



Institutional Review of Higher Education Institutions in Albania

**Report of the Institutional Review of
The University of Korça**

April 2017

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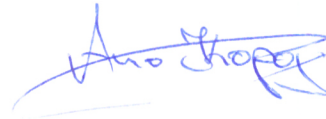
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Contents

About this review.....	1
The context of this review	2
Summary report	3
Summary of findings	4
Summary Judgement.....	6
Detailed report	7
Evaluation Area 1: The Organisation and its Management.....	7
Evaluation Area 2: Resourcing.....	11
Evaluation Area 3: The Curriculum.....	15
Evaluation Area 4: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research	19
Evaluation Area 5: Students and their Support.....	23

About this review

The overall aim of Institutional Review is to assess the extent to which each HEI meets the Albanian State Quality Standards which came into force in 2011. Institutional Review is a peer-review process with each review team composed of a mix of UK reviewers appointed by QAA and Albanian reviewers appointed by APAAL. The review team is led by a QAA reviewer.

The resulting reports will serve not only for institutional accreditation based on the extent to which the HEI meets the standards, but will also to inform the HEIs, Albanian government, the public and students of how each HEI meets the standards. This report also helps the HEI to identify priorities for enhancement (the process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported).

The Albanian State Quality Standards have been grouped under five headings, the Evaluation Areas: the Organisation and its Management; Resourcing; the Curriculum; Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research; and Students and their Support. This report identifies features of good practice, recommendations, affirmations of actions in progress and weaknesses for each Evaluation Area, together with a judgement as to how well the HEI meets the standards. The judgements that the reviewers may assign are: standards are fully met; standards are substantially met; standards are partly met; or standards are not met.

Finally, the reviewers conclude by recommending a summary judgement to APAAL's Accreditation Council. This overall judgement is one of four levels:

- **State Quality Standards are met**
- **State Quality Standards are substantially met**
- **State Quality Standards are partly met**
- **State Quality Standards are not met.**

As part of the report-writing process, QAA has provided expert support to the review team by ensuring that the team supports the findings made in the report with evidence, and also by proofreading and summarising the full report for the summary below.

The context of this review

In 1971, the High Institute of Agriculture was established in Korça. It was designated the Polytechnic University of Korça in 1992 by the Council of Ministers. In 1994, this became the University of Korça, otherwise known as Fan S. Noli University, named after a well-known personality in Albania. The University is a public institution of higher education in Albania and is located in the northeastern part of the town. It has four buildings, three on the main campus plus the Faculty of Natural and Human Resources in another part of the town, housing administrative offices, lecture halls and classrooms. In addition, the university complex includes two dormitories and a sports field.

Korça is one of the main cities in south eastern Albania and is surrounded by the Morava Mountain range. The City is approximately 869m above sea level. The district of Korça has a population of 194,000 with over 80,000 people living in the city.

The University has a mission *to create, to transmit, to develop and to protect knowledge through its teaching, scientific research and other educational services it provides.*

The University Strategic Vision is *Full integration in the European Zone of the Academic Research by undertaking reforming steps, aiming to create and support high teaching, learning and research standards that enhance the achievement of its mission.*

The University consists of four faculties, namely the Faculty of Agriculture, the Faculty of Economy, the Faculty of Education and Philology and the Faculty of Natural and Human Sciences. The faculties are organised into 14 departments and three educational subgroups. The University has two Centres of Excellence, the Lifelong Learning Research and Training Unit and the Didactic Experimental Economy, which provides research and professional practice in agriculture.

There are 22 bachelor's, 13 professional master's, four Master of Science and one PhD programme offered by the University, and the total number of students is currently 4,750. The University has 156 full-time academic staff and 80 administrative staff.

Summary report

A self-evaluation report was developed by a team at the University, which comprised members of the full-time academic staff of each faculty and administrative staff, as well as a representative of the student body. The University had specific criteria for the selection of the team and they, along with the Institutional Coordinator, designed a work plan to produce the report by January 2017. The University cooperated fully in the evaluation process, producing a very useful self-evaluation document and supporting evidence. It also produced additional evidence before and during the review visit at the request of the review team.

The visit took place over two days. The review team was made up of two senior higher education reviewers from the UK and one experienced higher education member of staff from an Albanian institution. The review team was supported by a Review Manager and note-taker provided by APAAL, the agency responsible for reviews of higher education in Albania. The review team was provided with a self-evaluation report and a portfolio of supporting evidence eight weeks in advance of the review visit, which was supplemented by additional documentation requested. In all, some 188 documents were considered, and enabled the team to familiarise themselves with the structure, policies, management procedures and the nature of teaching and research activity undertaken by the University. Evidence considered included the Statute of the University, Academic Regulations, Annual Reports, admission and orientation procedures, the range of external agreements, and examples of programme information and evidence from deliberative meetings.

A series of meetings took place during the two days of the review visit, which allowed the review team to gain a clearer understanding of responsibilities, procedures and the views of staff and students. The review team met with the Rector, senior managers, students, lecturers, administrative and support staff and representatives of stakeholders, partner institutions and alumni. Notes were taken at all meetings. As part of a tour of the campus the review team viewed the libraries, teaching spaces and IT and science laboratories. Having reviewed all evidence available, the team reached the conclusions set out below.

The University meets the standards fully for the Organisation and its Management. It has a published statute which defines the mission, objectives, legal status and organisational management of the University, in accordance with the law of higher education in Albania. The review team found four features of good practice. First, the Strategic Development Plan involving all staff across the departments; second, the staff are very supportive and engaged in debate in the University; third, the work of the Centre of Excellence for in-service teacher training; and finally, the University's success in the pursuit of international projects. The review team did not identify any weaknesses, recommendations or affirmations in relation to this evaluation area.

The University meets the standards fully for Resourcing. The responsibility for budgeting and resources are set out in the University Statute. The review team considers the development of the University campus and infrastructure, which contribute to a positive learning environment for students, to be a feature of good practice. The review team did not identify any weaknesses or recommendations in relation to this evaluation area. This area does, however, contribute to the progress made in the digitalisation of the University and supports the affirmation under Evaluation Area 5, Students and their Support.

