



Institutional Review of Higher Education Institutions in Albania

**Report of University of Shkodra,
Luigj Gurakuqi
May 2017**

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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 the Albanian Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (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 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 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 action 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 fully 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 review 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

The University of Shkodra, 'Luigj Gurakuqi', has its origins in the second Higher Pedagogical Institute established in Albania by government decree in 1957. It was the first modern public higher education institution to be opened in northern Albania. For the first 30 years or so of its existence the Higher Pedagogical Institute focused on graduating teachers. At first it provided a two-year programme in either the humanities or the sciences and was the only institution in the country providing qualifications for primary school teachers. Later its programmes were extended to three, and then four years, and teachers prepared for work in elementary schools with an extended choice of subject areas.

In 1991 the Institute, by then named after the patriot and scholar Luigj Gurakuqi, acquired its university title. New disciplines opened such as law, economics, foreign languages, nursing and midwifery, social work, sports, and communications. As it has grown the University has broadened its offerings across all three Bologna cycles and developed specialist research units in Albanian studies and water studies related to the Shkodra region. The library has a unique collection of Albanian literature including rare books and early editions which are currently being digitised.

The University provides a focus for education and scientific research in the northern region of Albania. The University is large. Over 12,000 students are registered in the current year (2016-17) and there are nearly 200 full-time, and almost 300 part-time, academic staff. The University has memoranda of agreement with Albanian and foreign universities which provide opportunities for mobility and joint working.

Summary report

A self-evaluation report (SER) was developed by a team at the University which included senior staff, academic and administrative staff and a student representative. Drafts were circulated for comment from within the University being finalised and approved by the Rector and Vice-Rector. [M2]The University had not previously completed such an exercise. The SER provided an introduction to the operation of the University as well as some critical reflection on the extent to which the University meets the expectations of APAAL's standards. The SER was supported by evidence, and more targeted evidence was supplied prior to and during the review. Not all evidence was available in English. In places the document lacked clarity, possibly because of translation, and did not always focus clearly on the standards. Overall the review team found the SER to be a helpful document upon which to build the review.

The review visit took place over two days. The review team was made up of four senior higher education reviewers from the UK and two experienced higher education members of staff from an Albanian institution. The review team was supported by a Review Manager and a 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, and supplemented by additional documentation requested. Over 150 documents were considered, which enabled the team to familiarise themselves with the structure, policies, management procedures, facilities, teaching and research activity at the University. Evidence considered included the Statute of the University, Academic Regulations, Annual Reports, admission and orientation procedures, the range of external agreements, 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, academic staff, administrative and support staff, alumni, and representatives of local and partner organisations. Notes were taken at all meetings. As part of a tour of the University the review team viewed libraries, computer rooms, laboratories, teaching spaces, and administrative areas. They also viewed the University's electronic information systems for staff and students. Having reviewed all evidence available, the team reached the conclusions set out below.

The University substantially meets the standards for Organisation and its Management fully. The organisation of the University is defined within its Statute and Regulations, and established procedures and protocols are followed for formal meetings. The University is making good progress in meeting the requirements of law 80/2015. The review team affirmed steps being taken to strengthen independent external advice in the work of the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQUA), and the work of the University in implementing its development strategy.

The University partly meets the standards for Resourcing. The responsibilities for resources are clearly set out in the Statute and Regulations of the University and are carried out appropriately through the Rectorate, Senate and Administration Board. The review team confirmed that the University has generally appropriate and effective systems and processes for managing both its human and physical resources. However, it identified a weakness in the underlying size and condition of its physical facilities which do not meet required standards. The University is to take steps to ensure that the required standards with regard to physical space are met. The review team did not identify any good practice or affirmations.

The University substantially meets the standards for the Curriculum across the three Bologna cycles. Programmes are offered which reflect the University's mission and its position in the local region and labour market. Study programmes are clearly defined, and appropriate and timely information is given to students. The review team affirmed the actions being taken to ensure that the proportion of full-time staff meets the required 70 per cent of the teaching workload in both first and second-cycle studies. **[Chapter I Standard I.9]** The review team did not identify any good practice, weaknesses, recommendations or affirmations.

The University substantially meets the standards for Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research. The University has a developing research agenda. Teaching is managed appropriately. However, the review team identified as a weakness the lack of a University-wide effective approach to promoting continuous improvement in teaching quality for both new and established staff. It is recommended that the University implements an effective system and accompanying procedure to develop all teaching staff in teaching, learning and assessment, taking into account current best practice. The review team did not identify any good practice or affirmations.

The University substantially meets the standards for Students and their Support. The University provides guidance, advice and tutorial and other support to prospective and current students and, where possible, to students with additional needs or from disadvantaged minorities. A well-resourced library is available to students. The review team affirmed the actions being taken by the University to increase student engagement through elections to a new Students Council. The team also affirmed action by the University in the establishment of an alumni database and work to populate it. The review team did not identify any good practice, weaknesses or recommendations.

Summary of findings

Good practice

The review team did not identify any features of good practice.

Weaknesses

The review team identified the following weaknesses:

- the failure to meet the standards in relation to space to student ratio and there is evidence of inadequate aspects of accommodation and facilities (paragraph 2.17; **Chapter III Standard V.1**)
- the absence of a University-wide effective approach to promoting continuous improvement in teaching quality for both new and established staff (paragraph 4.10; **Chapter I Standard II.4**).

Recommendations

The review team identified the following recommendations:

- that the University takes steps to ensure that the required standards with regard to physical space are met (paragraph 2.17; **Chapter III Standard V.1**)
- the implementation of an effective system and accompanying procedure to develop all teaching staff in teaching, learning and assessment, taking into account current best practice (paragraph 4.10; **Chapter I Standard II.4**).

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team affirms the following actions already in progress:

- the steps being taken to strengthen independent external advice in the work of the IQAU (paragraph 1.7; **Chapter III Standard I.4**)
- the work of the University in developing its strategy (paragraph 1.9; **Chapter III Standard I.5**)
- the action taking place to ensure that the proportion of full-time staff meets the required 70 per cent of the teaching workload in both first and second-cycle studies (paragraphs 3.8, 3.9 and 1.12; **Chapter I Standard I.9**)
- the actions being taken to elect a new Student Council which will institutionalise and improve the participation of students in institutional life (paragraph 5.11; **Chapter I Standard III.7**)
- the establishment of a University alumni database by the Career Counselling Office and working to populate it systematically (paragraphs 5.13 and 1.17; **Chapter I Standard III.9**).

Summary of judgements for each Evaluation Area

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

Summary judgement

The review team recommends to the Accreditation Council that at the University Shkodra, 'Luigj Gurakuqi', the State Quality Standards are **substantially met**.

Detailed report

Evaluation Area 1: The Organisation and its Management

1.1 The University of Shkodra (USh) is a public higher education institution established by central government decree in 1991. Its governance and regulatory frameworks are designed to align with national legal requirements for higher education. [SER p.9-11] The University's Statute is consistent with the institutional mission and reflects purpose. [1.2] A Regulation enacted by Senate ('The Interior Code of the Administration of the University of Shkodra') gives details of how the organisation's administration works within the Statute and covers areas such as use of the seal, the administrative structure of the University, roles and responsibilities and employee protocols. [1.1] The University has amended its Statute over time, following appropriate internal and external procedures [1.3; 1.4] and is introducing changes to enable compliance with the requirements of the new law (80/2015) and relevant by-laws when they become available. [M1] In the meantime, responsibilities are being discharged appropriately, with Faculty Council tasks allocated to the Dean's Office and the Council of Professors continuing to operate in the transition period. [M1] [Chapter III Standard I.1]

1.2 The University has in place the key bodies to secure efficient management: Academic Senate, the Rectorate, the Administration Board and the Council of Ethics. These bodies facilitate collegial decision-making and are understood by staff at all levels. As required by article 14 of the Statute, the Rectorate drafts and presents the budget to the Senate. [SER p9; 1.5] The Administration Board oversees the University's administrative and financial management, [1.7] with Senate having the academic authority. [M3] The Council of Ethics advises on matters relating to ethics and investigates breaches of the University Code of Ethics. [1.8] At a faculty level the Dean's Office (formerly via the Council of the Faculty) manages resources, based on proposals coming from the departments. [1.12; M3]

1.3 The Council of Professors is established only in one faculty (the Faculty of Social Sciences, as this is the only faculty currently offering third-cycle studies). The Council comprises all professors in the Faculty and includes in its terms of reference the award of professorial title and the approval of doctoral programmes and awards. [1.10; 1.11] The Council continues to operate pending government regulations as to a replacement. [M1] [Chapter III Standard I.2]

1.4 USh supports discussion and debate in its collegial bodies. Arrangements for the operation of councils and boards are well understood by staff and students. [M3; M12] Senate and other key bodies meet regularly and agendas and papers are made available in advance of meetings, allowing members the opportunity to consider and discuss matters with those they represent. [SER p.10; M3; M5] Members of the Rectorate and senior managers at faculty and department level are charged with responsibility for monitoring the implementation of decisions. The University publishes reports of meetings of Senate and Administration Board on the USH webpages as well as sending them to the offices of the Deans and to departments for communication at departmental meetings. Those whom the team met confirmed that this cascading of information worked effectively. [M12]

