KOSOVO ACCREDITATION AGENCY
(KAA)

Strategic Development Plan 2019 - 2023
**Background**

KAA is an independent public agency responsible for accreditation of public and private institutions of higher education in the Republic of Kosovo established over a decade ago. KAA’s mandate is to carry out the accreditation and reaccreditation of public and private institutions of higher education and their academic and research programmes and also to supervise the accredited institutions.

Besides MEST, which with respect to HEIs in general terms is mainly responsible for policy making, for regulating the sector and ensuring it’s well-functioning, and specifically does the licensing of HEIs and the diploma verification, the KAA’s role has become increasingly important in maintaining quality assurance among institutions of higher education.

The current mission statement of KAA included in the Plan 2014-2017 states that the Agency is committed “to support the development of quality in HE Institutions through the accreditation process and in the same time assures the Kosovo society that the quality of teaching and learning is at the level of international standards.” Besides, the document also states that KAA’s aims:

- To open the sector of higher education for providers from Kosovo and abroad;
- To provide quality assurance for all institutions of higher education;
- To promote, improve and develop the quality of the higher education sector;
- To create transparency and comparability in the interest of providers, students and the labour market;
- To encourage innovative forms and content in higher education;
- To ensure the comparability of degrees from Kosovo higher education institutions with those awarded by international programmes;
- To implement the objectives for the integration of Kosovo into the European Higher Education Area and to contribute to its development.

Kosovo’s higher education system is characterised with a big number of institutions of higher education which emerged mainly after the conflict in Kosovo. Recently established public universities from the Government contributed more to the general public debate whether Kosovo needs this big number of institutions. On the other hand, Kosovo has the youngest population in Kosovo and there is a great demand for higher education. Almost all students graduating from the high school are looking for a Bachelor degree because the labour market in Kosovo requests so. In accordance with the Bologna framework and the Law No. 04/L-037 on Higher Education, higher education is typically organised in three main levels leading to qualifications at bachelor, master and doctoral levels and it includes any other post-secondary education at levels 5-8 of the NQF for which ECTS credits may be granted. The system of higher education in Kosovo comprises both private and public institutions, of academic and professional study programs. There are mainly offered Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in both public and private institutions, whereas PhD levels are currently offered only by the University of Prishtina.
As of now, there are 7 public universities (University of Prishtina, University of Prizren, University of Peja, University of Gjilan, University of Gjakove, University of Mitrovica, and University of Applied Sciences of Ferizaj. There are also two public faculties, respectively the Faculty of Islamic Studies and the Faculty of Public Safety which operates under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. On the other hand, there are 22 private institutions of higher education, which are established as private initiatives or under a non-profitable organisation. As said above, private institutions offer study programs at BA and MA level, are entirely financed from their own incomes, do not receive any public fund, and vary in terms of number of students and number of study programs. The trend of proliferation of private institutions has stopped over the past three years, as due to the failure to meet accreditation criteria 8 of them have been closed down.

Cycle two and three higher education programmes are also provided by branches of foreign universities or by local institutions under a license, franchise or service agreement with foreign universities, the programmes of which are validated by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA). According to the Law on Higher Education, Recognized accreditation body is Kosovo Accreditation Agency or any other accreditation body which, in the European Area of Higher Education, is in current membership of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) or (in the United States) is an accreditation body which has been recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). There were two accredited branches of foreign universities operating in Kosovo, however due to the unsuccessful student’s enrolment, these two foreign branches have discontinued their study programs as of July 2016. Currently, there is one validated institution of higher education operating in Kosovo. ICBM is an institution of higher education accredited by the German Quality Assurance Agency EVALAG, whose accreditation has been recognised by KAA. There are also several programs validated by KAA, whose accreditation has been recognised by foreign quality assurance agencies including QAA UK, CHEA USA and NAKVIS Slovenia.

Changes made to the management of KAA over the last three years have led to certain changes in the work and procedures of the Agency. During this period of time, KAA made sure that through its procedures to implement fully the legal framework into force, it introduced some new changes and adoptions in the legislation and documentation which aimed at increasing the efficiency of the work, it made some changes in the work methods by slightly digitalizing some of the processes which indeed facilitated the work of the agency. While the decisions of the Agency become very painful for certain institutions, specifically private ones, the only way to gain the public trust was to increase the transparency of the KAA’s decisions and work. In order to achieve its mission, KAA opened itself towards the stakeholders primarily towards the higher education institutions, but as well to other relevant institutions, donors, civil society organisation, media, etc. Because of the political context in Kosovo, as in many sectors, when there is a change in government it is expected to have changes also in public institutions. Dismissal of the previous management in 2017 did cause some troubles for the KAA and the overall quality assurance system in Kosovo, even though the daily operations of KAA were not stopped. As a consequence Kosovo was removed from the European Register and was put member under review from ENQA. All of this triggered a great debate among the civil society in Kosovo, politics and even international community which despite of the damages done by this dismissal, it called for a national consensus that Kosovo Accreditation Agency should be independent, should be supported by all mechanisms in order to be able to carry out its responsibilities fairly and impartially. Therefore the election process of the new members of the Board took some more
time than it was planned, because everything took place through a transparent and inclusive process. The newest management of KAA has been into office for almost one year ago. There have been many challenges during this time, mainly because of the delays caused to the accreditation process, however it is considered that the HEIs have become matured vis a vis KAA’s procedures and processes, and regardless of whom is currently in the mandate it’s important to make sure that the system is always functional and efficient.