The University meets the standards fully for the Curriculum. The University's programmes are required to reflect the Mission, the Strategic Plan and the development strategy and there is a particular aim to meet regional economic and social needs. The review team considers the approach to programme design and curricula, which supports the development of graduate

employability in the context of regional needs, to be a feature of good practice. In addition, the University's development of a curricular offering and support infrastructure, which has increased opportunities for Albanian students to study abroad, is also judged to be a feature of good practice. The review team did not identify any weaknesses, recommendations or affirmations in this Evaluation Area.

The University substantially meets the standards for Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research. The University has the appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure efficient organisation and documentation of study programmes. The review team identified three features of good practice in this Evaluation Area concerned with teaching, learning, research and mobility. As a means of exchanging experience between senior and young academic staff, the departments undertake open teaching sessions and training between staff members. In addition, the University has a Didactic Experimental Economy that supports research in the Faculty of Agriculture. The University is committed to internationalisation through the mobility of academic staff and students, has many agreements with partners and is part of many international and national projects. The review team identified one weakness regarding the prioritisation and coordination of research areas between academic staff and students and recommended that the University should establish and implement a strategy to support the systematic development of fields of research identified as priorities in its Strategic Development Plan. The review team did not identify any affirmations in relation to this evaluation area.

The University meets the standards fully for Students and their Support. The organisation and management of students and their support is in accordance with the University Statute and the law of higher education. The review team identified two features of good practice. First, the current work of the digitalisation programme of the University is having a positive effect on student support. Second, the opportunity for student mobility through international projects such as Erasmus, as referenced in Evaluation Area 4, along with the preparation of English transcripts prepared for students who wish to transfer their studies abroad.

The team did not identify any weaknesses or recommendations in relation to this evaluation area but did make two affirmations. Firstly, to continue the ongoing project which will help the library digitalisation and online library. Secondly, the University has produced a students' card which will help students to get free access, or different services for free or at a reduced rate. The card has been produced but is not yet functioning to its full capability.

Summary of findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- Centre of Excellence for in-service teacher training (paragraph 1.6; **Chapter III, Standard III.1**)
- staff are very supportive and engaged in debate in the University (paragraph 1.9; **Chapter III Standard I.3**)
- success in the pursuit of international projects (paragraph 1.11; **Chapter III Standard III.4**)
- Strategic Development Plan involving all staff across the departments (paragraph 1.12; **Chapter III Standard I.5**)
- the University's systematic approach to the development of its campus and infrastructure which contributes to a positive learning environment for students (paragraph 2.8; **Chapter III Standard V.1**)

- the approach to programme design and curricula which supports the development of graduate employability in the context of regional needs (paragraphs 3.3 and 3.11; **Chapter I Standard I.3, Chapter I Standard I.4**)
- the University's development of a curricular offering and support infrastructure which has increased opportunities for Albanian students to study abroad (paragraph 3.9; **Chapter I Standard I.10**)
- as part of improving teaching quality, departments undertake open teaching sessions to exchange teaching experience between staff and also to evaluate the teaching process of new assistants (paragraph 4.4; **Chapter I Standard II.4**)
- the University has a Didactic Experimental Economy that supports research in the Faculty of Agriculture (paragraph 4.6; **Chapter II Standard I.6**)
- the University is committed to internationalisation through the mobility of academic staff and students and has many agreements with national and international partners (paragraph 4.7; **Chapter II Standard I.3**)
- digitalisation program of the University, ESSE3 system (paragraph 5.2; **Chapter I Standard III.2**)
- English transcripts for students are prepared if students want to transfer their studies abroad (paragraph 5.6; **Chapter I Standard III.3**).

Weaknesses

The review team identified the following weakness:

- the prioritisation and coordination of research areas within the Department between academic staff and students (paragraph 4.8; **Chapter II Standard I.4, Chapter II Standard I.6**).

Recommendations

The review team identified the following recommendation:

- the University should establish and implement a strategy to support the systematic development of fields of research identified as priorities in its Strategic Development Plan (paragraph 4.8; **Chapter II Standard I.4, Chapter II Standard I.6**).

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team affirms the following action already in progress:

- there is an ongoing project which will help the library digitalisation and online library (paragraph 5.5; **Chapter I Standard III.5**)
- the University has produced a students' card, which will help students to get free access, or different services for free or at a reduced rate. The card has been produced but is not yet functioning to its full capability (paragraph 5.7; **Chapter I Standard III.5**).

Summary of judgements for each Evaluation Area

- 1 The Standards for the Organisation and its Management are **fully met**.
- 2 The Standards for Resourcing are **fully met**.
- 3 The Standards for the Curriculum are **fully met**.
- 4 The Standards for Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research are **substantially met**.
- 5 The Standards for Students and their Support are **fully met**.

Summary Judgement

The review team recommends to the Accreditation Council that at the University of Korça the State Quality Standards are fully met.

Detailed report

Evaluation Area 1: The Organisation and its Management

1.1 The Statute defines the mission, objectives, legal status and organisational management of the University [A21; B2; B3]. It also covers election procedures, decision-making bodies, authority levels, quality assurance of study programmes, student enrolment and graduation, rights and responsibilities of staff and students, research activity and financial matters. Understanding of the relevant parts of the Statute was confirmed during meetings with staff from across the University [M1; M2; M3; M6; M7]. The new Statute has been drafted [A22] to comply with changes in the law on higher education in Albania and is ready to be put forward for approval. The regulation of academic and research activity of the University is described in the Regulation of Studies document [A23] and this, along with the Statute, is the basis for the other University operational processes, for example the Development Plan and the Terms of Reference of the committees [A24-A45].

1.2 The organisational structure [A47; B2; B3] of the University complies with the statute and is understood by staff [M1; M2; M3; M6; M7] who met the review team. The main components of the structure are the Board of Administration, the Council of Administration, the Rectorate, the Academic Senate, the Council of Ethics, the Decanates, the Council of Professors, the Scientific Council and Editorial Board, and the Advisory Board. The regulations governing their authority are clearly defined [A28-A36].

1.3 The Rectorate produces the proposed budget for the year [A7], based on feedback from the departments and faculties [M6; M7]. It then goes to the Academic Senate and the Board of Administration for approval [A21; A48]. From December 2016, the Board of Administration monitors and controls the administrative, financial, economic and asset management of the University according to Statute [A30].