1.5 Student representatives from all faculties are members of Senate and reported that they were able to play a full part in the debate, giving an example of having successfully lobbied for a change in the budget proposals. [M3] [Chapter III Standard I.3]

1.6 USh ensures that the limits of its autonomy are clear and that it operates its autonomy appropriately within the relevant legislation. Self-governance extends to organising internal structures, determining educational fields and research projects [M13] and selecting students and staff. [SER p.10; 1.14] Internal roles are defined [1.15] and elections are held for key posts such as Rector and Head of Department. [1.14]

1.7 Internal quality assurance is managed through the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU), [1.15] which, in line with legislative requirements, evaluates the efficacy of teaching activities and research and ensures compliance with the institutional Statute and internal regulations. The Unit was established in 2015. The IQAU has only one member of staff, but is part of the Department of Curriculum, Research and Standards. [M2] It conducts surveys of staff and students on the quality of programmes (see paragraph 4.5 below), the results of which inform the internal evaluation reports of departments and faculties [FE28] and from there the University's annual report. [M2] The Unit is supported by an ad hoc committee for ensuring internal quality which was established by the Rectorate in January 2017. [1.16] The University acknowledges that external experts should be engaged in its activities and processes in order to gain independent advice [SER p.13] and has started to do this through the involvement of external advisers in course development and review. [M4] The review team affirms the steps being taken to strengthen independent external advice in the work of the IQAU.

1.8 Through its Foreign Relations Office, USh has sought external funding opportunities and has benefited from European programmes and projects. [1.17; 1.23; 1.25] The University has several agreements supporting exchanges and cooperative working with other universities internationally and values the sharing of experience achieved through participation in TEMPUS and Erasmus programmes. [1.22; M4] [Chapter III Standard I.4]

1.9 A new development strategy, covering the period 2017-21, was approved by the Senate in February 2017. [1.18] It updates the previous strategy, which covered the period 2010-15. [SER p.11] Staff whom the team met were aware of the strategy's objectives and that it was providing a direction for their work [M2; M4] and some had been involved in its drafting. [M4; M10] The strategy is aligned with the University's mission and contains a SWOT analysis, priorities and objectives but does not contain explicit targets or an action plan. [1.18] Key performance indicators are stated separately [FE14] and provide measures (for example, 'number of channels for communication and information'), but not the targets and explicit timeframes which would enable the University to know when it has achieved its objectives. Work is continuing to refine the strategy and its implementation. The review team heard, for example, that departments were required to put forward their priorities from among the 30 objectives of the strategy, and that their achievements against these priorities would be evaluated annually. [M4] The review team affirms the work of the University in implementing its development strategy. [Chapter III Standard I.5]

1.10 An institutional level annual report [1.19] is developed by a working group from the annual reports of each faculty and presented to the Senate where it is discussed by staff and student representatives. [SER p.11; M3] The report provides details of the activities of the University, including expenditure, procurement and income from student fees. Following approval by Senate, the agreed report is sent to the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES) and is published on the University's website. [Chapter III Standard I.6]

1.11 USh has six faculties and 21 academic departments [SER p.6] and programmes are offered in three cycles of studies. Second-cycle studies are offered in all faculties except the newest, the Faculty of Foreign Languages. [SER p.7] Third cycle (doctoral studies) is offered only in the Faculty of Social Sciences in the field of the Albanian language. [SER p.7] Clear structures exist within the University. [1.1; 1.5] Faculties and departments are organised in accordance with legal requirements: management, executive and administrative

structures are separate from academic structures. USh exercises academic freedom in teaching and research, together with financial autonomy, and the Senate is responsible for ensuring that these principles are observed. **[1.2]** Academic staff are able to exercise independence in organising academic activities in teaching, research, and the curricula of study programmes. **[M3]**

1.12 The University has a full-time staff of around 200, all of whom are appropriately qualified in their subject area. **[1; GID; FE38]** The University does not consistently fulfil the requirement that 70 per cent of the staff teaching on first and second-cycle programmes should be full-time, but it is working towards it. (See further discussion in paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9.) The USh website offers a broad range of information, including online services for students, with some of its pages available in English and the intention to translate all of it into English over the next year. <http://www.unishk.edu.al/en>; **FE5** **[Chapter III Standard II. 1]**

1.13 As noted in paragraphs 1.2 and 1.4 above, the key institutional bodies (Academic Senate, the Rectorate, the Administration Board and the Council of Ethics) are in operation, and discussion and debate are supported. Staff and students are appropriately represented on these bodies. They report that they are able to raise issues and are kept informed of decision-making and gave examples of action having been taken around difficulties with timetabling. **[M3; M5; M12]**

1.14 The review team met students who had been elected representatives on the Student Council who reported that it had previously been a less effective body but now addressed issues of relevance and concern to them such as their learning experience, timetabling and regulatory matters. As representatives they consulted with others in class and by email and were able to put forward views and concerns. Actions had then been taken as a result of issues being raised in the Student Council. **[M5]** **[Chapter III Standard II. 3]**

1.15 The University's development strategy emphasises the importance of addressing domestic labour market needs. **[1.18]** Activities in support of this include the adaptation of the curricula to meet the demands of the market, **[1.24]** cooperation with employers, **[M7b]** careers counselling for students and participation in conferences on regional development. **[SERp.12]**

1.16 A Career Counselling Office was opened in December 2016. **[1.21]** The office consists of a chairperson (Professor) and three students. **[1.21]** It provides employment advice to students and information about employment opportunities. It also works with a range of employers to facilitate employment opportunities and arrange job fairs, and provides information about the job market to colleagues who are developing new courses. **[M12]** Students whom the review team met were aware of the office but recognised that it was very new, although the Faculty of Economics offered some similar services. **[M7b]** **[Chapter III Standard III. 1]**

1.17 The University monitors the employment of graduated students through departments for one year after graduation and very recently established a central database in the Career Counselling Office, on which information for around 700 graduates is currently held. **[M14]** This work, however, is only in the early stages of being undertaken systematically (see paragraph 5.13).

1.18 Internationalisation is one of the University's six key priorities in its development strategy **[1.18]** and it has a number of partnership agreements with overseas HEIs **[1.22; 1.23]** which have developed research activity. Its further plans include scholarship schemes, partnerships (regional and global), an internationalised curriculum, development of research in cooperation with others, and the mobility of academic staff. **[1.18]**

1.19 At a regional level, USh has very strong relationships with employers and, in meetings with the review team, external partners confirmed that they had been asked for advice on the local economy and on market demand when new courses were developed or when courses were reviewed.[SER p.12; 1.24;M7a;M7b;M12][Chapter III Standard III.2]

1.20 The University works with a number of other organisations in different sectors to enable internships for students.[SER p.12; 1.26] Meetings with students and external partners confirmed that students are able to benefit from strong links and close relationships with local and regional employers and that an extensive range of opportunities is made available by these organisations.[1.26;M5;M7b]Examples given by external partners and students of such opportunities included internships with banks and with the City Hall, placements in hospitals for nursing students, observation of trials for law students, 'live' projects, assistance with networking, and interview preparation.[M5; M7b][Chapter III Standard III.3]

1.21 The University's development strategy in identifying internationalisation as one of its key priorities states as an objective that it will 'enhance, encourage and support the mobility of students, staff and researchers'.[1.18]The University's Internationalisation Strategy 2017-20 [FE5] sets out an action plan for these objectives.This plan builds on existing activity: USh participates in EU programmes promoting student and staff mobility;[SER p.12; 1.25; FE15] it also participates in and hosts international conferences.[1.27]The Foreign Relations office provides advice and support for European Union funded projects under Erasmus and similar schemes.[SER p.10]Participation in such schemes was reported by staff and students who met the review team.[M4;M5]In particular, staff reported that they had benefited from being able to experience teaching styles in European universities through involvement with such schemes.[M4]The University has also benefited from visiting international staff who have been able to participate in teaching, supporting new USh staff and developing the curriculum.[FE16] Incoming students benefit from a number of modules taught in English.[FE5] [Chapter III Standard III.4]

Findings

Good practice

The review team did not identify any features of good practice.

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 affirmed the following actions already in progress:

- the steps being taken to strengthen independent external advice in the work of the IQAU (paragraph 1.7; **Chapter III Standard I.4**)
- the work of the University in implementing its development strategy (paragraph 1.9; **Chapter III Standard I.5**).

Judgement

The Standards for the Organisation and its Management are substantially met.