The system of external quality assurance in Kosovo, and all of its procedures, regulations and processes are build based on the very specific circumstances of Kosovo, because of the specific context that Kosovo is a young country. In order to safeguard the quality criteria, KAA is always striving to implement a protective system in order to detect fraud which at some extent is present in Kosovo.

Over the last two years, the Administrative Instruction on Accreditation of Higher Education has been revised several times in order to make adoptions which were needed to follow the trends in European context, in order to meet the needs of HEIs and also to adopt to the changes happening at the Kosovo higher education institutions. Moreover, a new Accreditation Manual has been adopted as a comprehensive original document produced by KAA after a long and careful process of involvement of relevant stakeholders and the academic community. Additionally an electronic platform has been set up, E-Akreditimi, which aims at digitalizing many processes of KAA. This platform aims primarily to increase the efficiency of the work of KAA but also to increase the transparency of KAA work towards the institutions. Many data concerning academic staff, number of programs, and relevant statistics are made publicly available to the wider public and more adoptions will be done in order to advance the system. Last year, the registration of all academic staff has been made through this platform, namely the professors themselves have registered their data on the system and have uploaded their documentation. We consider that this makes them more responsible towards the quality assurance of their institutions and increases their accountability towards the public.

In the field of development of human resources, KAA currently operates within the civil servants system of the Republic of Kosovo. As such many procedures are defined at the central level, such as the guidelines and instruction on the recruitment of administrative staff. The Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) is the ministry responsible to monitor how the instructions concerning the recruitment process, job descriptions and levels of administrative staff are being implemented. Every staff employed at the Agency is provided with a clear job description. In 2017 there has been a revision of the Job Description requested from the MPA which was done by every member of the agency. The staff was requested to update and revise their job descriptions in close cooperation with the Director of Agency, which were sent for formal approval at MPA.

Staff performance evaluation: In the civil service it is applied the yearly assessment of administrative staff. Every person employed at the Agency is subject of assessment from its direct supervisor, respectively from the Director of the Agency. There is a form which should be filled out for every administrative staff concerning his performance during one year, which is signed and put in the dossier of the respective staff. If the administrative staff receives three negative assessments in three consecutive years, than he shall be subject to a verification procedure initiated by MPA. An administrative staff of the Agency cannot be
removed from the office by the Decision of the KAA’s Director, if he/she has not been subject of a verification procedure carried out by a disciplinary committee set up by MPA (in case he/she has breached certain ethical or professional regulation), or he/she has received three consecutive negative assessments from his/her direct supervisor.

Staff development: KAA staff regularly participate in continuing education activities. Training is provided internally (particularly during internal workshops) and externally (mostly provided within international projects). KAA employees in expert positions also participate in different international conferences related to QA in HE organized by ENQA, CEENQA, EUA or similar bodies. It is foreseen that every year there will be organised a number of study visits to a selection of quality assurance agencies for benchmarking purposes.

SWOT analysis: As part of the external evaluation for ENQA membership and strategic planning process KAA organised a SWOT analysis of the system and obtained the following results (that were also used for the SER 2018):