1.4 The Council of Ethics has clearly defined regulations [A36] and makes decisions [A59] regarding any infringement, reporting to the Rector.

1.5 The University consists of four faculties, the Faculty of Agriculture, the Faculty of Economy, the Faculty of Education and Philology and the Faculty of Natural and Human Sciences [A7]. These faculties are organised in 14 departments [A7]. The Faculty Councils have now been replaced by the Decanates, headed by the Dean, whose main function is contributing to the strategic plan of the University and coordinating the academic and research functions of the departments [A7; M3; M6; M7].

1.6 The University has two Centres of Excellence [A7; M5; M6; M7]. The Didactic and Experimental Economy unit is part of the Faculty of Agriculture and is an integral teaching and research unit, [<http://www.unkorce.edu.al/en/didactic-experimental-economy>] and the Centre of Excellence in the Faculty of Education and Philology offers programmes for in-service teacher training for both University academic staff and also for people from outside the University. The review team considers this Centre of Excellence for in-service teacher training to be a feature of **good practice**, which enhances the learning experience of students throughout the region.

1.7 The Council of Professors was set up in 2010 according to the higher education law and organises and manages doctoral studies and post-doctoral qualifications of academic staff [A7; A13; A14; A31]. During its period of operation, the Council has assessed and promoted the qualifications of 28 associate professors, eight teachers and one PhD student [A7].

1.8 The Heads of Department manage the study programmes and coordinate the teaching, learning and research activity in the department, reporting to the Faculty Dean, who coordinates the activities of the departments [A7; M3; M6]. The members of the Academic Senate, members of the Board of Administration, the Rector, Faculty Deans and the Heads of Department are all elected by secret ballot by the academic staff [A46].

1.9 The committees of the University meet regularly according to their terms of reference [A24-A45] and items for discussion are circulated in advance of the meetings. It was evident to the review team during meetings with staff [M3; M6; M7] and examination of minutes of meetings [B4-B8] that they feel closely involved in University decisions and are listened to on matters that are important to them and the University. Staff are very supportive and engaged in debate in the University and the review team considers this to be **good practice**. Decisions taken by the Academic Senate and the Board of Administration become decrees, which are kept on a database by the Rectorate [A7].

1.10 The previous paragraphs are evidence that the University functions within the autonomy limits of the statute and the law on higher education in Albania. It has structures in place, as described above, for the supervision and internal evaluation of its processes. In addition, the University has an Internal Quality Assurance Unit [A20; A39] which monitors internal processes, resulting in the production of a self-evaluation report [A93] and an action plan [A94]. In addition, the University undertakes external evaluation, which also results in an action plan [C1].

1.11 The University has participated in 26 international projects [A81] relating to, for example, lifelong learning, distance learning, staff and student mobility and quality assurance. Although the participation rate among both staff and students is currently low, 91.95 per cent of teachers have not worked abroad in the last five years and 97.33 per cent of students have not studied abroad [Teachers and Students Survey]. Staff and students seen by the review team were very supportive of these initiatives. The University has been very successful in the pursuit of international projects, which should be translated into increased staff and student mobility, and this is considered by the review team to be **good practice**.

1.12 The Middle-Term Development Programme (2008-2013), [A24] more recently updated by the Strategic Development Plan (2016-2020), describes the plans for University development in the context of the region of Korça, and the University has been successful in following these plans over a number of years. There has been widespread consultation across the University on its content [M3; M6; M7] and also has the full support of key employers in the region [M5]. The review team considers the development of the Strategic Development Plan involving all staff across the departments to be a feature of **good practice**. The plans are consistent with the Mission and Strategic Vision of the University [A7] and the employment needs of the region [M5].

1.13 Each department of the University produces an annual report of its activity, [A51; A52-A53] which is compiled into a Faculty Report and finally a University Report [A50]. Following approval by the Senate and the Board of Administration, this is then submitted to the Ministry of Education and Sport. The Internal Quality Assurance Unit produces an action plan for improvement [A94] based on its findings.

1.14 The structures of the University, referred to above, are appropriate to accomplish its mission and purpose. The University offers 22 bachelor's programmes, 17 master's programme and one doctoral programme, which are taught by 156 full-time academic staff [A7]. The University website [www.unkorce.edu.al] is continuously updated, in both Albanian and English, with information about the University and its study programmes [M7].

1.15 Proposals for new programmes have been the result of market research, for example the Professional Master's in Public Administration **[A61]** and the two-year vocational programme for Teachers of Early Childhood **[A62]**. It was clear to the review team that both public and private employers in the Korça region had been consulted, and were supportive of new programme developments by the University **[M5]**. The University has an active Careers Centre which communicates with the Regional Employment Office in order to give students information about employment opportunities **[A124]**. The Centre also undertakes employment research in the Korça region **[A27]**.

1.16 The University pursues an open strategy of collaboration and partnership at a regional, national and international level, as evidenced by both documentation **[A96-A106; C3; C4]** and discussions with staff **[M2; M3; M6; M7]**. The range of collaborations includes those for research, mobility and professional practice **[M3; M4; M6]**. The University also promotes the enrolment of foreign students on its programmes and foreign academic staff in teaching, according to its Statute **[A21]**, although this is not yet widely practised. The University plans to increase the number of programmes offered in the English language to facilitate this objective **[A7]**. This supports the good practice described in section 1.11.

Findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- Centre of Excellence for in-service teacher training (paragraph 1.6; **Chapter III Standard III.1**)
- staff are very supportive and engaged in debate in the University (paragraph 1.9; **Chapter III Standard I.3**)
- success in the pursuit of international projects (paragraph 1.11; **Chapter III Standard III.4**)
- Strategic Development Plan involving all staff across the departments (paragraph 1.12; **Chapter III Standard I.5**).

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not make any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not make any affirmations.

Judgement

The standards for The Organisation and its Management are fully met.