Evaluation Area 2: Resourcing

2.1 The University has a clear, open and fair recruitment policy covering all categories of staff. **[1.2 Chapter 7; 2.2]** Vacancies and appointment criteria are published on both the University's and Public Procurement Office's websites. **[2.3; 2.4]** Staff described their own appointment processes, which accorded with the requirements set out in the recruitment policy. **[M14]** The University's approach to planning teaching resource is departmentally led. Each department sets out its requirements in June of each year for the forthcoming year. The applications are reviewed by the Dean's Office before being passed to the Office of the Rector for approval. The University aims to employ 70-80 per cent of its staff on a full-time basis with the remainder on a part-time basis (see paragraph 3.8 below). This provides flexibility and control in the coverage of subjects. The University strives to attract academics from Western universities (see paragraph 2.4 below). **[2.6; SER p.15]** The University continues to use the Council of Professors as the vehicle through which to promote its internal staff pending the publication of the new byelaws. **[2.5]** The University publishes its organisation structure and key regulatory documents on its website. [\[http://www.unishk.edu.al/en/node-110\]](http://www.unishk.edu.al/en/node-110) **[Chapter III Standard IV.1]**

2.2 The University does not have a centralised approach to the induction of new staff. However, during the visit the team was informed that the faculties required new staff to shadow a senior professor in their subject discipline and observe the professor delivering classes and lecture. A new staff member would be observed teaching and would be mentored by the professor. **[M3; M12]** This is discussed further in paragraph 4.10, which includes a recommendation that the University adopt a common and consistent policy and content on staff induction across all departments. The University provides institutionally organised integration and social events, which include academic conferences, student events and activities, open days and the celebration of festivals. **[2.7]** Written information is made available to new staff in the form of departmental information sheets, student guides and general information. **[2.8] [Chapter III Standard IV.2]**

2.3 The University has published a Development Strategy 2017-20, **[1.18]** which sets the mission and vision of the University together with a number of broad areas and aspirational objectives. These objectives correlate with the developmental activities that staff are encouraged to undertake to support the strategy. **[1.17; 1.27; 2.10]** The strategy is supported at a more analytical level by a range of reviews including the Analysis of Educational Work for 2015-16, **[1.27]** which covers a wide range of the research and pedagogical activities of the University and its staff and which draws upon other summative and departmental reports. **[2.5; 2.11; 3.17; 4.7; 4.15]**

2.4 The University is developing its approach to the evaluation of staff performance. The review team was told that faculties conduct surveys at the end of each semester on the performance of the individual staff member and on the programme as a whole. The surveys are then submitted to the Office of the Dean for review. The Dean prepares an overall report which is submitted to Senate through the recently expanded Office of Curriculum, Research and Standards. **[M12]** The University's approach has, up to this year, been devolved to faculties and is therefore not consistent or systematically followed. The University has identified this as a weakness and an area for development. **[1.27]** There is evidence that the University actively recruits staff from western universities and encourages its own staff to gain experience in western universities. The University has 39 collaborative agreements with Universities internationally, 36 international projects, and is active in CEEPUS and TEMPUS. **[1.22; 1.23; 2.11, M12]** However, the University has noted that numbers have dropped this year, for example there are only three staff from a foreign university and only two invited staff (a drop from 5 in 2015). The University has recognised that greater efforts

are needed in this area and has highlighted internationalisation in its 2017-22 Strategic Plan.[1.27][**Chapter III Standard IV.3**]

2.5 The University and its students organise social activities and promote social dialogue through a range of events that include fairs, debates, arts and sports events, charity and community activities and awareness raising. [SER p.16 web links; 1.23-1.27;2.12; 4.23 - 4.27] In accordance with State law the University provides social and health insurance to its staff. [FE7; FE11] [**Chapter III Standard IV.4**]

2.6 The University ensures the effective management of human resources through the specification of rules and responsibilities for HR functions in the Statutes and the Administrative Regulations administered by a Human Resources Office comprising a chairperson and two staff.[1.1; 1.2; 2.2] The contractual rights and obligations for each employee are set out in their terms of employment and job description. [2.4.2; 2.4.5; 2.6] Workload and performance is reviewed annually, which provides the opportunity for adjustments to be made to the terms of employment, such as hours and subject coverage. The employment contracts are filed by the Human Resources Office, which oversees their maintenance and currency.[1.1]In the internal audit report [FE10] reference is made to a number of contraventions of accepted practice in the appointing and reimbursement of staff. The reasons for this are given as ignorance of statutory requirements and lack of effective internal communication between different teams within the University. These matters were subject to an action plan and have been reported in the Annual Report.[1.19] [**Chapter III Standard II.2**]

2.7 In accordance with statutory requirements the University operates a medium-term budgeting model that extends over a three-year period and which is reviewed and amended annually. [SER p.17; 1.19;FE7; FE8; FE9]The structures for determining, drafting and scrutinising the budget are in accordance with statutory regulations. The budget is driven from bottom up with bids from departments and administrative units through faculties to the Chancellor. The collation of the budget is administered under the authority of the Chancellor by the University's Branch of Finance and is sent by the Chancellor to the Academic Senate for scrutiny and approval. Once approved by Senate the budget proceeds to the Administrative Council for approval, after which the detailed budget is devolved back down to faculty and department level for implementation. [1.5][**Chapter III Standard VI.1**]

2.8 The University has in place a structure to support and implement its financial policy. Chapter VIII of the University's Statutes sets out roles and responsibilities relating to the budget process.[1.2] The Chancellor is operationally responsible for the implementation of financial policy assisted by the Finance Branch.[1.1] Financial policy is reviewed collegially by the Administrative Council (which is comprised to have appropriate expertise, including representatives from the Ministry of Education and Sport), and the Senate. The application of accounting rules is the responsibility of the Finance Branch. The Annual Monitoring Report and Internal Audit Policies document [1.19; 2.13;FE10] indicate close review and oversight of the implementation of financial policy.

2.9 The Annual Report [2.13] includes reference to the Ministry of Education and Sports' external audit,[FE10]which identified a number of issues in the administration of the budget including the absence of a management board, and in the payments made to part-time professors and some law professors, as well as the timing of the filling of vacancies. It also states that some legal requirements had not been met at faculty level. However, the evidence provided, and its triangulation with, for example, the approval of quotas for the draft budget 2017-19, indicates these matters are being addressed and that there is appropriate planning and implementation. [**Chapter III Standard VI.2**]

2.10 The University has in place appropriate policies and mechanisms to support budgetary and financial control. The responsibilities of the Audit Branch are set out in the Internal Regulations of the Administration. **[1.1 Article 25]** The Audit Branch conducts a rigorous internal audit process which results in an analytical report and action plan to the Rector, which is discussed in a meeting of the staff and members of the Ministry of Education and Sport. **[FE10]** In addition to internal audit the University is subject to external audits by the State Audit Institution and Ministry of Education and Sports, **[SER p.18]** the outcomes of which are referred to in the Annual Report. **[1.19]** In all cases the results of audit are presented to collegial bodies including the Administrative Council, Senate and Faculties. **[Chapter III Standard V.3]**

2.11 The University's information management system is effective in supporting the work of staff, students and administration. As a member of the Albanian Academic Network (AAN), the University was able to implement ESSE3 IRIS for teaching, research and administrative needs in 2013, before which a manual paper system existed. The University also has a relationship with the Albanian National Examination Association through this system that enables it to draw down applicant data. The University's data is forwarded through ESSE3 to the Ministry of Education and Sport. **[2.14]** ESSE3 is credited with having contributed to the more efficient operation of the University and the provision of better information. **[SER SWOT Analysis; M14]** ESSE3 hosts the student profile, which provides information about programmes of study, students' teaching and examination timetables and their results, which students have access to through their personal accounts. **[SER p.18; FE3; review during the visit]** The system does not yet contain personal details or details and materials about the curriculum, but this is an aspiration. In the meantime, departments have developed their own ways to facilitate access to materials online, for example the Department of Mathematics has developed an App to enable online access while other departments use cloud facilities or email. **[M14]** The University publishes all key regulatory and academic information on its website including data on student intake. **[SER p.18; review during the visit]** **[Chapter III Standard VII.1]**

2.12 The Department of Information Technology supports and coordinates IT facilities which, in addition to academic and administrative staff facilities, comprise 407 computers distributed in labs across the University's premises. **[GID; tour]** The APAAL student survey indicated a comparatively high level of dissatisfaction with the quality of access to computers and connectivity to the internet. The department of Information Technology conducts its own inspections and these are summarised in the report TIK Infrastructure at USh, which describes the structure and state of IT resources and makes recommendations for repair and enhancement. **[2.14]** During the visit students confirmed that the quality of provision varied by building but they stated IT provision was acceptable. **[APAAL Student Survey; M5; 45.9]** **[Chapter III Standard VII.2]**

2.13 The University manages its real estate appropriately subject to the limitations of the financial resources it has at its disposal. The University maintains a record of its real estate and has followed a medium-term plan for the construction of a new building and the refurbishment of existing buildings. **[2.15]** The buildings containing the faculties of Education and natural Sciences have been renovated, a new building is nearing completion for the Faculty of Economics and the University's other buildings will be renovated over the next three years. **[SER p.19]** The management and maintenance of the University's estate is supported by the Department of Investment. **[1.1 Article 31]** While there is evidence of a planned strategic and operational approach to the management of the estate, the University acknowledges that it does not meet expected standards with respect to student to space ratios as discussed in 2.17 below. **[1.18, 17-19; 2.16; 2.17; M5; M10]** **[Chapter III Standard VII.3]**