Strengths
- KAA performs its activities in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines ESG 2015
- Since the SCQ was constituted it operates independently. This is ensured by the Administrative Instruction for Recruitment of SCQ Members. As a result, SCQ is now composed of members who passed through several filters, thus guaranteeing professionalism and transparency.
- KAA performs its evaluations with foreign international experts only. This assures impartiality.
- KAA performs its activities with reference to the National Qualification Framework, which is referenced to the European Qualification Framework.
- KAA has increased the number of student experts from the European Students Union, in compliance with ENQA’s recommendation.
- The Kosovo Accreditation Agency has advanced its legal framework. As a result, the Agency operates through a revised Administrative Instruction which defines clearly accreditation criteria.
- KAA continuously invests in its staff by offering them training relevant to their work in quality assurance.
- KAA has a devoted and experienced administrative staff
- As a member of international organisations for quality assurance, KAA participates in international events, providing the opportunity to remain up-to-date with developments in higher education.
- KAA enjoys good relations with agencies that are members of ENQA and other agencies in the region.
- KAA continuously publishes its decisions, announcements and other information related to the process of accreditation, ensuring full compliance with ENQA requirement regarding transparency and accountability.
- KAA has increased the transparency and openness to the public and media by requesting that HEIs publish data on their academic activities.
- KAA has digitalised the accreditation process by means of a platform known as “e-akreditimi”. This is a huge step towards demonstrating its efficiency and transparency, as it is accessible to all stakeholders in higher education.
Higher education has further advanced through the establishment of consultative bodies, such as the Rectors’ Conference and the Students’ Union.
KAA has ensured the strengthening of student input in to decision-making.
KAA has increasingly supported HEIs by offering them training in quality assurance matters.

**Weaknesses**
- KAA has insufficient human resources. Currently KAA operates with only five administrative employees and an Acting Director.
- KAA has limited office and other space.
- On-site monitoring visits remains a challenge due to a shortage of human resources.
- KAA continues to operate without a permanent Executive Director. This has impacted upon the dynamism of the institution.
- Exclusion from EQAR as a result of political interferences.
- Kosovo still does not have a centralised system providing data on market needs, which would facilitate the orientation of study programmes towards maximising employment opportunities for its graduates. Standards and Guidelines for levels 5, 6 and 7 have been undertaken, but revision of the Standards and Guidelines for level 8 is yet to be undertaken.
- KAA is unable to confirm whether its decisions are being fully respected, mainly because of the shortages of human resources and lack of monitoring.

**Opportunities**
- KAA is flexible and responsive to change, adapting and revising policies.
- KAA is in the process of drafting the Law which will apply to the Agency, thereby ensuring its independence.
- KAA has steadily increased and absorbed international projects which have further supported its work.
- Professional and financial support from international donors, with the aim of improving the efficiency of KAA’s work.
- KAA is continuously increasing the self-awareness of HEIs about the importance of their internal quality assurance systems.
- Strict implementation of criteria concerning academic staff has discouraged proliferation of study programmes among institutions of higher education which do not meet the minimum quality criteria.
- KAA is continuously seeking to increase the role of students in higher education institutions.
- KAA is increasing its cooperation with civil society organisations and other stakeholders.
- KAA is increasing its cooperation with local institutions to inform debate about the relationship between study programmes and employability.
- There is high demand for study programmes in higher education from Kosovo youth.
- Through its membership of European mechanisms for quality assurance in higher education, KAA has increased the international mobility of academic staff and students.
- KAA encourages the involvement of HEIs in Erasmus, Erasmus + and Tempus projects.
- KAA contributes to Kosovo’s integration into the Bologna Process.
- KAA contributes to Kosovo’s integration into the European Research Area.
• Building local capacities for the monitoring process after accreditation
• Financial support to supplement KAA’s budget
• Returning to EQAR, KAA will stimulate its stakeholders and central institutions to allow the KAA to perform in full compliance with the ESGs

**Threats**

• Damaged reputation as a result of former political interference
• Slow economic development might reflect in the quality of offered study programmes
• Too few university programmes in line with the needs of the labour market
• Lack of acceptable working conditions in Kosovo HEIs, which leads academic staff to seek better opportunities abroad
• The inability to create a system in which research can be promoted and benefited from financially
• Inadequate infrastructure to support study programmes, including libraries and laboratories
• HEIs lack of awareness of opportunities for investment in innovation, research and science
• A tendency to deliver academic programmes for which there are insufficient academic staff
In the course of this work, KAA has been working to draft a Strategic Development Plan of KAA for the period 2019 – 2023. The priorities of KAA continue to aim the enhancement of KAA’s contribution to quality development and anchoring Kosovo’s Quality Assurance system and the Agency into the European Higher Education Area.

Immediately after the current membership of the State Quality Council was constituted, discussions started about the need to engage in mid-term strategic planning. The State Council decided to work in two directions: on one side to develop an action plan for a period of six months and on the other to start activities for mid-term strategic planning. The SQC also agreed to synergize between the external evaluation process for ENQA and the strategic planning (as was the case with the use of results of the SWOT analysis) and to assign one of its members (Xhavit Rexhaj) to coordinate the overall planning process. The administrative staff and the responsible SQC member developed the six months action plan, which was approved in the SQC meeting of September 2018.