Evaluation Area 2: Resourcing

2.1 The University's organisational structure is approved by Academic Senate and then published on the institutional website [<http://www.unkorce.edu.al/en/organizimi>; **A47; A122**]. Recruitment of staff is carried out in accordance with legal requirements via principles in the Statute and procedures in the Regulation of Studies. New appointees receive orientation about the University and the department [**A21-23; http://www.unkorce.edu.al/sq/node/561**; **M6**]. The appointment of part-time staff is determined at the beginning of each academic year. The University has been required to appoint a greater number of part-time staff on some professional programmes because of an insufficiency of specialists in the region [**M3; SER p.20**].

2.2 Regular meetings are held at departmental, faculty and Rectorate levels to promote staff integration [**B3; B4; M6**]. This is reflected in the University's approach to the development of the Strategic Plan, whereby each faculty undertook a SWOT analysis for educational and research activities and outcomes were fed in to the objectives, which were agreed by Rectorate and approved by Academic Senate [**A26; M2; A93; A94; M6**]. The team that developed the University's self-evaluation report included a student and representatives from each faculty [**A7; M1**]. Administrative departments of the Rectorate are responsible for providing staff with information. There is also a programme of Open Lectures operating across the faculties. Participation is not compulsory but those staff who have been involved described it as a valuable means of developing links across the University [**A89; M6; M7**]. The University also promotes a series of social integration activities, appreciated by staff [<http://www.unkorce.edu.al/sq/node/743>; **M6**].

2.3 Academic staff are assessed in end-of-semester evaluations, administered by Faculty Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) and overseen by Heads of Department. The evaluations result in annual departmental reports which feed into faculty reports and action plans. Staff promotion must take account of evaluation outcomes [**A63; B12; M3; A92; A93; A94; B31; M6; B9; B18; B19**]. Administrative staff performance against job description is assessed continuously during different meetings in the Rectorate and is finalised in a Performance Evaluation Report. The Office of Curricula and Institutional Evaluation is now seeking to gain more comprehensive feedback on the academic experience from alumni [**A62; B11; M3; M4**]. Heads of Department and Deans of Faculty are evaluated against departmental and faculty objectives and the Annual Workload Agreement. Outcomes are considered by the Rectorate, which produces the comprehensive Annual Report on Scientific and Financial Activity, in line with Ministry requirements [**A50; A63; M3; M6; B9**].

2.4 The Department of Human Resources and Juridical Office maintains the database of staff contracts and records. Job descriptions are in line with functions specified in the Statute and Regulation of Studies [**A21; A22; A23; A70**]. In accordance with statutory requirements, an Annual Workload Agreement is signed at the beginning of the year [**A69**]. The Annual Report to the Ministry includes a section on Academic Staff and Workload, which reflects on the University's effectiveness in balancing various activities including teaching, research, administrative work and knowledge dissemination [**50**]. The University is committed to a policy of social development, which extends both to developing the University as a social network for employees and to promoting regional and cross-border development [**SER p.23; M4; M5; M6; http://www.unkorce.edu.al/sq/node/743**].

2.5 The University compiles the budget in accordance with statutory guidelines. The development of the budget is overseen by Rectorate and signed off by Academic Senate and Council of Administration [**A7 p.24; A21; A23; A38; A48**]. Financial policy, including regular monitoring of performance, is overseen by the University Administrator in line with University policy [**A38**]. Rectorate, Academic Senate and Council of Administration hold monthly meetings to monitor performance against budget [**A7 p.25; A48; B10; A21; A28**].

A29].The budget is subject to internal auditing and the external audit by the Ministry of Education and Sport every two years and by the State Supreme Audit Institution every four years **[B13; A7 p.26; M3]**.Academic and administrative staff met by the review team revealed a good understanding of financial and budgetary procedures **[M6; M7]**.

2.6 The institutional information system is managed via the Albanian Academic Network, which provides the University with database space for the purposes of learning and teaching, research, human resources management, financial management and administration.A University regulation defines policy, responsibilities and operational practice**[A7 p.26; A43]**.The University's network is centrally coordinated by the Department of Information and Knowledge Transfer and is used to co-ordinate information between the University and national bodies, including the Ministry of Education and Sport **[A43]**.All faculties, including each faculty library, are equipped with computers and internet access so as to support the information technology skills on study programmes**[Campus tour; A79; M7]**.Students are positive about the quality of the University's information technology**[M4; Student Survey]**.

2.7 The University's official website is in Albanian and English and provides accurate information on admissions, academic activities, study programmes and their units, quality assurance, and student support documents**[<http://www.unkorce.edu.al/>]**.The University produces a standard range of promotional publications including the University guide and brochures for individual study programmes**[A127; http://www.unkorce.edu.al]**.Students met by the review team were positive about the information they receive,aligning with the outcomes of the Student Survey **[M4; Student Survey; A79]**.

2.8 The University occupies a series of well-tended buildings close to the centre of the city.There are good quality teaching classrooms which are well-equipped with audio-visual equipment, including PCs and projectors **[Campus tour]**.Oversight of estates and facilities management is under the auspices of the Board of Administration**[B1; B2; A21]**.The University has a systematic approach to the development of its teaching facilities, with clear objectives being set out in the Strategic Plan**[A7, M3]**.The University is working closely with the municipality of Korça and has purchased a former municipality building next to the campus.This is currently being redeveloped for new teaching accommodation and administrative offices,which will enhance learning and teaching **[Campus tour; M2; M5; M7; A24; A26]**.There is a University archive and a museum which collects evidence relating to the University's academic heritage**[<http://www.unkorce.edu.al/en/article/historiku-i-universitetit-0>; Campus tour]**.Students and academic staff met by the team valued the University's facilities and estate, saying that it provided a productive context in which to learn**[M4, M6]**.The review team accordingly concluded that the University's systematic approach to the development of its campus and infrastructure,which contributes to a positive learning environment for students, constitutes a feature of **good practice**.

2.9 The self-evaluation report describes ways in which the University meets legal requirements for space for academic and other activity.Compliance rates have been improved following the purchase of the new building from the municipality**[A17]**.There are appropriate teaching rooms, laboratories, lecture halls equipped with video projection, a video conference hall, department offices, libraries in each faculty, and over 300 computers with internet access.Moreover, as noted at paragraph 2.8, the buildings are sited on an ambient campus thathas green spaces**[A50; Campus tour; A7, pp.30-31]**.The University's infrastructure is monitored, including at the Student Council, which in 2015 worked with the University Careers Centre to organise a student survey of learning and teaching facilities**[A91]**.The faculty libraries operate an essentially manual system for book loans.The review team was informed that there is a project to introduce a digital system, that further funding was required, and accordingly, that there is no date for completion of the project**[M7; Campus tour]**.The team concluded that this contributed to the affirmation discussed under

Evaluation Area 5.