2.14 The University has appropriate policies and resources in place to collate, store, protect and develop its cultural and scientific heritage. The Library is responsible for cataloguing the scientific and cultural texts of the University, protecting hardcopy editions and digitising them to establish a permanent and accessible resource. A condition of the establishment of the library in 1957 was that it served the community as well as the students of the University. As part of that service the library gathered and saved materials that might otherwise have been lost or destroyed. As a consequence, the library now curates a collection of rare books and materials. The library began a digitisation project in 2010 to preserve and make accessible both its rare collection and standard stock. This was enhanced in 2013 with the introduction of new technology in association with the Marin Barleti Library. [2.14] The digital archive holds over 70,000 pages and is of particular value in the fields of Albanology, Balkanology and Linguistics. [SER p.19; M14; 1.1 Article 34; 2.17; Tour][Chapter III Standard VII.4]

2.15 There is clear evidence that the University pursues a strategic and practical approach to the management of its assets. At a strategic level the University has in place overarching policy documents and procedures such as the University Statutes, Regulations of the Administration and Strategic Plan. [1.1; 1.2; 1.6; 1.18] These are supported at a practical and micro level by records such as the Infrastructure Table, [2.15] the List of IT assets, [2.14] and records of facilities within institutes. [2.19] Operational implementation and oversight is achieved through detailed plans such as the study of the frequentation of the library, [2.12.1] the requisition requests for the library, [5.11] and the record of costings for infrastructure and facilities projects. [2.16] The analysis of these plans and documents then feeds back through the review process into broader documents such as the Annual Report [1.19] and the SWOT analysis attached to the SER. [SER p.52-53] [Chapter III Standard VII.5]

2.16 The University is engaged at a regional and national level in areas of common interest. There is evidence of analysis of the market and of providing services [1.24; 2.19] as well as extensive collaborative arrangements and projects with other universities, employers and other bodies. [1.17; 1.22] External partners described a range of benefits arising from their collaboration with the University, which included knowledge exchange, labour market and sector reviews, practice updating and talent development. [M6] Staff take into account labour market and regional needs when developing new courses. [M10] Some of these activities are supported centrally by a number of administrative units such as the Department of External Relations. However, most of the initiatives appear to be driven by faculties or departments themselves without formal, central support or coordination from the University. [Chapter III Standard VII.6]

2.17 The University uses eight buildings distributed across the city of Shkodra. These buildings and the facilities they house vary considerably in age and condition. The University is aware of the deficiencies and limitations of its accommodation and facilities and has undertaken a planned programme of new, building, renovation and refurbishment. This programme will go some way to addressing some of the deficiencies. The University currently has 19,600 square metres of space, which will rise to 25,400 square metres on completion of the new building that will house the Faculty of Economics. However, with nearly 13,000 students the standard on space to student ratio set out in **Chapter III Standard V.1** is not met, which the University acknowledges. [GID; M10] Staff offices are shared and cramped, with no facilities for part-time staff, student supervision or advisory meetings. The Panel heard how the University and its staff seek to ameliorate these problems through timetabling and noted that the University opening times were 12 hours a day, seven days a week. [2.15; Tour] The University also acknowledges that in some of its buildings, at least, there are issues in relation to the presence of resources relating to air-conditioning, modern fire prevention systems, teaching facilities, IT, sufficient space in seminar rooms, access routes and facilities for disabled students. [2.14; 2.15; M5; SER

SWOT] The review team considers the failure to meet the standards relating to space and the variable condition of accommodation and facilities to be a **weakness**. The team notes the actions taken by the University to improve its infrastructure, and recognises the dilemma that reducing student intake to enable space and other infrastructure standards to be met would have a negative effect on income to pay for the improvements required. However, the team **recommends** that the University takes steps to ensure that the required standards with regard to physical space are met. [**Chapter III Standard V.1**]

2.18 The University has specialist units for maintaining its records in both paper and electronic form, which apply its regulations on document management and archiving. [5.10] The Office of Protocol and Archive retains all University paper records and correspondence. The Department of Information and Technology is responsible for the collation of all statistics required by law. Individual student data is maintained by faculty secretaries. [SER p.22] ESSE3 provides an electronic database of the student record. [AE3; review of the database] [**Chapter III Standard V.2**]

Findings

Good practice

The review team did not identify any features of good practice.

Weaknesses

The review team identified the following weakness:

- the failure to meet the standards relating to space and the variable condition of accommodation and facilities (paragraph 2.17; **Chapter III Standard V.1**).

Recommendation

The review team identified the following recommendation:

- that the University takes steps to ensure that the required standards with regard to physical space are met (paragraph 2.17; **Chapter III Standard V.1**).

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not affirm any actions already in progress.

Judgement

The Standards for Resourcing are partly met.

Evaluation Area 3: The Curriculum

3.1 In its Mission Statement, [1.2] USh acknowledges its strengths in the fields of teaching and education. Third-cycle programmes (PhDs) are confined to Albanian Studies, in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Student admission criteria are defined and published; [3.7; 3.8] and students' skills are tested using the appropriate regulations. [3.6] [M14] The University provides opportunities for the public to be informed about study programmes that are offered by organising orientation sessions at the beginning of each semester, information on the website [SER p.23] and by organising 'Open Days'. [3.3; M5a; M14] The institution provides student manuals for the first, second and third cycle of studies. [FE41] [Chapter I Standard I.1]

3.2 The Centre of Excellence, since its foundation in March 2015, has offered regular provision in the form of life-long learning. [3.10; 3.11; FE18] There is also some provision in the Department of Education, Department of Nursing and Faculty of Economics in the form of training modules. [3.12] The University was offering part-time study programmes up to the academic year 2013-14, but as the changes to the law in 2014 prohibited part-time programmes, admission to such programmes was closed. [SER p.25] The IQAU conducts questionnaires to get feedback on various aspects of the implementation of study programmes. [3.13] [Chapter I Standard I.2]

3.3 The portfolio of programmes offered by the University aligns closely with the Development Strategy 2017-21. [1.18] The University includes further improvement of its offering as a strategic objective establishing, developing, protecting and transmitting knowledge through teaching based on the Bologna Declaration and scientific research, training of specialists, and preparation of young scientists. [1.2] As stated in the Development Strategy 2017-21, USh has identified the labour market as one of its priorities, aiming to adapt curricula to the needs of the labour market; to cooperate closely with employers; and to orient students to the demands of the labour market. [1.18; M4] Additionally, in February 2017, the University established both a teaching strategy and a labour market research strategy in order to adapt teaching activities to contemporary trends and to integrate curricula with the labour market's needs. [3.10; 3.11] [Chapter I Standard I.3]

3.4 USh's study programmes are offered in line with local and national trends. The University tries to ensure alignment also with international trends. The University's Development Strategy 2017-21 and International Strategy clearly define the University's target of continuing to engage with internationalisation. [1.18] The International Strategy includes courses offered in the English language and agreements signed for the development of international curricula. [FE5] New curricula proposals are based on local economy and labour market needs. [FE17] For example, the Faculty of Economy has opened three professional master's based on the trends and needs of the labour market. [FE17] The University is in the process of agreeing a joint master's programme in Law with an Italian institution. [FE21] Such evidence confirms that USh meets the criterion that the study programmes should be in line with the local, national and international trends. [Chapter I Standard I.4]

3.5 The teaching load of lecturers is assigned in accordance with criteria set in force through by-laws. [3.16] Any additional teaching load of lecturers is financed by the institution's own resources. [3.15] Study programmes are organised in such a way as to provide for academic staff harmonisation of teaching load, scientific research and administrative research. [FE22; FE30] [Chapter I Standard I.5]

3.6 In the SER, USh states that students are informed about their study programmes. Students who met the review team confirmed this. **[M5a]** Detailed information about the curriculum, research and standards are provided in cases of student transfers. **[SER p.26; 3.2]** Study programmes have clearly defined objectives regarding the inclusion of knowledge and skill that the students can acquire from the relevant study programmes. **[SER p.26]** Student admission criteria are determined by USh respecting the relevant legal basis and they are published on its website. **[SER p.26; M5a; 5b] [Chapter I Standard I.6]**

3.7 First-cycle study programmes provide students with basic knowledge, general scientific methods and principles. **[SER p.26]** Example programme guides **[3.4.1.8; 3.4.1.9]** show introductory classes generally concerned with acquiring background theory and basic skills in year one, leading up to more applied topics in year three. Study programmes are designed in such a way that students can easily transfer their studies in the counterpart programmes. **[3.6] [Chapter I Standard I.7]**