On the other hand, the strategic planning process continued with the responsible member and three external experts using the SWOT analysis results to draft elements of the Strategic Development Plan 2019 – 2023. The group analysed the key issues identified during the planning process and proposed a number of key fields of intervention, the respective strategic objectives, a vision and a mission for the Agency in the coming mid-term period and presented them for approval by the SQC. SQC and KAA staff organized a consultation workshop in November 2018 where it discussed the proposal by the group. Based on this document this document was drafted further and was approved in the 73th Board meeting held on 19.06.2019.

Vision and Mission

Vision
KAA is established as a lead accreditation agency in the Western Balkan region and a respected member of international associations in higher education accreditations. Accreditation and monitoring processes carried out by the KAA serve as a vehicle for sustainable development of quality in higher education in Kosovo. Degrees issued by Kosovo accredited institutions and programs are respected at home as a brand of quality and automatically recognized by international higher education institutions, which facilities cooperation, exchanges and mobilities of Kosovo academia and students with their colleagues in the region and abroad.

Mission
Kosovo Accreditation Agency mission is to organize reliable, affirmative, and participatory processes of accreditation and monitoring, which are based on best expertise available at home and abroad. The results of these processes make way for sustainable development of higher education institutions in Kosovo that provide high quality study programs for the young people and adults in Kosovo and wider.
Intervention fields and strategic objectives

In September 2018 KAA organized a SWOT analysis exercise with all relevant stakeholders to analyse the actual situation and trends in higher education from the perspective of quality assurance and accreditation. Participants of the workshop identified main fields of analysis, which later were turned into intervention fields for the purpose of the strategic planning process. Thus, all issues and challenges identified during the SWOT analysis were grouped according to the following main fields:

1. Management and legal framework
2. Internal quality assurance
3. External quality assurance
4. Social and institutional responsibility

Strategic objectives
The issues and challenges identified for the intervention fields were analysed to identify the key issue and causes behind the difficulties faced by the quality assurance – accreditation process in higher education in Kosovo. The key problem and other issues grouped by intervention fields were then reformulated into strategic and specific objectives to serve for the improvement of the situation in line with the logical framework planning approach. The key objectives for every intervention field in fact were formulated as strategic objectives (SO) – one for every intervention field:

SO 1: To provide effective accreditation processes and monitoring of quality in higher education by enhancing coordination and management capacity of KAA staff and experts.

SO 2: To provide quality assurance policies and guidelines that will help the higher education institutions in preparing for accreditation and follow-up quality assurance activities.

SO 3: To build human and institutional capacity that will result in high quality accreditation and monitoring activities.

SO 4: To provide full transparency and active participation of relevant stakeholders in the processes of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. Following is a more detailed description of strategic measures by intervention field and strategic objectives.
1. MANAGEMENT AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

“To provide effective accreditation processes and monitoring of quality in higher education by enhancing coordination and management capacity of KAA staff and experts.”

Apart from more specific activities to improve capacity to meet its responsibilities as provided by the Law on Accreditation, the KAA will organize comprehensive event, a Joint Annual Review (JAR), every year in July after the end of the annual accreditation cycle. In this event a KAA annual report will be presented including state of quality and trends in Kosovo higher education, KAA activities, and the KAA Mid-Term Expenditures Framework. The main purpose of the JAR is to build a shared assessment of the KAA activities and a projection of future development in the higher education sector, with a particular focus on quality assurance. The JAR will be organized to ensure active participation of relevant stakeholders and local and international partners. Student representatives will be an important part of all stages and activities of the JAR. The JAR will also serve to increase accountability and to improve communication with stakeholders and relevant authorities.

1.1. Legal framework

1.1.1 Participate in drafting of the national legal framework on accreditation

The Agency staff and SQC members will continue to actively participate in the meetings of the Team for drafting of the Law on Accreditation. They will also engage in advising and supporting the MEST (Government) and members of parliament when proceeding the Law through parliamentary reviews and approval processes. Agency staff and SQC members will actively participate in MEST working groups to further make the Law operational by developing / reviewing respective bylaws and administrative instructions in line with the new Law.

1.1.2. Coordinate and implement drafting of internal regulations

The KAA staff and SQC members will establish working groups to develop KAA regulations, standards and guidelines in line with the Law on Accreditation after its approval by the Parliament. The working groups will consist of representatives from higher education institutions (including in particular students), NGO-s active in higher education, and international partners.

1.1.3. KAA will draft clear guidelines about monitoring and monitoring units within KAA are established

With regular monitoring, the KAA assures the permanent realisation of academic standards at public and private higher education institutions in Kosovo. Complementing the regular accreditation procedures, the monitoring gives the possibility to examine selected quality standards in more detail and to check that the institution provides true facts in their publications, including their website and self-evaluation reports. In that sense, monitoring contributes to the transparency of processes within Kosovar HEIs, and therefore protects outside stakeholders, most importantly prospective students. Monitoring should also be a guiding/supporting process to respective HEIs to reflect on the implementation of programs and their institutional development. In order to implement the monitoring component as defined under the Administrative Instruction on Accreditation, clear guidelines will be drafted as well as officers for monitoring will be
employed. These officers will be responsible exclusively for the monitoring component and will be subject to training and professional development in order to be able to perform according to the principles laid down in the AI.