2.10 University and Faculty administrative structures are published in key University documentation and on the University website [B2; B3; <http://www.unkorce.edu.al/en/organizimi>]. The Office of the Protocol and Archive is responsible for maintaining all significant documentation of the University, overseeing hardcopy and electronic databases of staff, student and research records in accordance with the relevant Rectorate Regulation. This includes the full student record from enrolment, and then examination, through to graduation [A35; A36; M7]. The University is aware that if it grows student numbers, it will need to develop its electronic database information storage [A7 p.32; M7].

Findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- the University's systematic approach to the development of its campus and infrastructure, which contributes to a positive learning environment for students (paragraph 9.8; **Chapter III Standard V.1**).

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not make any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not make any affirmations.

Judgement

The standards for Resourcing are fully met.

Evaluation Area 3: The Curriculum

3.1 The University's programmes are required to reflect the Mission, the Strategic Plan and the development strategy. There is a particular aim to meet regional economic and social needs. At the end of the year, the University reviews strategic objectives relating to teaching and research to ensure that they are sensitive to regional needs [A23; A24; A25; A26; M2]. Over recent years this has seen a focus on agriculture and the professionalisation of teaching. The University maintains continuous contact with regional directorates of education and other employers [A99; A129; M2; M6; M7]. Strategic objectives have also stimulated the development of further engagement with employers and the development of two-year professional degrees [A99; A129; M2].

3.2 The University offers qualifications across all three cycles, with 22 bachelor's programmes, 13 professional master's programmes, four MScs and one doctoral award. There are also plans to offer the provision of two-year vocational and professional awards [A3; M2]. The institutional website publishes information on study programmes and this includes course structure, learning and teaching information, and ECTS credits [<http://www.unkorce.edu.al/sq/studime-bachelor-koh%C3%AB-e-plot%C3%AB>]. More comprehensive information, including on admissions and employment opportunities, is published in the University Guidebook and in individual study programme leaflets [A123; A23; A158]. Regulations of each study programme specify definitive information on learning outcomes, syllabi, assessment and other aspects of each course [A107-117; A23, Articles, 40-42, 44-47, 56].

3.3 The University's Middle-Term Development Programme (2008-2013) addressed Ministry priorities by focusing on national and regional factors. It considered socio-economic priorities in south-eastern Albania around Korça and prompted developments in mathematics and science, and more applied areas including agriculture, business administration and education. The Strategic Development Plan (2016-2020) has supplemented the earlier plan by extending a strategic emphasis to internationalisation policies [A24; A26; M2; M3; A61; A123]. The University was able to point to the signing of a number of new Tempus agreements aimed at promoting student and staff mobility and developing new curricula. One example is the joint master's with universities in Greece and Azerbaijan, a cross-border co-operation funded by the European Union which has seen the introduction of a master's programme in Petroleum Oil and Gas Management and Transportation [C4.1; C4.2; C4.3; C4.4; C4.5; C4.6; M2; M3; M4]. Employers met by the review team were aware of the University's strategy and pointed to mutually beneficial collaborations, including the development of a new University building (see EA2) and the involvement of employers on the University's Advisory Board [M5; A15]. This strategic approach contributed to the feature of **good practice** identified at 3.11 [A24; A26].

3.4 Workload for full-time academic staff is allocated across teaching; research development and knowledge transfer activities; and 'activities in support of the institutional mission', in compliance with statutory requirements [A7, p.36; A69]. Full-time staff may do more than the allotted norm to reduce the requirement for part-time staff [A69; M7]. Actual hours worked are recorded by Heads of Department during the year and monitored by the Department of Finance at the end of the year [A71; M6; M7].

3.5 As noted, the definitive regulations for each study programme include comprehensive information about the curriculum, learning and teaching, assessment, admission, infrastructure and support, and employment opportunities. The regulations and information about each unit are displayed on the website and available on the University's ESSE3 Digital System [A107-117; <http://www.unkorce.edu.al/en/node/751>; www.unkorce.esse3]. This information is followed up by academic staff in initial lectures [A23, Articles 85-86; M4]. Admissions criteria are now developed by the relevant

department, approved by Academic Senate and then sent to the Ministry [A23, Article 20; A128; A54; <http://www.unkorce.edu.al/sg/node/763>]. They are published in the Statute and the Regulation of Studies [A21; A23]. Students are satisfied with the programme information that they receive [Student Survey; M4].

3.6 First-cycle programmes are designed to include fundamental knowledge on general scientific principles and methods, and subject-specific skills. Learning objectives are divided into general and subject-specific competencies, relating to the requirements of the overall qualification and the actual study programme, respectively [A21, Article 33; A107-117; <http://www.unkorce.edu.al/en/node/751>; www.unkorce.esse3]. Most first-cycle programmes seek to embed employability. The only exceptions are for professional education programmes, where students must have a second-cycle programme to practise [A107-117]. Credit mobility and equivalence procedures, in line with the Bologna Declaration, are defined in the Regulation of Studies, as well as regulations of individual study programmes (see 3.9) [A23; A107-11].

3.7 Under the auspices of the Careers Centre, students receive an orientation which covers University and programme information. Third-cycle students receive a bespoke version reflecting their specific departmental location [M4; A21, Article 8; A124]. Regular surveys cover orientation and other aspects of student progression. Results are discussed at faculty and Decanate meetings [A49; A51-53; A92; A23; Student Survey]. Students met by the review team were appreciative of the orientation they had received, both in terms of documentation and the attentiveness of staff [M4; Student Survey].

3.8 Regulations for the second cycle require study programmes to train critical thinkers with specialist knowledge and research skills and stipulate that they should be delivered by full-time staff with research backgrounds. All master's programmes include an element of professional practice, undertaken with state and private organisations across the region [A111-116; M4; M6; A27]. Students on master's programmes and alumni spoke positively of the professional practice, noting both the support available from University staff in setting up the placement and its value in developing employability (see section 3.11) [M4; M7].