3.8 Scrutiny of programme guides confirms the University's assertion that first-cycle programmes are constructed to develop basic proficiency in key subjects, thereby building on knowledge gained in high school. **[3.4.1.8; 3.4.1.9]** Students get full information when they are enrolled. **[M12]** The University provides students with detailed manuals for their respective study programmes. **[2.7]** USh adopts criteria such as titles and degrees while recruiting new academic staff. **[M10]** USh does not consistently fulfil the expectation that at least 70 per cent of the teaching workload in the first cycle has to be comprised by the full-time academic staff. **[SER p.27, p.52]** The University is aware of this and is taking action to ensure that all first-cycle programmes meet the required percentage. The University's actions include recruitment of alumni as well as wider recruitment of both young and experienced staff. **[M1]** The review team **affirms** the action taking place to ensure that the proportion of full-time staff meets the required 70 per cent of the teaching workload in the first cycle of studies. **[Chapter I Standard I.8]**

3.9 Second-cycle study programmes, 'Master of Sciences' at USh, are designed to support University research policies and strategies in line with the institution. **[1.2; 1.18]** Academic staff are engaged in research by actively participating in national and international conferences and projects, by publishing scientific articles, **[1.27]** and by organising international conferences. **[3.17]** Additionally, based on applications for vacancies, priority for the recruitment of new staff is given to the most competent. **[M1]** At the same time, academic staff support the design and implementation of study programmes. **[SER p.27]** Professional practice is facilitated within the University through agreements with local public institutions as well as through cooperation with the private sector. **[1.26; 5.16]** The University ensures cooperation for thesis supervision with private sector/state companies. **[FE23]** The Career Counselling Office is responsible for relations with alumni. There is an online application form for alumni data collection. **[FE34]** The University does not consistently fulfil the condition that at least 70 per cent of the teaching workload in the second cycle has to be comprised by the full-time academic staff. As noted above regarding first-cycle programmes, the University is aware of staffing levels and is taking action to ensure that all programmes meet the required percentage. The review team **affirms** the action taking place with respect to second-cycle studies. **[SER p.28, p.52] [Chapter I Standard I.9]**

3.10 All three cycles of studies offered in USh are in accordance with the Bologna Process. The diploma supplement contains all the detailed information in English and Albanian. **[3.18]** Students are informed about the possibilities of studying abroad. **[3.19]** However, the information provided is limited (during 2014-17 in total only five announcements were made). Students have the opportunity to develop two foreign languages during the first cycle of study and for the rest of the study programmes they are obliged to document the knowledge of one foreign language (as a requirement of admission criteria). **[3.8]** Additionally, there are some courses delivered in English, for example, 11 courses in Faculty

of Economics, nine courses in the Faculty of Education Sciences, one course in the Faculty of Social Sciences and all the modules of the Faculty of Foreign Languages. [3.21] The University is part of TEMPUS programmes, Erasmus+ and has 39 collaboration agreements with foreign universities which provide for mobility. [1.22; 1.23, 1.25; M4] Around 180 Academic staff and students have participated in mobility from year 2015 and on. [FE15] Taken together, these measures facilitate the mobility of Albanian students in Europe and beyond. [Chapter I Standard I.10]

3.11 USHU organises field trips and [3.22] departments encourage student participation in extracurricular activities, [3.23] including social, cultural and sports activities. [3.25] Students of different faculties confirmed that students are consulted on curricula and can themselves propose changes for discussion in order to fit courses better to market needs. [M3] In addition, SHU has established guidelines for students' dissertation preparation. [3.24; 3.24.1] [Chapter I Standard I.11]

3.12 Study programmes offer special modules of a professional nature with knowledge related to socioeconomic areas and professional practices. [SER p.30-31; 3.4; 3.4.1.1-3.4.1.12] There are two laboratories which support the processes related to teaching through technological and linguistic practice. [SER p.31; 2.15] Additionally, bilateral agreements with local institutions facilitate the completion of the students' internships. [1.26] Good cooperation with external partners and with alumni strongly supports these internships. [M7a; M7b] [Chapter I Standard I.12]

Findings

Good practice

The review team did not identify any features of good practice.

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 affirmed the following action already in progress:

- the action taking place to ensure that the proportion of full-time staff meets the required 70 per cent of the teaching workload in both first and second-cycle studies (paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9 *Chapter I Standard I.8; Chapter I Standard I.9*).

Judgement

The standards for the Curriculum are substantially met.

Evaluation Area 4: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research

4.1 The University organises study programmes taking into account discipline needs, for example the inclusion of professional training (internships) and field trips, where necessary.[SER]The University provided examples showing the organisation of study programmes, including the deployment of staff, which demonstrated careful planning that embodies a balance of subjects across semesters and academic years. [4.3] Approval of study plans and individual staff workloads [3.16] initially occur at departmental level, then at faculty dean level, then at Senate.[3.9] Students are generally content with teaching methods, curriculum organisation and the quality of teaching staff,[Student survey] and the provision of supporting literature.[M5] The University provided exemplars of student handbooks for first, second and third-cycle students.[AE41]These provide a useful starting point and contextualisation for students to understand the nature of their programmes.[M6] [Chapter I Standard II.1]

4.2 Examination rules and requirements are available on the University's public website,[SER] and students reported that they were generally content with assessment systems, rules, requirements and processes. [Student survey; M5; M6]Nevertheless, over half the students surveyed for this review reported that students sometimes copy in exams. Understanding of the processes for dealing with suspected cheating was found to be variable. Senior staff whom the team met stated that cheating was rare. [M4]Furthermore, where cases did occur, local University procedures based on custom and practice were followed.[M4; M11]Some staff stated that there was no University guidance or policy to follow in respect of such cases. [M10]However, other staff [M11;M12] were aware that the Code of Ethics [1.9] recognises cheating in exams as a violation and specifies penalties that the Council of Ethics can apply for any violation, linked to clear statements in the regulation for all three cycles of study. [3.6.1; 3.6.2; 3.6.3]

4.3 The SER stated that graduation criteria and procedures are placed on faculty notice boards and that the criteria conform to University requirements and may be amended as appropriate.Although the University provided no evidence to support these claims, students confirmed that they knew the relevant graduation criteria and procedures, and additionally that they received official diplomas and diploma supplements. [M5; M6]

4.4 Anonymity during examination marking is preserved [AE25] and appeals, often referred to as complaints, against examination results are handled by a committee established for that purpose, and an example was supplied.[4.5]Students were aware of the process. [M6] [Chapter I Standard II.2]

4.5 In evaluating and improving programmes, the IQAU(part of the Department of Curriculum, Research and Standards) administers surveys to staff and students. Students complete questionnaires twice per year,[SER; M12] but thus far only a sample of students has been used in order to keep costs down. [M4] However, with a move to online questionnaires, the University plans to involve all its students. [M4; M5]The questionnaires concern students' opinions on their programmes and on the staff who teach them. [M5]The team heard that the Office also gathers data by conducting focus groups with students and deploying students on programme evaluation teams.[M2] However, the team was unable to verify these activities as the students met by the team were unaware of such groups. [M5; M6] Departments analyse the data [FE19; FE28] to create annual reports [M3] that feed into faculty reports [4.7; 4.8] of activity in teaching and research, some of which are produced by calendar year and some by academic year.The reports pass through the Department of Curriculum, Research and Standards before being compiled into a single University-wide

report by the Rectorate and approved by Senate. [M3] Both the University and students provided examples of where changes to the curriculum had occurred following both student and staff suggestions. [M2; M6]

4.6 The University makes efforts to monitor graduate employment in the year following graduation, but this process is in its infancy. [4.9; AE24] Further comment on this can be found in paragraphs 1.17 and 5.13 of this report. [Chapter I Standard II.3]

4.7 Following an analysis of questionnaire feedback from students, the Office of Internal Quality Assurance requires departments to produce a report on the effectiveness of their teachers. [AE29] This retrospective approach is the primary means used to improve teaching quality. [M12] The University acknowledged that a priority is to improve the quality of teaching [M2] and to support this there is a new (March 2017) Teaching Strategy, [4.11] with good objectives for improvement to address specified weaknesses, but no targets or performance indicators to signal when desired progress has been achieved. Many items relating to improving teaching quality are also addressed as part of the Key Performance Indicators from Sectoral Strategies, [AE14] but these indicators are new (April 2017) and so are presently aspirational, and again suffer from a general lack of targets that indicate when they will be met.

4.8 The team heard that teaching quality is assured through spot checks on staff by Heads of Department, who maintain a file on each member of staff. [M2] However, senior academics charged with evaluating teaching rely largely on their own experience as academics to measure performance. This contributes to the weakness identified below in paragraph 4.10.