1.4.4. KAA will revise and draft specific standards about PhD study program
In addition to the standards which are now applicable, in year 2019 KAA has engaged an external expert through the HERAS project who will assist KAA in revising its current standards about PhD study programs. The standards and performance indicators for PhD studies should be differentiated from the BA and MA standards and be oriented to research work of HEIs.

Expected results and outcomes:
- KAA’s independence is consolidated and strengthened through the drafting of the new Law on KAA
- Monitoring is a regular process carried out by KA
- By 2020 KAA has drafted and started to implement all internal regulations which regulate the work of staff and third parties who engage in works with KAA
- By 2021 KAA’s legal stability is achieved through the drafting and approval of the new law on KAA, and other sub legal documents (administrative instructions)

1.2. Finances

1.2.2. KAA has gained financial stability through the approval of the new Law on KAA
According to the new draft Law on Accreditation in Kosovo, Agency of Accreditation will gain additional autonomy, in particular in the field of finances. The new outlook will provide new functions in the field of finances for the Agency and its staff. This will require additional staff and new procedures in planning, implementation and financial reporting. In this respect, the functional review of the Agency will provide for the measures needed to be taken to provide sustainable financing and for the Agency to perform well in using funds made available to it by the state budget, non-public sources and from development partners.

1.2.3. KAA will sign the second agreement in 2020 with the extension of the project HERAS through which will benefit financial assistance and foreign expertise
It is expected that there will be an extension of the Austrian project HERAS which will have as their objective the support of KAA in different activities it undertakes. Considering that many activities are supported through international expertise and assistance, it is expected that some of these activities will start to be provided by other sources - apart from own resources of KAA.

Expected results and outcomes:
- By 2020 KAA has developed respective financial rules and procedures based on the Kosovo laws regulating finance and procurement;
- By 2021 has hired the additional staff according to the provisions of the Kosovo Law on Finances and the respective Procurement Law
• KAA has introduced a yearly system of training and developing staff responsible for management of finances

1.3. Human resources

1.3.2. The efficiency of KAA processes is increased through the recruitment of regular positions/ sufficient human resources within KAA

A functional review will be carried for the KAA by an independent agency to look into the Agency meeting its mission in the changed context in Kosovo higher education (new law on Accreditation and the significantly expanded system of higher education). The report of the review will contain advice regarding needs, positions and terms of reference, recruitment procedures, staff development program, a performance assessment tool and procedures, and a performance assessment framework both for staff and institution. Based on the functional review results, a staff recruitment and development plan will be designed to provide for all needs of the KAA to best meet its mission and functions in line with the legal framework. The Staff Development Plan will be implemented on a continuous basis and will correspond with the duration of this Strategic Development Plan. Additional budget will need to be planned and committed to meet the growing capacity of the Agency to meet its responsibilities.

Expected results and outcomes:
• The regular position of the Director of KAA is filled by September 2019
• At least 13 civil servants will be employed at KAA by the end of 2019
• At least 36 civil servants will be employed at KAA by the end of 2021

1.4. Planning

1.4.2. KAA works based on a Strategic Plan which takes full and realistic account of aspects of the internal and external environment affecting the agency

One of the key challenges in the functioning of the KAA has been the lack of capacity and planning routines. This has created a situation of lack of predictability in the KAA operations. For this reason, the Agency will establish sustainable planning routines and will develop staff capacity in planning, management and reporting. These routines will include five-year Strategic Development Plans, annual operational plans, and monthly action plans. Every member of staff will need to engage actively in a monthly cycle of planning – reporting to the Executive Director. An important segment of planning activities will be the reviews of the strategic and annual plans that will take place respectively at mid-points of implementation. The KAA permanent administration will produce periodic reports to the State Quality Council (SQC). A Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) will be designed as part of this Strategic planning process that will serve to provide the needed indicators as points of reference for institutional and individual planning efforts. The KAA will engage external expertise for drafting and reviews of strategic development plans and for drafting of performance assessment frameworks (PAFs).
1.4.3. Student’s involvement in KAA’s decision making and policy making process is increased
Student’s involvement in decision making and policy making of KAA will be strengthened through the legal changes in the legislation, respectively through the approval of the new Law on KAA. However considering the time which is needed to approve the new law, KAA will undertake concrete steps such as inviting students in Board meetings as observers. KAA will initially work with the Kosovo Students Union who officially represent the students in Kosovo, however during the time it will make sure to cooperate with Student Unions of HEIs individually. These meetings will serve to collect inputs from students and try to address the requests that students have during the external quality assurance processes of KAA. In addition to meetings will students, KAA will plan to disseminate questionnaires to students at all accredited HEIs and evaluate the real student involvement in management, decision making and policy making at HEIs, and how do they feel about their representation in HEIs structures. During the time, it will try to find ways on how to increase the awareness among students on how they could increase their role in management in higher education at different levels.