3.9 The University has sought to develop a platform for its study programmes that promotes Albanian students' mobility in Europe and beyond. Programmes are designed to meet the requirements of the Bologna Process and include regulations on student transfer for candidates coming from abroad [A23, Article 62; A56; A4.1-4.11]. Programme descriptors are published in English on the website [e.g., <http://www.unkorce.edu.al/en/bachelor-study-full-time>]. Second and third-cycle students must pass an English language examination before they graduate [A21, Article 33]. Students are issued with a Diploma Supplement with their award certificate [A23, Article 63; B18.1; B18.2; B18.3]. The Careers Centre is responsible for promoting and helping to organise student mobility. It publicises opportunities and helps students with applications [M3; M4; A74; M6]. The team met students who had benefited from exchange in a number of European countries through Tempus and Erasmus+ projects, though other students noted that cost could inhibit their aspiration to study abroad [M4; M3; M2; C3; M6; M7]. While University managers acknowledged that they would like more students to experience study abroad, the review team noted the University's development of a curricular offering and support infrastructure, which has increased opportunities for Albanian students to study abroad, judging it to be a feature of **good practice**.

3.10 The University's strategic approach to its curriculum has allowed it to integrate practical and theoretical elements effectively within study programmes [A99; A129; M2; M7]. All second-cycle, and a selection of first-cycle programmes have some form of professional practice. In addition, a number of study programmes across the faculties are participating in Review of the University Curricula based on Competences, which will result

in an institutional competence framework and the development of competences for each study programme[A107-117; A64; M3; M7].

3.11 Study programmes are required to indicate how they will provide opportunities for student employment[A23; A107-117].Moreover, as noted at paragraph 3.1, the University's strategic planning has sought to embed employability in the curriculum via various initiatives, including engagement with regional employers and the development of two-year vocational and professional programmes, including in Nursery Education and Veterinary Medicine (see also 3.11) [M2; A25; A26; A99; A129; M7].Students were positive about the professional practice, valuing its role in developing employability[M4, Student Survey].The municipality of Korça also works with the University on a careers fair[M4; Student Survey; M7].Some students and a few employers met by the review team were of the view that more, and more regular, practical applications and placement opportunities would be beneficial.Nonetheless, the review team noted the extent to which the curriculum develops from University strategy, and the degree to which programmes integrate theoretical and practical elements to help students gain employment.Moreover, these opportunities align with regional socio-economic development needs.This allowed the review team to conclude that the approach to programme design and curricula, which supports the development of graduate employability in the context of regional needs,constitutes a feature of **good practice**[A23; A24; A26; M4; M5; M6].

Findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- the University's development of a curricular offering and support infrastructure, which has increased opportunities for Albanian students to study abroad (paragraph 3.9; **Chapter I Standard I.10**)
- the approach to programme design and curricula, which supports the development of graduate employability in the context of regional needs (paragraphs 3.3 and 3.11; **Chapter I Standard I.3, Chapter I Standard I.4**).

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not make any affirmations.

Judgement

The standards for the Curriculum are fully met.

Evaluation Area 4: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research

4.1 The University has the appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure efficient organisation and documentation of study programmes [A21, A7 p.44]. The structure of the programme and curriculum content is discussed and agreed in the Department. [B5, M6]. The approved version is signed by the Rector, the Dean of the Faculty and the Head of the Department [A21]. Syllabi and curricula of study programmes are designed to meet the overall objectives of the study programme, which are very clearly stated in the University statute and Strategic Plan [A21, A23]. During the tour of the University the [tour] review team were able to observe a very good infrastructure regarding laboratories and equipment [A79], nevertheless it is constantly updating its capacity and laboratory equipment to keep up with practical teaching and learning methodology [A23]. Academic staff update their teaching material periodically [A87] and keep records of the teaching activity in their register, as an official document that identifies the student's attendance, results and effective class hours [B46]. Teaching materials are available to the students in the form of academic textbooks, transcripts of lectures, handbooks, electronic documentation, previously worked papers, the communication media and IT programs [A23, 79, 87, 107-111; B33, 46].

4.2 Examination rules are approved and made available to students, and are displayed on information boards in the faculty halls in relevant periods of the academic year [A23, <http://www.unkorce.edu.al/sq/rregullore-e-studimeve>]. Assessment results are published in a manner which preserves confidentiality principles and expectations [<https://www.unkorce.esse3.u-gov.rash.al/Home.do>]. Students can access information about the course evaluation form, dates of exams and graduation in the ESSE3 database and on the "Online Service" section of the website. Students have the right to contact the lecturer for any kind of clarification on the exam performance and their grades [A41, 43]. The University provides students who have fulfilled the requirements of their programme with an official diploma [A23] which has been approved by the University. The diploma comes together with a diploma supplement which has all the necessary information on the study programme they have followed [B42, 43, 44, 45].

4.3 Study programmes are subject to continuous quality assessment procedures, which involve internal quality assurance units [A34]. Internal quality assurance units (IQAU) analyse curriculum reviews and improvement of facilities related to the study programmes quality, for example, laboratory use, documentation updates, IT tools, workload ratio, teaching methods and assessment tools [A39]. All the findings are reflected in the self-evaluation report of the Faculty [A50]. Academic staff' performance is measured through students' questionnaires and personal information they provide for their academic and research annual performance [A92]. This performance assessment is carried out by the Internal Quality Assessment Unit.

4.4 Improving the teaching quality is one important focus of the University [A21]. The Inner Quality Assurance Unit is directly involved with the measurement of the study programme performance indicators and has an operational autonomy and access to the university data [A34, 39]. Improvements in teaching quality is part of a continuous process. All academic staff go through an evaluation process that takes place every year [A92]. This is also described in the Manual of the Quality Assurance of the University and is detailed in the calendar action [A39, 40] plan. As part of improving teaching quality, departments undertake open teaching sessions to exchange teaching experience between staff and also to evaluate the teaching of new assistants and this is regarded by the review team as **good practice** [A88, 89].