4.9 The SER stated that the teaching performance of new lecturers is examined, but the evidence cited did not support this. On asking staff, the team learned that there is unspecified, general support for new lecturers, including some informal mentoring, [M3] but no targeted support. The limitations of support for new staff also contributes to the weakness identified below in paragraph 4.10. [M2]

4.10 The SER noted, and the team heard [M2; M4; M11] that staff are trained in teaching through the Centre of Excellence. Though the Centre has laudable aims and plans to develop staff, [SER] and organised a conference in 2015 on 'Contemporary Methods of Teaching', the team could find no evidence of an ongoing role for the Centre in teaching improvement. The team also heard that training is not systematised either for new or established teaching staff or occurs opportunistically; and there is no specific encouragement for experimentation in teaching. [M3; M4; M11; M12; M13] The absence of a University-wide effective approach to promoting continuous improvement in teaching quality for both new and established staff is a **weakness**. It is **recommended** that the University implement an effective system and accompanying procedure to develop all teaching staff in teaching, learning and assessment, taking into account current best practice. [Chapter I Standard II.4]

4.11 While the departments are the basic teaching and research units, and research is prioritised and coordinated at this level, institutes of research and development also manage and promote research. [SER; M13] Staff have freedom to pursue their own research interests, conditional on following the overall direction of the department. [M13] Though funding for research is limited, [M4] the team saw evidence that small sums are allocated [4.18; M13] to departments. The team heard from some staff that individuals make proposals to departments and if successful must report back on research progress. [M4] However, members of the Administration Board and teaching staff stated that there was no funding to departments and institutes. [M10] The team was unable to form a clear view of funding arrangements.

4.12 There are presently two research institutes, capitalising on the University's history and location: Albanology and Water Research. [M3] These institutes facilitate internal collaboration by bringing together staff from different departments. There is financial support for the research institutes both in cash terms [4.18] and in terms of the provision of buildings, offices and information technology infrastructure. [M13] The Office for Scientific Research overviews research activity, including monitoring the progress of University-funded projects. [M1; SER] In an attempt to codify that overview the University has recently (February 2017) approved a Research and Innovation Strategy, [4.21] which has international elements and aspirations, as well as an action plan to address identified weaknesses in research generally. The team heard that there were plans for research expansion. Commensurate with its heritage in training teachers, the University has aspirations for establishing research activity in Albanian Education [M1; M13] including a doctoral study programme. [M1] [**Chapter II Standard I.2**]

4.13 The University pursues a policy of research internationalisation through agreements with overseas bodies [1.22; 3.17; 4.19; M3] and these have resulted in tangible benefits, including exchanges of staff and students, joint production of teaching materials and programmes, provision of hardware, and conference organisation. [AE31; M13] The University organises several research and research-related conferences each year, not all of which are held in Shkodra [3.17] and encourages its staff to make collaborative research bids to external organisations, such as the European Commission. [M4; 13] An impressive number of staff [AE15; SER p.40 #4] have benefited from overseas collaboration through, for example, Tempus and Erasmus+ programmes. [M3; M4] Scientific debate is clearly promoted.

4.14 The team heard that increasing research conference attendance was a priority for the University, [M2] and though staff participation in international conferences [1.27; AE19] is not insignificant, funding occurs in only a minority of cases. [M13] In future there will be a specific budget line for conference attendance and staff will be invited to apply against set criteria. [M10; M12; M13] There is also a recognition among senior staff that research infrastructure could be improved and there will be a separate budget line for this, against which departments can make bids. As noted above, staff are able to set their own research priorities within broad parameters set by their department. [M10] [**Chapter II Standards I.3 and I.4**]

4.15 Staff are generally well qualified in research [4.15] and there is emphasis, through criteria set by Senate, [M10] on recruiting research-active staff, [SER] especially those who train abroad, [M1; M3] and on supporting staff to complete doctoral studies abroad. [M3; M6] [**Chapter II Standard I.5**]

4.16 Second and third-cycle students are encouraged to participate in research through their programmes of study and to attend conferences in Albania and beyond. [SER; M6] There is some international mobility of students, [M6] but this is at a low level. [SER]

4.17 In relation to the University providing continuity in the scientific research field, the SER was weak, and strong evidence was not offered. The University reported alignment but in most cases the evidence was either not given or that given did not support the claim made, for example in prioritising new doctorates, and in information on staff travelling abroad for training. The team asked for information concerning these two aspects, but were informed that the University does not hold such data. Many staff are active in editorial board membership [AE19] and much of the University's modest published output is in its own in-house journal. [4.25] Staff the team met [M12] did not have a strong understanding of international publishing and the University may wish to identify means of supporting publications in international scientific journals thus enhancing the University's exposure. [**Chapter II Standard I.7**]

4.18 The research institutes are evaluated through annual reports they submit to Senate. [M3] At departmental level data is collected annually on research activities [SER; M13] through individual meetings with staff [M1] and are compiled into retrospective reports and plans for the coming year. [AE30; M1] The reports are collated at University level and a single overview report [1.27; M3] is approved by Senate. [M1] The overview report presents an analysis of activities, but notes that the method followed does not allow an appreciation of how faculties and departments are performing, in particular in respect of goals and progress towards them. [1.27, p2]

Findings

Good practice

The review team did not identify any features of good practice.

Weaknesses

The review team identified the following weakness:

- the absence of a University-wide effective approach to promoting continuous improvement in teaching quality for both new and established staff (paragraph 4.10; *Chapter I Standard II.4*).

Recommendations

The review team identified the following recommendation:

- that the University implement an effective system and accompanying procedure to develop all teaching staff, in teaching, learning and assessment, taking into account current best practice (paragraph 4.10; *Chapter I Standard II.4*).

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not affirm any actions already in progress.

Judgement

The standards for teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research are substantially met.

Evaluation Area 5: Students and their Support

5.1 The University has approved the Strategic Development Plan and the admission policy reflects the specific objectives of this plan. [1.18] Admission to the University is carried out based on Law No. 80/2015, 'On Higher Education and Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania' and on the criteria laid down in Statute and study regulations for each study cycle. The institution has admission procedures in place for first, second and third cycle. [SER p.43; 1.2 article 27 p.31; 1.3; 3.6] Primary responsibility for the implementation of admission policy rests with departments and faculties as well as the new Career Counselling Office. [<http://www.unishk.edu.al/sq/content/kuotat-e-pranimit-cikli-i-par%C3%AB-i-dyt%C3%AB-dhe-i-tret%C3%AB-i-studimeve-viti-akademik-2017-2018>; <http://www.unishk.edu.al/sq/content/senati-vendimi-nr-16-dat%C3%AB-18012017-p%C3%ABr-miratimin-e-kritereve-t%C3%AB-pranimit-t%C3%AB-kandidat%C3%ABv%C3%AB>]; <http://www.unishk.edu.al/sq/search/node/pranimet>'<http://www.unishk.edu.al/sq/content/vendimi-nr-329-dat%C3%AB-25072016-p%C3%ABr-miratimin-e-formula-ve-t%C3%AB-p%C3%ABr-zgjedhjes-t%C3%AB-kandidat%C3%ABve-q%C3%AB>; 1.21] [*Chapter I Standard III.1*]

5.2 The University keeps contacts with the institutions of secondary education through the collaboration with the Regional Directorate of Education and organises open days every year for high school students. [SER p.43; M12; M14; 1.26; 3.3] Departments and the Careers Counselling Office are responsible for information about admissions to potential and prospective students. Departments appoint tutors for every study programme who are responsible for providing information about the study programme and the academic schedule. For first-year students of the bachelor studies, meetings are organised in each faculty, so that they can become acquainted with the study programme and the University environment. Information is also provided through the University website and social media. There is a new office in the Faculty of Law where high school students can receive information. In order to meet the students' needs, there are published office hours for students. In all premises of the University timetables are displayed for students about obtaining information, certificates and other required services. [SER p.43; M5; M12; 1.21; 1.1 article 37] [*Chapter I Standard III.1*]

5.3 USH pursues policies to welcome foreign students. Admission of foreign students follows government requirements. Foreign students are mainly from the Balkan region and their study language is Albanian. Foreign students study and conduct research work at USH also in the framework of CEEPUS (Central European Exchange Program for University Studies) and ERASMUS programmes. [5.1; 5.2; <http://www.unishk.edu.al/sq/content/kuotat-e-pranimit-cikli-i-par%C3%AB-i-dyt%C3%AB-dhe-i-tret%C3%AB-i-studimeve-viti-akademik-2017-2018>] [*Chapter I Standard III.1*]

5.4 The number of students is proposed by the departments and approved by the Academic Senate. Meanwhile, the University is conducting a combined study, involving alumni, to see which study programmes have been most employable and most liked by the students. This study will be completed at the end of this year and will guide the University in financing and recruiting new staff. The number of new enrolled students has fluctuated in the last three academic years. [GID] The overall institutional academic staff/student ratio appears to be 1:65 for the academic year 2015-16. However, the evidence shows different ratios in different departments. [FE38] The methodology of calculation is not unified at the University level. There are departments that have a high staff/student ratio, others are low. As discussed above in paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9, the institution is aware of issues relating to staffing levels and is taking action to address the matter. [*Chapter I Standard III.1*]