1.4.4. Stakeholder’s involvement in KAA’s informed decision making and policy making is increased
Concrete relationships will be established with local industries and employers into to take into consideration their inputs about the quality of higher education institutions. Local employers and members of professions will be invited to join regular workshops and other meetings when discussion about the fitness of the methodologies for external quality assurance.

1.4.5. KAA is able to produce thematic analysis which feedback its decision making
With the increase of the number of staff but also with the support of donors, KAA will be engaged in collecting information and inputs which will result in producing thematic analysis. Clear concepts with be drafted to design the methodology and also the working groups to work for the analysis. These analysis will be integrated into normal planning of KAA and in the cycle of planning, implementation, assessment and review.

Expected results and outcomes
1. Meetings with student representatives are held at least every three months either via Kosovo Students Union or the Student Unions of HEIs
2. Meetings with stakeholders are held at least once per year
3. At least one thematic analysis is produced every year

1.5. International cooperation

1.5.2. Cooperation agreements – in the region, in Europe, wider
The KAA will work together with MEST and other partners to negotiate and sign cooperation agreements with higher education institutions and authorities in the Western Balkan region and wider to facilitate verification of the teaching staff in Kosovo HEI-s coming from the neighboring countries. Other agreements will be signed with local and international institutions to provide expertise for external evaluation and monitoring of higher education institutions and study programs. International cooperation will also serve to ensure sharing of experiences with other similar agencies and institutions abroad, to build staff capacity,
to facilitate communication between local and international academic staff, higher education institutions, and students. The KAA will organize an annual thematic event of international character in the field of quality assurance to facilitate communication of local academia with international colleagues and to keep-up with higher education trends.

1.5.3. Participation in International projects
KAA will regularly participate in international project that support the development of KAA, and HEIs to strengthen their QA system. Usually KAA participates in projects supported and funded by international donors in Kosovo.

1.5.4. Follow up with European developments in HE
With the aim to monitor the trends in QA in higher education in Europe and widen its cooperation with other QA agencies, KAA every year participates in the European Quality Assurance Forum, in ENQA and EUA conferences and seminars and other activities. NQC members also participate in different international events related to QA in HE organized by ENQA, CEENQA, EUA or similar bodies.

Expected results and outcomes:
- The credibility of Kosovo diplomas is increased in the international market
- Make HEIs more international visible in the European market of higher education
- Stimulating operation of foreign institution in Kosovo by facilitating the criteria through the legislation
- KAA regains its international membership to EQAR and preserves its membership to ENQA

1.6. Digitalization of services

1.6.1 Setting up the e-Kiosk
KAA will set up a kiosk to issue certificates and various documents verifying status of programs, degrees and institutions. This will provide for more efficient issuing of documents by KAA and at the same time will allow the KAA administrative staff to commit to other tasks.

1.6.2. Advancing the e-Akreditimi platform for digitalized staff declaration
In October 2018 KAA started applying online staff declaration. During 2019, KAA will assess the impact and challenges of the new system and will decide how to improve the system. The system can further be approved to serve other purposes, such as to generate more relevant data for decision making of education authorities in Kosovo. In the future, the system can be enhanced to become compatible with the SMIAL (HE-EMIS) and to export / register data in real-time for both KAA and MEST.

1.6.3. Digitalized application for accreditation / reaccreditation:
In 2018 KAA started utilizing a program for facilitating online application of higher education institutions for accreditation / reaccreditation. This program will further be developed to include real-time drafting and submission of self-evaluation reports by institutions.
Expected results and outcomes:

- **Management information systems are fully functionalized and support the informed decision making and policy making of KAA**

- **All HEIs submit their application process and self-evaluation documentation through the e-Akreditimi portal**

- **Management information systems of KAA are integrated with other databases of relevant ministries which will support the exchange of information between parties (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kosovo Tax Administration, etc.).**

- **By 2022 KAA will design and implement Webinars for training of ETs prior to their engagement in accreditation process in Kosovo**
2. Internal quality assurance

“To provide quality assurance policies and guidelines that will help the higher education institutions in preparing for accreditation and follow-up quality assurance activities.”

2.1. Improvement of internal processes
KAA will commission external expertise to review internal processes and policies in light of the new Law on Accreditation (in the second part of 2019). The report will include recommendations for improvement and updating of policies. These recommendations will be reviewed and approved by the SQC.

2.2. Drafting of the internal quality policies and processes
KAA will engage a number of experts to develop relevant internal policies and guidelines that will serve to enhance quality of KAA accreditation / monitoring and control processes and will be in line with the ESG and similar processes in accreditation agencies in European countries. Exchange visits with similar agencies will be organized to benefit from good practices and to align KAA policies with those of the similar agencies in EU countries.

2.3. Improving internal reflection mechanisms
Within the Joint Annual Review event, one workshop will be dedicated to the reflection and review on the mechanisms and processes applied by the KAA in its daily operations.

2.4. Internal meetings
There are regular meetings held between the Director and the administrative staff with duration of approximately 0.5 hours that assures the constant exchange of information among KAA’s employees. Moreover, because of the new composition of the Board there are internal meetings held weekly in order to safeguard a constant flow of information between all staff members. This is the forum to discuss possible pitfalls in ongoing processes and the appropriate counter-measures. The employees also reflect on legal changes, new international trends or other external changes and their implications on KAA’s procedures. Meetings of the State Council of Quality are organised and held according to the Rules of Procedures of the SCQ, and are followed by minutes which are archived in KAA files.
3. External quality assurance

“To provide quality assurance policies and guidelines that will help the higher education institutions in preparing for accreditation and follow-up quality assurance activities.”

3.1 Evaluation teams
KAA will approve a procedure for identification and recruitment of external experts. KAA will advertise annual calls for external evaluation expertise. Based on selection procedures, the KAA staff will propose the consolidated list of experts to the SQC for approval. KAA will review its guidelines for external experts annually during the Joint Annual Review events to reflect on new legal provisions, experiences, and the arising needs of the accreditation process.

3.2. External evaluation visits and reports
KAA will review and approve its guidelines on evaluation visits after the approval of the Law on Accreditation. The guidelines will be reviewed with local and international technical assistance. These guidelines will be made available to higher education institutions in order for them to build clearer expectations regarding the external evaluation.

3.3. Monitoring process
KAA will commission local and international technical assistance to develop guidelines for monitoring and control of higher education institutions in line with the Law on Accreditation and ESG 2015. These guidelines will be consulted with HEI-s and stakeholders before their approval by the SQC. The KAA will identify and recruit external experts for monitoring based on the provisions of the Accreditation Law and respective bylaws. Results from monitoring and control will serve to bring informed decisions that will improve quality of higher education services.

3.4. Appeals
KAA established and made the Appeals Committee operational in early 2019. With the appeals regulation approved the Committee will be able to review all grievances of the institutions in an informed and transparent manner. The KAA will recruit an expert to assess the work of the Appeals Committee in the fourth quarter of 2019 to identify strengths and weaknesses in the operations of the Committee. Based on the recommendations of the report, the KAA will make the needed amendments to overcome challenges and omissions.
4. **Social and institutional responsibility**

“To provide full transparency and active participation of relevant stakeholders in the processes of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. Following is a more detailed description of strategic measures by intervention field and strategic objectives.”

### 3.1. Communication

**3.1.1. Draft a plan for sharing the strategic plan with stakeholders**

Before the final approval of the Plan, the Agency will bite the tail: after the initial joint SWOT analysis, the Agency will organize a closing consultation with stakeholders to receive their feedback and ideas. After its approval, the Agency will translate and print the Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023. It will also be published on the web-page and shared with stakeholders and authorities.

**3.1.2. Develop guidelines for communication with HEI-s and partners**

One of the key critiques on the work of the Agency during 2018 was claimed to be the relative lack of transparency. The Agency will develop guidelines of communication with stakeholders and partners. Guidelines are developed in joint efforts with higher education institutions, MEST, media, NGOs and other stakeholders. The guidelines will be approved and piloted for a period of one year. After this period, the guidelines will be reviewed, amended based on recommendations and will be finally approved.

### 3.2. Transparency

**3.2.1. Live-streaming of the State Quality Council meetings**

**3.2.2. Publish key decisions from the SQC meetings on the same day and issue any decision to the interested party in the shortest possible time.**

A log-book of the decisions will be designed and approved for this purpose containing the time when a decision was approved by the SQC, when the institution was notified about the decision, when the decision was drafted and signed by the chair, when it was delivered to the party, the time of possible appeal and so on, all details about a particular SQC decision.

**3.2.3. Provide “open doors” days every second week.**

On this day, the SQC and staff members will be available for questions and consultations media, NGO-s and other stakeholders.
3.3. **Accountability**

3.3.1. **Annual reporting**
According to the Law on higher education, the Agency is required to draft and submit an annual performance report and on the state of the higher education system. The Agency will build the report based on regular periodic reports that are developed by the administrative staff for the SQC. The annual report will be submitted to the Ministry of Education and to the Kosovo Assembly. The report will also be presented during the Joint Annual Review (see SO 1) and the next activity in this measure.

3.3.2. **Regular annual analysis of the state and performance of higher education in Kosovo through Joint Annual Reviews (JAR).**
Joint Annual Review has been described in more detail in SO 1. Apart from facilitating communication with stakeholders, the JAR will serve well for finances, management issues and to improve accountability of the Agency towards the society and authorities.

3.3.3. **Staff and institutional Performance assessment**
The Agency will recruit an independent agency to develop and pilot a system for staff performance assessment. Based on the institutional mission, on Performance Assessment Framework and on the job descriptions, the staff evaluation will be carried out once a year, with brief reviews every six months.

3.3.4. **Annual auditing of the Agency performance and finances (by independent agencies).**
The Agency will request regular reviews by the Kosovo Auditors Office. In case so decided, the SQC may also engage an independent auditor to assess the institutional performance of the agency.

The expected results and outcomes:

- *The reputation of KAA is restored at home and abroad*
- *The public trust towards its decisions is increased*
**Risk analysis**

There are many indicators which we consider will enable the implementation of the strategic objectives such as the national consensus that the quality of higher education should be improved and that the independent work of the KAA should be safeguarded. In the recent year, the competencies of KAA have become a topic among civil society organisations, donors, members of the government and an increase of the awareness about the importance of KAA activities and processes has been noted. The overall perception of those stakeholder is that KAA should be strengthened through legislative and financial support from all layers of the government. While the very optimistic approach among all those stakeholders exists, there might be some factors which may pose a risk for the implementation of the above mentioned activities and aims such as:

- Because of a political changes, the procedures to approve the new Law on Accreditation might be prolonged by the MEST and Assembly and therefore not enable KAA to implement its strategic objectives which are closely related to the approval of the new law
- Ministry of Finance might put financial restrictions for the employment of new staff as planned by the new Law on KAA
- Lack of interest from qualified persons to apply for the professional positions to be advertised from KAA
- Lack of motivation from stakeholders to be actively engaged in the consultation process of KAA
- Lack of professional capacities to contribute in the consultation process of KAA which are related to decision making and policy making
- Potential tentative from external parties to influence the work of KAA which would result in damaging the KAA reputation and the public trust
- Lack of approval of the new law would endanger the implementation of many activities planned by KAA and thus would jeopardize the membership of KAA to ENQA
- Lack of interest from international/ European universities to cooperate with national HEIs, or to approach the Kosovo market of education
- Refusal of the foreign donors to contribute to the KAA because of the damaged reputation and exclusion from EQAR
The KAA working group will develop a general framework for performance evaluation. This framework will serve to monitor the implementation of the Development Plan. The framework includes the main indicators for which data can be provided, making it easier to measure and compare progress with the implementation of the Plan. In addition, the framework contains the relevant values for the current state (in 2019) and the values that KAA aspires to achieve during the implementation period of this Plan (Target in 2023). In some cases, the targets for years are not defined, but it is expected that at maximum, by the end of the strategy period, they will be achieved.
Communications strategy

Upon the approval of this strategic plan, KAA will develop stakeholder information materials, including materials for HEIs, students, donors, businesses, civil society organisations, etc. For this purpose, leaflets and brochures will be drafted, while the website will be continuously updated. Web site materials will be published in Albanian and English in order to reach as many stakeholders as possible.

Also, information sessions will be organized by KAA with different organisations and stakeholders representatives in order to disseminate the goals and objectives of KAA. Having into consideration that media in Kosovo are very much interested to follow the work of KAA, this platform will be used to continuously reach the wider community through media appearances which will target students and parents and will try to increase their awareness about the role of KAA. There are dedicated columns in online newspapers and TV shows which research the educational policies in general, and this will be easily used in order to report about the progress of KAA but also to report about the challenges it faces towards its work.

In addition to this, KAA will try to mobilize all relevant stakeholders who are affected by the strategic objectives of this document. Regular information events will be organized in order to present the progress of KAA towards the implementation of its strategic plan. Having into regard the cooperation agreement between KAA and the Coalition of Civil Society Organisations and that there is always one representative in the Board meetings, there are conferences which are held and which report about the work of KAA. This is another platform which will be used by KAA in order to inform the relevant parties about the progress but also to collect inputs which might be used as feedback for revision and midterm review of the strategic plan.

In mid-2021, the mid-term review of the implementation of the plan will be carried out. In this case, a wider involvement workshop will be organized, including students, partners, HEIs other similar institutions.