4.5 The University has three study programmes, bachelor's, master's and

PhD[A47]. Even though it has just one PhD programme, the basis for scientific research is good[M6]. The University consists of 14 departments, which promote, coordinate and manage the activities of teaching and research [A47]. Qualification levels are good, where 50 per cent of the academic staff hold academic titles and degrees [A59, 60]. Departments are the teaching and research base unit and they meet regularly and decide about the important matters related to organisation of the research activities, publications and promotion [A76]. Based on the evidence provided by the institution, the review team understands that academic staff are working towards increased research, this mainly based on their qualifications and publications,[A60; B21;M6] but as has been indicated in the meetings with the staff, there may be a lack of funds generated through projects and other activities to support research.[M6;Professors' survey]

4.6 The University encourages development and scientific research within the institution[M2;M3;M6]. There is funding for research in the annual budget 'Fundamental Research and Excellence'[A48, 82]. Funds are discussed in the Rectorate and approved by the Academic Senate and the Board of Administration. Budgets are detailed down to department level[A50]. The University has been, and still is, part of many international projects, and this supports research development [A81, 96]. Cooperation and networks created with these partnerships have enhanced more interaction and scientific communication between researchers[C11, 12]. The University has a Didactic Experimental Economy that supports research in the Faculty of Agriculture[A45]. This is an experimental centre within the University's facility that supports academic staff and students in agriculture to undertake their scientific or applied research. The review team identified this as **good practice**, facilitating the advancement of scientific research in agriculture.

4.7 The University is committed to internationalisation through the mobility of academic staff and students and has agreements with many national and international partners which the team view as **good practice**. [C2;M4; M6]. It has increased the number of international projects during recent years, through international publications and symposiums, a variety of agreements where academic staff and students have been part of international teaching experience and employment of staff that have graduated abroad. The University has many agreements with partners and is part of many international and national projects[A81]. During the last years, it has started to realize increased staff and student mobility within the framework of Erasmus+ programme[C2]. During student and staff meetings they have testimony for their international experiences [M4; M6]. Although the great majority of academic staff have not worked abroad in the last 5 years, the University is taking steps to address this through its commitment to internationalisation. From Academic Staff survey, results show that 91.95 per cent of the staff has not been working in any Higher Education institution abroad during the last five years[Professors' Survey].

4.8 Priority areas of the scientific research are determined in the Strategic Development Plan of the University[A25]. Also, several scientific events are organized by the university, in accordance with areas of research[A32; A122]. However, the prioritisation and coordination of research areas within the departments between academic staff and students is regarded by the review team as a **weakness** and the team **recommends** that the University should establish and implement a strategy to support the systematic development of fields of research identified as priorities in its Strategic Development Plan. The research experts in each academic area are in the departments and this knowledge should be used to inform decisions at strategic level in the University. The academic staff survey results indicate that 79.87 per cent of academic staff have not got any funding for research from the institution in the last three years,[A66;M6] which indicates a difference in opinion between the departments and University management. As mentioned above, prioritising the research areas from the department will help in a better coordination of funds.

4.9 Institutional process of prioritising the areas of research is done by the Scientific

Council and Editorial Board and the Deputy Rector in charge of the scientific research[A32].It is in accordance with the strategic development plan of the University [A32; A33;A34].During the meeting with the academic staff they expressed their concern that their scientific research has limitations with regard to funding[M6; A61].

4.10 The University pursues a favourable policy for mobility of academic staff whoareinvolved in scientific research[A26].This is mainly done through projects and partnerships[M6; M7].Internationalisation of studies is another step that the University is taking towards scientific research improvement[A73, 81].Research is carried out at an individual level, rather than strategically.Also, as discussed above, the academic staff are concerned regarding the level of financial resources for research [M6;C11;C12].

4.11 The University organizes an annual International Conference which aims to promote all the scientific research of the academic staff, students and invited researchers[A32, 122].The publications that follow the conferences and other scientific events in the form of proceedings, and the publication of The Scientific Bulletin or its special editions, are a very useful way of increasing the impact of the University researchers.The University also publishes monographs, PhD theses or other books for its academic staff[A76,80].

4.12 The University has established a unit that evaluates the progress in scientific research outcomes that is known as the Scientific Council and Editorial Board[A32].It is headed by the Rector and is composed of academics holding scientific titles, either within the University or invited [M6].Institutional policies of the intellectual copyright protection are defined in the Regulation of the Scientific and Editorial Board and the Regulation of Ethics[A36].They define cases of plagiarism and authors and researchers are aware of the scientific and individual responsibility they have in terms of academic papers' quality.Promotion of outcomes in scientific research is done through the University journal and its specific publications are printed in hardcopy and delivered to all authors[http://www.unkorce.edu.al/sites/default/files/buletini_2016.pdf].Young researchers are encouraged and supported in personal initiatives related to research [C11;C12].This is mainly done by financial support or publishing their research without publication costs[C11, 12; M6].

Findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- as part of improving teaching quality, departments undertake open teaching sessions to exchange teaching experience between staff and also to evaluate the teaching of new assistants(paragraph 4.4; **Chapter I Standard II.4**)
- the University has a Didactic Experimental Economy that supports research in the Faculty of Agriculture (paragraph 4.6; **Chapter II Standard I.6**)
- the University is committed to internationalisation through the mobility of academic staff and students and has many agreements with national and international partners(paragraph 4.7; **Chapter II Standard I.3**).

Weaknesses

The review team identified the following weakness:

- the prioritisation and coordination of research areas within the department between academic staff and students(paragraph 4.8; **Chapter II Standard I.4, Chapter II StandardI.6**).

Recommendations

The review team made the following recommendation:

- theUniversity should establish and implement a strategy to support the systematic development of fields of research identified as priorities in its Strategic Development Plan (paragraph 4.8; **Chapter II, Standard I.4,Chapter II StandardI.6**).

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not make any affirmations.

Judgement

The Standards for Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research are substantially met.

