

STRATEGIES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION AREA IN KOSOVO



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authors:

Aulonë Memeti

Nuhi Sadiku

researchers:

Nuhi Sadiku

Fitore Metbala

Samir Shahini

reviewer:

Xhavit Rexhaj

Translated in English by:

LBG Communications

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ABBREVIATIONS

- VET** – Vocational Education and Training
- KAA** – Kosovo Accreditation Agency
- GDP** – Gross National Product
- MDE** – Municipal Directorate of Education
- ENQA** – European Association for Quality Assurance (in Higher Education)
- EQAR** – The European Quality Assurance Register (for Higher Education)
- FIEK** – Faculty of Electric and Computer Engineering
- HEI** – Higher Education Institutions
- EQF** – European Qualifications Framework
- KFOS** – Kosovo Foundation for Open Society
- NQF** – National Qualifications Framework
- KITU** – Coalition for Integrity and Transparency at the University
- MESTI** – Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
- SAA** – Stabilisation Association Agreement
- SME** – Economic Reform Program
- SPEK** – Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo
- SPUP** – Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina
- HEIMS** – Higher Education Information Management System
- NDS** – National Development Strategy
- UP** – University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”

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REVIEWER'S REMARK

This study by ADMOVERE organisation focuses on a topic of crucial importance for the functioning of higher education public institutions and the respective education institutions for the higher education sector in Kosovo. The strategic planning in general, and the process of drafting, implementing, and monitoring strategic plans at all levels of higher education is a reliable indicator of the performance of our institutions in charge of higher education. The reviewed reports about the monitoring of various strategic plans and the research results presented in this report indicate a very low, concerning level of the implementation of strategic plan at all levels. To a certain extent, this may be explained by the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years on the overall functioning of the education institutions and of the Kosovo society in general.

The time when this research was conducted coincides with an important year for the strategic planning in the higher education sector at state level. Indeed, the deadline of two strategic national plants – namely the National Development Strategy 2016-2021 and the Strategic Plan for Education in the Republic of Kosovo 2017-2021 ended in 2021. Already, the Government of the Republic of Kosovo and MESTI have initiated the process to draft the respective strategic plans for the next development period. At the same time, the findings of this Report may be of use to the teams at the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” to review the Strategic Plan 2020-2022 and to organize the process to develop the Strategic Plan for the next development period. Perhaps it would be appropriate that the University of Prishtina begin with an early planning of the Strategic Plan 2022-2027 due to the low rate of the implementation of the current Strategic Plan (2020-2022) that was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings and recommendations in the report may serve to ensure coherence and a more systematic approach across all levels of planning and developing higher education – which was sorely lacking in the period we are leaving behind. The report could have compiled a more thorough picture of the situation with the planning at education institutions and authorities if it had had an opportunity to delve into the development and strategic plans of other higher education institutions in Kosovo.

The topics that the research team selected to review were also more than relevant:

- transparency and accountability,
 - scientific work,
 - inclusion,
 - linking study programs with the labour market, and
 - accreditation.
-

Each of these topics affects the essence of the mission and functioning of the higher education institutions in Kosovo. At the same time, such topics ensure internal coherence of the research and final report. In addition to these topics, the report deals also with the issue of internationalization of the higher education institutions, as yet another important trend of the higher education in the framework of globalization processes and rapid technological developments in the country and the world. Therefore, the research team managed to preserve inclusion (by dealing with the strategic planning at the national, sectoral, and institutional levels) and relevance (by dealing with key issues in higher education).

Finally, it should be ascertained that the report identifies key issues and deficiencies that need to be addressed to improve the situation with the strategic planning, and to manage development processes in the higher education. To address the established deficiencies, the report provides relevant and specific recommendations for each level and institution, respectively.

INTRODUCTION

Considering that the performance of higher education institutions in particular and the situation of education in generak in Kosovo has often been deemed unsatisfactory by the broader masses, the civil society, students' perceptions, and the relevant institutions, it is important to analyze higher education strategies to explore the range of coordination among them, the level of redundancy and overlap of objectives. Since the new Strategic Plan for Education in Kosovo (SPEK) is currently being drafted, a question arises: is it time for a thorough planning, and if yes, what does this mean?

This project intends to analyze and compare trends for assessing issues in the higher education from the institutional aspect. Specifically, the research focuses on five indicators:

- transparency and accountability,
- scientific work,
- incusion,
- linking study programs with the labour market, and
- accreditation.

The research compares and reviews defined objectives and the level to which they are met across all strategies (and action plans) of higher education in Kosovo, issued by the Government of Kosovo and the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), and across university strategies (and annual reports) of the University of Prishtina (UP).

For purposes of this research, the National Development Strategy (NDS) and the guide for its implementation, the Strategic Plan for Education in Kosovo (SPEK) 2017-2021 and the Action Plan, the Strategic Plans of the UP 2017-2019 and 2020-2022 were reviewed with special focus. To assess the implementation of strategies, with focus on the abovementioned indicators, the cases of three UP faculties, namely the Faculty of Electric and Computer Engineering (FIEK), the Faculty of Education, and the Faculty of Philosophy were reviewed in detail. To this end, indepth interviews were conducted with the respective managements. Further, a raound table with persons in charge and representatives of relevant higher education institutions, with education specialists and experts, with organisations that focus on education, and so on, was envisaged. The recommendations from this round table shall be incorporated in the final report.

SUMMARY OF KEY DOCUMENTS (2016 – 2022)

National Development Strategy 2016 - 2021

This strategy is presented as a new development approach and addresses factors that hinder economic growth and improvement of living standards. The strategy seeks to prioritize the needs of our country by creating a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis mechanism. In addition, the strategy seeks to prevent overlapping institutional processes and to increase work efficiency. The stakeholders of this document are: state institutions, private sector, civil society, development partners, and to be effective, the contribution of each one is needed as either implementer or oversight entity.

The National Development Plan 2016-2021 demonstrates coherence between intervention areas and is characterised by a program and project-based approach (not a strategic systematic intervention one). The plan seems to be drafted by a selected group of experts. This Plan considers education as one of the key development priorities including it in the first thematic pillar of the Human Capital Development. A considerable number (7) of concrete measures refer to the development of education and human resources in the framework of a thorough and coherent development approach.

The Strategy differs from the other documents due to the orientation of policies and implementation time. Since it takes five (5) years for the implementation, the Strategy goes beyond the mandate of a government. The NDS is harmonized with other strategic processes in the country, such as the EU Integration process through the Stabilisation Association Agreement (SAA) or the Economic Reform Program (ERP).

The leading and coordination role in preparing this document was taken by the Office for Strategic Planning (mandated by the Government of Kosovo), whereas the technical support was provided by the Office of the European Commission in Kosovo. The drafting of this document started on the day the decision was taken by the Government of Kosovo. Further, consultative meetings within state mechanisms followed; even outside of those, as the document was open for discussion with the public. Also, ideas were harnessed by the civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders.

The selection of priorities was done based on two general principles. The first principle is the need to ensure higher annual rates of economic growth (it implies the increase of income and employment). The second principle is that in parallel with the economic growth, social cohesion is also ensured, as mentioned above, the inclusion. