All of the institutions publicly advertise their calls for accepting the new staff in the institutional webpage, newspapers and other relevant job portals.

- **What are the selection criteria?**

Some of the selection criteria are in common for most of the institutions as: a. holding a PhD degree or PhD candidate (according to the specifics of the study program); Teaching experience; Publications in international peer-reviewed journals. There are also some criteria which are in common only for some of the institutions communication skills, team – work, knowledge of a foreign languages (mainly English) etc.

- **Does your institution negotiate target agreements with the teaching personnel? If yes, please comment on the content of these agreements!**

None of the institutions negotiates target agreement with their staff. *The contract with the teaching personnel is mostly based on a standard institutional form.*

The EU project partners in different meetings, workshops and study visits can further share the practise of target agreements with the teaching personnel.

- **By which means does your institution monitor the quality of teaching in relation to the educational objectives? Please specify!**

Course evaluation filled out by the students is one of the most used tools to monitor the quality of teaching. Results are often processed via Quality Assurance unit/office and the feedback is forwarded to the relevant bodies Academic Committee, Management, Board for further steps

Further tools on monitoring the quality teaching in relation to the educational objectives, should be shared by the EU project partners.

- Does your institution offer awards for very good and/or innovative teaching?

Only 2 institutions offer awards for innovative teaching.

- Does your institution enable/support/reinforce/request continuing scientific education of the teaching personnel?

All of the institutions apply policies to encourage the staff for continuing education by organizing different trainings and conferences from the institution for the purpose of capacity building; by offering the possibility of a paid leave (in some cases up to 6 months) to its staff; participating in different mobility programs (i.e. ERASMUS) in order to bring closer the opportunities to their staff.

- **Did your institution implement measures for gender mainstreaming?**

At most of the HEIs there are good examples of gender mainstreaming. It can be noticed that there are continuous efforts to first increase the percentage of female members among the academic staff, where according to the percentage presented still male gender prevails. This will then be further reflected in an increase of the number of females in the relevant managerial and decision – making bodies. HEIs also put effort to increase number of female students in the fields of study, where their percentage of enrolment has been traditionally low.

Students

- **What are the requirements for student enrolment?**
Diploma that certifies successful completion of the secondary school as set by national laws (passing the Matura Exam); Entrance Test. In some of the cases also the interview is applied.

- **Are students actively involved in teaching evaluations? How are they involved?**

Mostly students participate in teaching evaluation via filling out a questionnaire, focus groups part of the Internal Quality Assurance unit.

- **Does your institution offer additional qualifications to enhance competitiveness nationally and internationally? If yes, which ones?**

All of the institutions consider the international cooperation as one of the most important ways to enhance the national and international competitiveness. One of the institutions offers internationally recognized certifications in the field of IT (CISCO, MS and ORACLE).

- **Does your institution offer joint study programmes with international higher education institutions? If yes, please specify!**
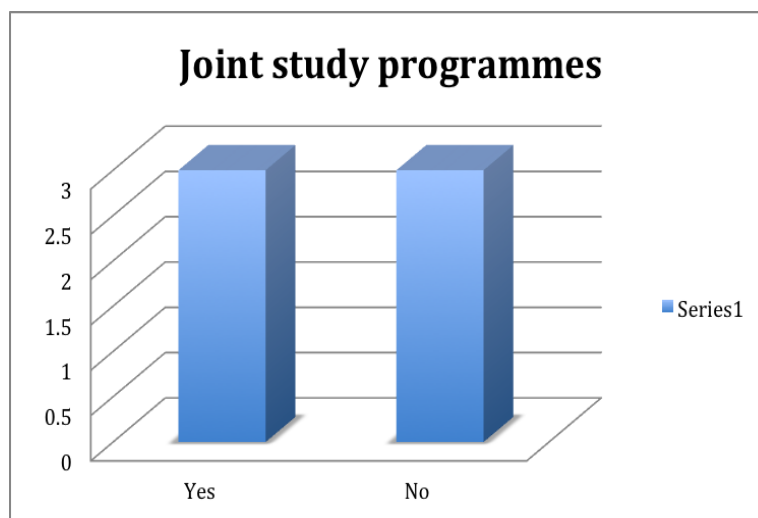
The three institutions do offer joint study programmes, while the other three do not offer.

- **What services are provided for the students – IT services, international office, access to scientific literature, career center or others?**

Most of the institutions offer access to its students to the following services: IT services, international office access to scientific literature, career centre and other types.

- **To what extent does your institution offer e-learning courses?**
*For the time being none of the institutions offer e-Learning courses.*

- **How many of the initially enrolled students of a given curriculum graduate? How high is the drop-out rate?**

According to the data provided from 50% - 65% of the students graduate within the normal length of study program, whereas drop – out rate varies from 10% - 20% across different institutions.

- **Is the drop-out rate depending on particular curricula?**

For most of the institutions the drop-out rate is not linked to a specific curricula, with exemption of one HEI that states that the drop-out rate is higher in the study programs in the field of engineering and architecture and lower in the field of business and economics.

- Does your institution have a graduate survey system allowing a feed-back for improvement of the curricula based on the success of your graduates at the labour market?
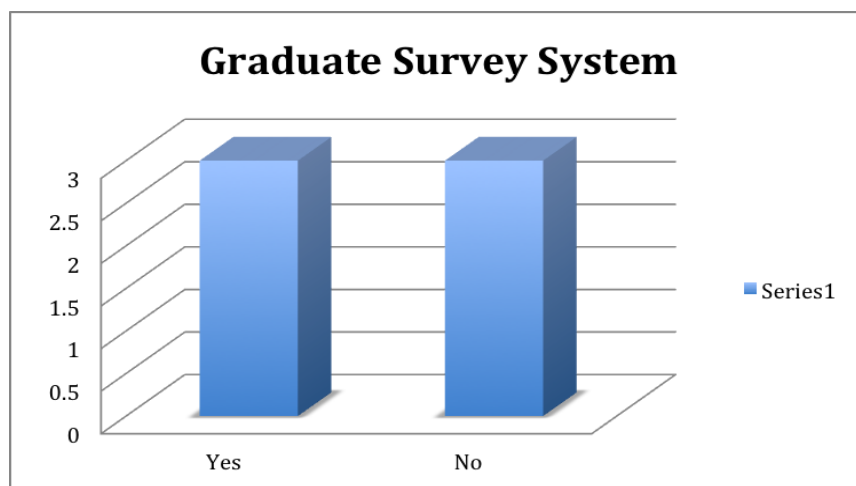
The three institutions apply graduate survey system to get a feedback for improvement of the curricula based on the success of their graduates at the labour market, while the other three HEI do not implement such practice.

- **How does your institution keep contact with the graduates?**

Most of the institutions keep contact with their graduates through Alumni Office, whule only one HEI keeps such contact through Quality Assurance Office.

- **Does your institution provide curricula not accredited by the National Accreditation agencies? If yes, please specify the degree(s) obtained upon graduation!**

None of the institutions offers study programs, which are not accredited.
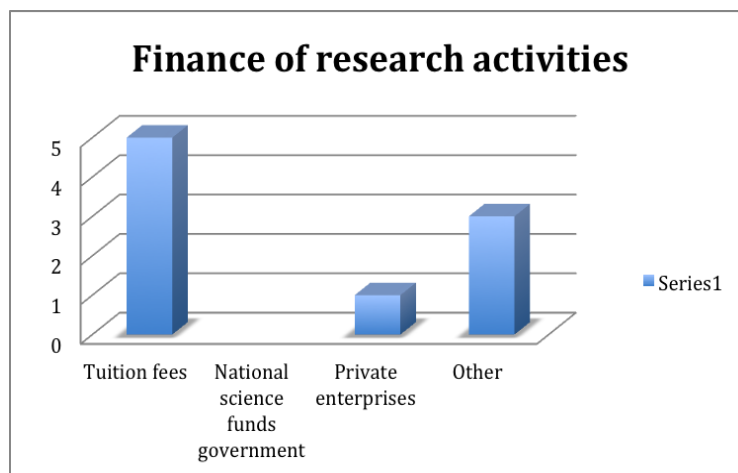
Quality of research and development

- Is your institution also a research institution?

All of the project partners beneficiaries state that are research institutions, as well.

- **How does your institution finance research activities – tuition fees, national science funds, government, private enterprises or other?**

Most of the institutions finance their research via tuition fees, international donors and other source of funding, while none of the institutions have had a research project financed from governmental funds.

- **How does your institution provide access to international scientific literature (libraries and scientific databases)?**

All of the institutions ensures access to different online databases for its staff and students (EBSCO, Questia, Jstor, Cambridge Journals Online, IOPscience, New England Journal of Medicine, OECD-i Library, Taylor & Francis Library, Scopus); Library which contain books in English and Albanian languages as per their fields of studies. Some of the institutions also engages its staff to translate some relevant books from English to Albanian.

- **Please describe your research infrastructure!**

All of the institutions (except one) their research infrastructure depends largely in the fields of studies that they offer. For example one of the institutions possesses three laboratories civil engineering, electronics engineering and computer engineering; research institutes/centres are more common in the surveyed HEIs. These research centers posses access to different literature, and are supported by its staff and PhD students.

- **Is your institution involved in national and/or international research projects/programs?**

The five institutions participate in the international research projects.

- **Are the research achievements of your institution published – nationally, internationally?**

The main focus of all of the institutions is to publish their research results in internationally recognized journals. All the staff is engaged actively to seek the opportunities to publish internationally, while the HEI are also engaged in organization and participation in national conferences, publication of working paper series and their own journals.

- **By which measures does your institution support research? Please describe!**

The budget of all HEIs support support in some or all of the following activities: a. Participation in internally-financed research projects; b. participation in international scientific conferences, symposiums and other scientific meetings; c. publication of scientific papers in an international scientific journal (listed in Thomson Reuters, Web of Science); d. publication of scientific papers in other international or national scientific journals.

- *By which means does your institution evaluate research at a regular basis – Peer review, benchmarking or other?*

Peer review and benchmarking are tools applied only by some of the HEIs.

- **Is budget allocation within your institution depending on the evaluation outcome?**

*Actually, none of the institutions apply a practise of budget allocation based on research outcomes. **The EU project partners can further share this practice.***

- *Does your institution adhere to quality standards such as GLP (good laboratory practise), GCP (good clinical practise) or other? If yes, which ones?*

Quality standards such as: GLP, GCP and other types of standards can be further presented in the workshops, study visits and other events by the EU project partners.

- ***Does your institution adhere to good scientific practice rules, i.e. how do you prevent fraud and/or plagiarism?***

All of the institutions have clear written rules, which are transparent to its staff and students in order to comply with good scientific practice rules. By considering that fraud and plagiarism remains one the main challenges for all of the HEIs, some of the surveyed have also a plagiarism software.

Quality of student support services

- **Which services are provided by your institution? Please describe!**

Some of the services offered by the HEIs include (but not limited to): Career and Alumni Office; Student Union; Student Union Clubs; Counselling Centre; Academic Support Centre; International and Exchange Students Office; Mathematics Centre; Library; Writing Centre ; IT support; Coordination Office.

- **By which means does your institution evaluate these services – questionnaires, external review or other?**

The five HEIs evaluate the services via questionnaires, whereas only one through

- **Are there process optimization procedures applied?**

The answers are not very clear. Optimization processes should be shared in the workshop, study visits and events.

- **Are there measures of continuing training – courses the personnel has to attend for improvement, etc.?**

The staff is supported in all the cases to attend specific trainings to improve their skills, which would directly result in the enhancement of their daily work. A special attention is given to the staff, who have not received any training.

Quality of management

- **Is there a permanent management, Rector (or equivalent) and management board (or equivalent) or is it elected for a certain period?**

Only two HEIs have given a clear answer whether the governing bodies are permanent or elected for a certain period of time. The question has to be repeated.

- **Does your institution have an external advisory board? If yes, are there international members in the board?**

The 3 HEIs do have external advisory board, 2 of them do not have, while one of the institutions has not provided a clear answer.

- **Does your institution have an external supervisory board? If yes, are there international members in the board?**

Only one of the institutions do have an external supervisory board.

- **From which occupational areas are the members of the boards recruited?**

From business community, civil society, professors, media.

- Is the management subject of evaluation? If yes, describe how!

In all of the institutions the management is subject of evaluation.

- Does the management release a development plan?

All of the HEIs release a development plan.

Quality Assurance Office

- **Did your institution establish a quality assurance office? If yes, specify the number of employees working there and the quality assurance measures the office is responsible for!**

According, to the data processed the following terms have been used for quality assurance office: Quality Assurance Unit (3 HEIs); Quality Assurance Office (2 HEIs); Internal Evaluation Unit (1 HEI). **The used terms need to be further elaborated by the HEIs in the upcoming needs and analysis for the QA Office.** *Most of the institutions specify the role of the QA office, but still more general description prevails instead of more specific task description.*

Only one of the institutions has specified the number of staff working for the QA Office.

- **Did the personnel in the quality assurance office receive any training? If yes, please specify!**
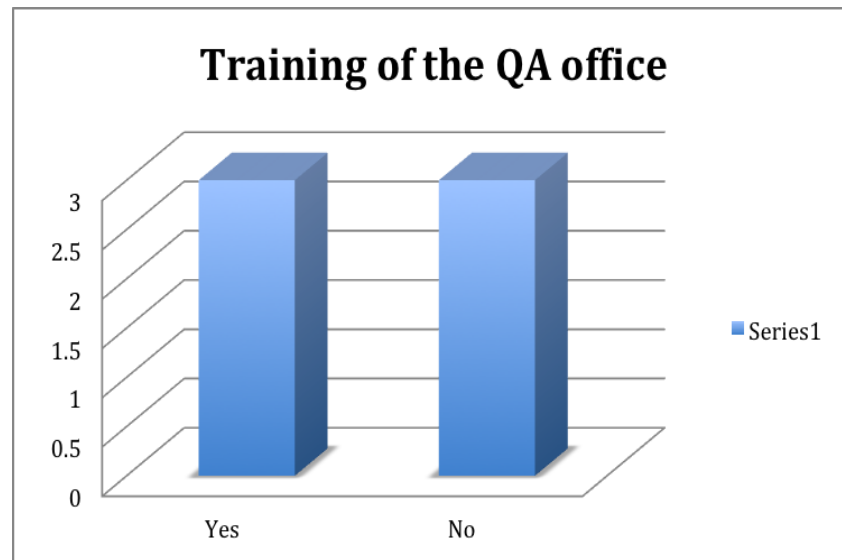
- Is there a requirement for additional training? If yes, please specify!

This the summary of the training asked by the HEIs:

"Trainings regarding the methods of data collection; assessment instruments, and the methodology used for compiling the IQAU reports; The techniques and the requirements for monitoring the internal quality assurance; Trainings for the accessibility of students towards quality assurance; The context and the European/Austrian/Salzburg principles related to internal quality assurance; The ways of planning the internal quality assurance; Tracking of an internal evaluation process from the IQAU staff, in the framework of accreditation, and the role of quality assurance office; Trainings for the way of quality assurance in teaching process. Trainings for the way of quality assurance of scientific research. Trainings about how to assure the quality of academic staff monitoring"

"Given the complexity of quality assurance (QA) in higher education, and the on-going reform of higher education in Albania, the personal and the QA committee members, would appreciate training and assistance in terms of: Balance between internal QA procedures with the national/international requirements; • Balance between quality assurance processes at different levels (teaching vs research; entry/drop outs/graduation rates; employability; internationalization etc. Learn best models and practices on how to foster a "quality culture" , addressing: - Increasing participation of students in teaching and service related activities; - Enhancing the use of all operational types of questionaries' (on-line surveys, relevant feedback, how to better define and use the key performance indicators of teaching and services) - Using effectively the staff development workshops as a means for enhancing quality - Promoting trust among all internal groups of interest (internal and external bodies)"

"The most prominent being: - Quality assurance mechanisms with regard to research - Quality assurance mechanisms with regard to the management. Further improvement of the quality assurance mechanisms with regard to teaching, with a specific focus on international programs".

"The Quality Assurance Office at our University is a recently established unit and as such needs training on quality assurance with a particular focus on: Improvement of teaching methodologies; Ensuring quality in research; Involving stakeholders in the improvement of curricula, services to students etc."

"Continuous training for quality assurance is carried out in cooperation with Accreditation Agency, which provides two times a year training for university evaluation units. On the other hand, we are part of quality assurance projects with other analogues universities within and out our country that serve for the improvement of our field for management and assurance quality in our university."

"There is huge need for continuous trainings in: a) quality assurance control b) teaching methodologies c) students assessment methodologies d) in building research capacities."