Evaluation Area 5: Students and their Support

5.1 The admission procedure is in accordance with the legal requirements of the Albanian Law on Higher Education. Policies for the students' admission in study programmes are included in the Strategic Development Plan [A23, 26]. Responsibilities of the student admission and induction are shared by the Department of the Studies and the Student Career Centre [A21]. Departments coordinate the promotional campaign with prospective students [A126, 127]. Visits of University representatives to high schools and open-day visits of the prospective candidates to the University are organised every year [M6]. Handbooks for students, brochures, and leaflets [A127] highlighting study programmes are published and available during the year, especially at the beginning and during the promotional campaign. Each academic year, the University organises informative meetings with first-year students and prepares and distributes the necessary information to them. [A126, 127]. The University has approximately 4,750 students in all the study programmes it offers and the ratio of staff to students is 1 to 27 [A3, 77], but for study programmes that use the laboratories it is lower, at 1 to 15 [A77].

5.2 Communication with the students is very good and effective, usually done by personal contact, email or the virtual platform available for students [A7 p.59; M4]. Information and communication is mainly supported by the Department of Information, Technology and Communication, and the website is updated frequently and has all the required information for regulation, registration, curricula, exams and student grades. [A23]. The University communicates with interns through the intranet, website and email. The University has applied a digitalisation programme through the ESSE3 system [www.unkorce.esse3.u-gov.rash.al/Home.do], a virtual platform for students that helps them in the communication process. Additionally, information is provided through lectures and access to their grades, which the review team considers to be **good practice**. Every student and staff member has an internal personal email address that helps the communication process [M4; M6]. All students' information, from the beginning of their studies until the end, is inputted and stored in the secretary's office, including the grades, living addresses, email addresses and telephone numbers of the students. [A34, 44 www.unkorce.esse3.u-gov.rash.al]

5.3 Information and orientation of students is a continuous process during the years of study [A21]. All information is posted on the website or intranet [<http://www.unkorce.edu.al/>]. The Careers Centre plays a crucial role in the orientation and mentoring of students [A124; A126; A127]. Students are offered assistance, advisory and orientation services throughout and after their studies [A44]. Students consider that the mentoring system within the University works well [M4]. Students get all the advice they need through their studies, and they can contact their professors during office hours, lectures and seminars [M4; M6]. They also get a supervisor for their thesis at the end of their studies. During their studies, students have the opportunity for mobility within international projects such as Erasmus+ programmes [C2].

5.4 The University offers a supporting policy for students with disabilities or special categories [SER p.60]. Only the Faculty of Natural and Human Sciences provides a lift for access to the second-floor classrooms; others provide ramps [Tour of facilities]. Through all study programmes, there is a quota for candidates from social groups in need [M2; M4; A21]. These students are usually exempt from the payment of tuition fees in year 1 [M2; M4]. From the results of the students' survey, 45 per cent of them state that the infrastructure (ramps, elevators) for students with disabilities is lacking [A21; A23]. The institution, however, is aware of the situation and is working to improve it.

5.5 The University has four libraries for its students and staff [tour]. Libraries are part of each of the faculties of the University. The libraries offer all kinds of literature such as books,

periodicals, encyclopedia, wall maps, newspapers, albums and language or terminology support. There are in total 11,890 titles and 37,402 copies in Albanian and foreign languages, mainly English and French [Campus tour]. The library also has all the published books in Albanian by the academic staff of the University [A78]. All these books are also part of the libraries of the University. However, digitalisation of the resource is underdeveloped [tour]. During the meetings with academic and support staff it was stated that this is already an ongoing project that will help with the University library digitalisation and online library, [M4; M5; M6] and the review team **affirms** the progress made in this project.

5.6 Tutorial and advisory services for the students are described in the Regulation of Studies [A28]. In addition to the formal tutoring process, daily lecturer and student contact provides further opportunities to support and facilitate the progress of first-cycle and second-cycle students [A23]. Specific mentoring is provided for year three first-cycle students to support them during their thesis selection and development and to advise on future employment opportunities [M4; M6]. The Careers Centre offers a range of services and support for ongoing students [A124]. Another important thing that the University does for its students' support and assistance is that in case of study transfer the University prepares English transcripts for students. This is an official document followed by the module description, and it is signed and stamped by the Dean and the Rector [M4]. The review team identified this as **good practice**.

5.7 Students have the right to be, and are, represented in the institutional level of the University [A7 p.61]. They have the right to vote for the Rector and the Dean of the Faculty, and they also vote for two of their representatives in the Senate of the University [A21, 46]. They also have their representatives in the Internal Quality Assurance Unit and faculty units. Students are organised within the Council of Students, which is an independent organisation within the University and which helps to promote and support the interests of students [A42, A91]. Additionally, the review team **affirms** the provision of a students' card, which will help students to get free access, or different services for free or at a reduced rate. The card has been produced but is not yet functioning to its full capability. [<http://www.unkorce.edu.al/sq/keshilli-studentor>].

5.8 The University pursues an effective and appropriate supporting policy to assure the cultural and sporting quality of student life [A129]. Students organise fairs and sell products in order to raise charity funds [A129]. The University covers the financial costs and offers means of transport for fieldtrips of study programmes related to history, geography, tourism, linguistic studies and agriculture. Students also organise different sporting activities [A83]. The graduation ceremony is another activity that the University organises [A7 p.62; M4].

5.9 The University is very much oriented towards the future employment of its students [A25]. The Careers Centre has a significant role in this process [M5]. During the meeting with employers they stated that most of their employees come from the University, especially the banking system, which stated that 95 per cent of staff are University graduates [M4; M5]. The University has a database of all the employment of its graduate students through the years [M2]. To help its students in their future employment, the University has signed several agreements with public and private institutions and companies [A99-A106]. These companies offer internships to the students and will serve in the future as possible employers for them. The University participates as a full partner in the annual Job Fair organised by the Municipality of Korça, which is also one of its close partners [A106].

Findings

Good Practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- the digitalisation programme of the University, ESSE3 system (paragraph 5.2; **Chapter I Standard III.2**)
- English transcripts for students are prepared if students want to transfer their studies abroad (paragraph 5.6; **Chapter I Standard III.3**).

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not make any recommendations.

Affirmation of actions being taken

The review team affirms the following actions already in progress:

- the ongoing project that will help with the library digitalisation and online library (paragraph 5.5; **Chapter I Standard III.5**)
- the University has produced a students' card, which will help students to get free access, or different services for free or at a reduced rate (paragraph 5.7; **Chapter I Standard III.5**).

Judgement

The standards for Students and their Support are fully met.