5.5 The University has some administrative units which guarantee students' rights to be kept informed. Students are informed by the Dean's office, the secretary of studies and other support units. They have published office hours, provide information and support for the teaching process. [SER p.44; M14] Communication takes place through the University website, posters in buildings and via email. Academic staff have a University email address. Within the departmental office there is a file for each student which includes their contact details. [5.4] The University holds personal files for each student. The students' secretary is responsible for creating and administering the students' files. The University holds addresses (including email address) and phone number for each student. [SER p.44; 1.1 Article 38, paragraph 3; 5.6; <http://www.unishk.edu.al/sq/content/student%C3%AB>] There is a student management system-ESSE3. There is a student profile on this system which is a good source of information for teaching and assessment timetables, and credits. Students like the fact that they can see their grades on ESSE3. There is a list of staff there with their email addresses so they can communicate with their professors. However, as discussed in paragraph 2.11, ESSE3 is a limited student record resource which contains grades and timetables but not programme information. [M5; AE3; M14] [Chapter I Standard III.1; Chapter I Standard III.2]

5.6 Besides the departments and faculties that guide and advise students about all cycles of study, the University has set up a Career Counselling Office for guiding and advising students. This office opened in December 2016 and started to work in February 2017. [1.21] The University uses a number of communication tools to guarantee that students are well informed as well as guided by experienced academic and non-academic staff. On the first day, students attend a meeting with academic staff where they are introduced to sources of information on the curriculum. There are also notice boards in the faculties where information is posted. [M12] Essential information about their study programmes, regulations and student life are included in a guidebook for new students, and a diploma preparation handbook and guidebooks on the faculty is provided on the University website. [SER p.45; 3.6; 3.24] Academic staff would like to upload teaching materials to ESSE3 but at the moment only the programme outline goes up. [M12] The Curricula office and Secretariat provide support and guidance to students wishing to change their study programme. There are procedures in place that allow students to change study programmes and facilitate the process. Changes of study programmes within the University are done based on by-laws approved by MoES. [1.1 article 38, paragraph 3] [Chapter I Standard III.3]

5.7 The University pays special attention to students with special needs, as well as Roma and Egyptian students in the first-cycle study programmes, by supporting them in accordance with the national legal framework. The University provides financial support (full or partial tuition fee waivers) to special groups of students as set out in the Council of Ministers Decision No. 903, date 21.12.2016. [5.7; M5; M10; M14; FE35] The new building will have physical access via ramps. [M10] According to the students, building access is not a problem but noted that for a blind student appropriate infrastructure does not currently exist. [M5] The University asked for special quotas for Roma, Egyptians and students with special needs. The Council of Ministers has approved those requests every year. [<http://www.unishk.edu.al/sq/content/kuotat-e-pranimet-cikli-i-par%C3%AB-i-dyt%C3%AB-dhe-i-tret%C3%AB-i-studimeve-viti-akademik-2016-2017>] Students are encouraged to engage in sport and are supported by the University based on regulations. [SER p.45; 5.8] The University also provided scholarships for students with exceptional academic ability. Students have been supported to study part-time but this route has now closed. [M5; 5.9] [Chapter I Standard III.4]

5.8 Each department of the University has study programmes (first and second cycles) and the curriculum for each offered subject. Each subject syllabus includes required, additional and recommended literature. The University provides best textbooks in Albanian

and English for every module. **[3.2]** The library has received positive responses in the student and staff surveys. It appears that the library is well resourced. **[Students' survey; M9; M14]** Some departments have their own libraries too. **[2.17]** The library has 400,000 books and 85 per cent of the fund is in electronic catalogue and can be accessed online. The University is undertaking digitising of old materials to preserve cultural heritage. The library has a special collection of Albanian books and possesses 28 books of unique value. The wide range of books and journals accessible to students available in Albanian and other languages effectively support student learning and research work. **[SER p.46; M14]**
[Chapter I Standard III.5]

5.9 The University enriches the library periodically. Budget planning includes library resourcing. New literature is purchased annually based on proposals from individual departments. Lecturers donate copies of the books they have published to the library. **[5.11; M14]** The working time of the library is posted on University premises and on the library's website. The library is open until 7pm weekdays for reading and until 1pm on Saturdays. There is published online information for students. **[5.12; 2.17; <http://bush.unishk.edu.al>]** The University has a central library, but the faculties have their own local libraries in addition to the central one. The study space in the main library is for 300 students. There are three computers for students to work on, and a photocopier. On the second floor they can work collaboratively. Internet is provided in the library. **[M14]** Documents of the University are administrated by Archive office, but each unit has its own archive to store documents. **[5.10]**
[Chapter I Standard III.5]

5.10 Departments offer a tutorial service for students. Staff have office hours, and even though they share offices they arrange times to see students individually. **[M12]** The office hours of each lecturer are defined at the beginning of the academic year and are included in the annual workload. **[3.16]** Each lecturer has two hours office availability per week. Academic staff also provide scheduled consultations to help students who have difficulties with the learning process. **[5.5]** Every student has the right to have a supervisor to prepare their diploma thesis. The department approves the list of students and the name of the supervisor. Students are assisted and guided to find literature by the lecturers for every module. **[3.2]** The University also gives some additional support to students with disabilities, such as those with visual impairment. For example, the University has approved a different form of assessment (oral exam) for those students. **[M10]** There is also a timetable for assisting students who have problems with particular rules and regulations or with timetables. Students can refer appeals or complaints to the Dean of the Faculty. **[M14]**
[Chapter I Standard III.6]

5.11 Students are represented in the Academic Senate, the Faculty Council and the Administrative Council. **[1.2 article 47, paragraph 2/b; 1.14]** The students' representatives participate in all meetings and express their opinion and proposals about curricula, study programmes and regulations. **[SER p.48; M5]** A student from each cycle of study is also part of the internal assessment unit in each faculty. Students are members of the internal assessment groups for the programmes of the three cycles of study. Students' views and evaluations are taken account of in order to improve study programmes. **[SER p.47, M3; M3; 1.14]** Students can govern themselves through an elected Students' Council, whose mandate is year-long. Students' Council is an independent organisation that promotes student participation in decision-making with the right to express their concerns and suggestions about University life. **[1.2 article 49]** However, the Council is in suspension awaiting new elections. **[M2; FE36]** The review team **affirms** actions being taken to elect a new Student Council which will institutionalise and improve the participation of students in institutional life. **[Chapter I Standard III.7]**

5.12 The University offers a wide range of extracurricular activities for students. **[3.23; 3.25; 2.12; M5]** The University has a Department of Physical Education and Sports that

supports students to organise sports activities. [SER p.49; 5.15] The University also supports students who are members of national sports teams by offering them an individual teaching plan based on MoES regulation. [5.8] The Department of Nursing organises open hours for awareness activities on health protection and facilitates blood donation campaigns.

Meanwhile there is a small centre for students in the Department of Psychology that offers counselling sessions for students who might have psychological issues. [M12; M5; SER p.48; 5.16] [Chapter I Standard III.8]

5.13 The Career Counselling Office organises workshops and jobs fairs to provide expert services for preparing graduates for the labour market. [M6] The Academic Senate recently approved (February 2017) an employment strategy and action plan, which aims to increase the employment of students graduated in USh in the local and the regional labour market, [4.10] and is proactively pursuing collaboration with the Regional Directorate of Education, local businesses, alumni students and other stakeholders in order to support its graduates to enter into the labour market. [SER p.48; 5.20] The University has implemented a positive employment policy to employ its own graduate students at USh. The University has recruited, in total, 324 graduate students as full-time (155) and part-time academic staff (169). Internships developed in local institutions and support letters provided by professors have helped many students find their job. There have been previous initiatives to gather data about employment of graduates in only one faculty (Faculty of Economy since 2013), but there was no data available from five other faculties. [4.9; FE34] Six months ago USh started gathering information on graduates at the institutional level through the Career Counselling Office. [M14; 5.18; 5.21] The review team affirms that the Career Counselling Office has established a University alumni database and is working to populate it systematically. [M7a; 5.21] [Chapter I Standard III.9]

Findings

Good practice

The review team did not identify any features of good practice.

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 affirmed the following actions already in progress:

- actions being taken to elect a new Student Council which will institutionalize and improve the participation of students in institutional life (paragraph 5.11; **Chapter I Standard III.7**)
- the establishment of a University alumni database by the Career Counselling office and working to populate it systematically (paragraph 5.13; **Chapter I Standard III.9**).

Judgement

The standards for Students and their Support are substantially met.

FIRST BATCH OF EVIDENCE PROVIDED WITH SER: REFERRED TO AS EVIDENCE.

- 1.1- Internal regulation of administration
- 1.2- Statute of SHU
- 1.3- Decree on Statute changes
- 1.4- Decree on the Internal Regulation of Administration
- 1.5- Decree on Budget 2016
- 1.6- Council of Administration Regulation
- 1.7- Decree of Council of Administration
- 1.8- Decree of Ethic Council
- 1.9- Ethic Code of SHU
- 1.10- Professor Council Regulation
- 1.11- Decree of Professor Council
- 1.12- Decrees of Faculty Council
- 1.13- Senate Decrees
- 1.14- KIZ Decrees
- 1.15- Organizational structure 2015
- 1.16- Ad-hoc Commission decree
- 1.17- Projects list
- 1.18- Strategy 2017-2021
- 1.19- Annual Report 2016
- 1.20- Senate Decree (Full-time academic staff CA)
- 1.21 - Decision for office of career and counselling
- 1.22 - List of collaboration and cooperation SHU-UN
- 1.23 - Example Tempus Project
- 1.24 - Example Labour Market Study
- 1.25 - Erasmus Project
- 1.26 - Examples of collaborations with institutions SHU
- 1.27 - Reports of scientific research and teaching work 2016
- 2.1 - Organizational chart
- 2.2 - Maintaining the job position 2009
- 2.3 - The report of the Senate 09.11.2016
- 2.4.1- Grille evaluation FSHE
- 2.4.2- Agreement with internal
- 2.4.3- Agreement with foreign
- 2.4.4- Agreement with outsiders
- 2.4.5- Employment Requirements
- 2.4.6- Economics criteria.jpg
- 2.5 - Titles and degrees
- 2.6 - Personalities, Francesco Altimari, Matteo Mandala
- 2.7 - Open days FSS (2), Students manual-Faculty of Economics
- 2.8 - Evidence 7 March Procurement
- 2.9.1 - Giulio Masotti
- 2.9.2 - Recognition of Economics
- 2.9.3 - Roberta Majerhofer
- 2.9.4 - Ted Oelfke
- 2.9.5 - Augusta Brettoni
- 2.10 - Florian Mandija, ICRAE, Letter of invitation B.Bushgokaj
- 2.11 - List of foreign professors in FFL, Economics, during the last 5 years
- 2.12.1 - Frequentation of library
- 2.12.2 - Championship debate reactivation project in 2016
- 2.12.3 - Championship debate certificate 2015
- 2.13 - The internal audit policies, annual monitoring report

- 2.14 - Expression of interest, infrastructure Tik
- 2.15 - Infrastructure of SHU, Infrastructure (tables of surfaces)
- 2.16 - On approval of quotas for the draft budget 2017-2019
- 2.17 - Library of Manual
- 2.18 - Emeritus and Honorary Title
- 2.19 - Institute of Waters Studies, Microbiological Laboratory
- 43.1 - List of study programs
- 3.2 - Patterns of study programs
- 3.3 - Information on the organization's "Open Days"
- 3.4 - Procedures for drafting and adoption of study programs
- 3.5 - Information regarding the opening of new study programs
- 3.6 - Study regulations and decision No.407, dt.06.10.2016
- 3.7 - Decision No.16, dated 01.18.2017
- 3.8 - Decision No.409, dated 10.06.2016
- 3.9 - Procedures for supporting and improving the quality of study programs
- 3.10 - Senate Decision No. 103, dated 18.03.2015
- 3.11 - The workshop "Modern methods of teaching"
- 3.12 - Certificate of accreditation
- 3.13 - Examples of periodical evaluation reports of study programs
- 3.14 - The agreement with the University of Naples
- 3.15 - Relation of the Senate Meeting, dt.09.11.2016
- 3.16 - Model agreement
- 3.17 - Scientific research activities carried out by SHU
- 3.18 - Supplement models
- 3.19 - Information on study opportunities abroad
- 3.20 - The criteria and procedures for students transfer
- 3.21 - List of courses offered in English
- 3.22 - Organization of Expeditions (field trips)
- 3.23 - Student Activities
- 3.24 - Guide for the preparation of a diploma thesis
- 3.25 - Participation of students in cultural activities
- 4.1 Memorandum of Agreement with Sandhills College (internship possibilities)
- 4.2 - Certificate on practice experience and training
- 4.3 - Report of annual professional practice - internship
- 4.4 - The lecturer report on field expeditions of the students
- 4.5 - The procedure on appeal of grades by the student
- 4.6 - Examples of assessment commissions of students
- 4.7 - Sample of a department analysis on academic and scientific activity
- 4.8 - Evaluation models on the lecturers performance
- 4.9 - Sample statistics on placement rate of graduates
- 4.10 - Labor market research strategy
- 4.11 - Teaching strategy
- 4.12 - Sample contract signed by the academic staff in case of mobility
- 4.13 - Letter of intent CEEPUS and EUREQA
- 4.14 - Regulation of the Center of Excellence
- 4.15 - Statistics on academic staff qualification
- 4.16 - Decrees on the establishing of Institute of Albanology and Institute of Water Studies
- 4.17 - Report on the Institutes research activity
- 4.18 - Evidence on the financing of scientific research and Institutes activity
- 4.19 - Examples of Memorandum of Understanding with International Universities
- 4.20 - Regulation of the research Institutes
- 4.21 - Research and Innovation strategy
- 4.22 - Sample agreements with national research institutions

- 4.23 - Evidence on international lecturing of academic staff
- 4.24 - Examples of open lectures from scientific personalities
- 4.25 - Examples of book publications from academic staff
- 4.26 - Example of editorial board participation
- 4.27 - Newspaper publication on research activity
- 4.28 - Example of agreement with economic institutions
- 5.1 - Summary list of students from Albanian land bank
- 5.2 - Summary list of foreign students
- 5.3 - Foreign students that have study SHU
- 5.4 - Strategy of Communication and Public Information
- 5.5 - Defining the time of lectures meeting
- 5.6 - Form of teaching secretariat
- 5.7 - Financial support for the students in need
- 5.8 - Individual plan for the elite athletes
- 5.9 - Summary list of students in Part time study system
- 5.10 - Instruction on the correspondence and archiving process in SHU
- 5.11 - Investment needed for the Library of SHU
- 5.12 - Regulation of the Library of USH
- 5.13 - "Nisma" newspaper
- 5.14 - Request for allowing the distribution of the students newspaper
- 5.15 - Diploma and Certificates awarded in sportive activities
- 5.16 - Agreement with Red Cross
- 5.17 - Invitation of Alumni meeting
- 5.18 - Report on Alumni meeting
- 5.19 - Project report for U3M - AL
- 5.20 - Invitation of activities of Economics Faculty
- 5.21 - Statistics for former students Alumni which works as professors at SHU

Second batch of evidence referred to as Further Evidence:

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Council of Faculty |
| 2 | Purpose and plans of Career Office |
| 3 | Minutes of Senate and Council of Administration |
| 4 | Evidence showing how University encourages debate |
| 5 | Internationalisation strategy |
| 6 | Note about induction programme for new staff |
| 7 | Current budget |
| 8 | University statement on budget |
| 9 | Examples of departmental budget bids |
| 10 | Internal/external audit report |
| 11 | Health insurance provided to staff |
| 12 | Note about quality assurance |
| 13 | Note about an hoc commission |
| 14 | Summary of key performance indicators |
| 15 | Mobility of staff and students |
| 16 | Integration of foreign staff |
| 17 | USH examination of labour market |
| 18 | Centre of excellence |
| 19 | Examples of surveys conducted by IQUA |
| 20 | Development strategy |
| 21 | Information about joint programmes |
| 22 | Teaching loads |
| 23 | Evidence regarding co-operation for thesis supervision |
| 24 | Statistics about employment |
| 25 | Anonymous marking and registration for graduate exam |

26	Note on process for appeal against exam results
27	Minutes of faculty meetings
28	Student questionnaire
29	Role of SAQ-SADCRS
30	Research work evaluation
31	Outputs of agreements
32	Evidence of staff travelling abroad
33	Information about human resources
34	Alumni database
35	Scholarships for students
36	Student Council
37	<i>See Additional Evidence 26</i>
38	Numerical ratio of academic staff to students
39	Co-operation with the municipality
40	Note about student induction programme
41	Student handbooks: first, second and third cycle

Evidence provided during visit referred to as Additional Evidence:

1	Infrastruktura e USH
2	Shpalije e vendeve vakante ne Buletinin e Prokurorimeve
3	Screenshot sistemi esse3
4	Shembull te permiresimit to prog te studimit
5	Regullore e studimeve
6	Procedura e hapjes se nje programi studimi
7	Projekt Statuti Ri USH

Note – all the Additional Evidence documents are in Albania. Although the documents listed in Evidence and Further Evidence have English titles some, or parts of some, may be in Albanian.

Meetings

- M1 – Meeting 1
- M2 – Meeting 2 Self Evaluation Team
- M3 – Meeting 3 Academic Senate
- M4 – Meeting 4
- M5 – Meeting 5 1st cycle students
- M6 – Meeting 6 2nd and 3rd cycle students
- M7 – Meeting 7 Meeting with Alumni
- M9 – Meeting 9 Univ. tour
- M10 – Meeting 10 Meeting with Administration Board and senior staff
- M11 – Meeting 11
- M12 – Meeting 12 academic staff
- M13 – Meeting 13
- M14 – Meeting 14 with support services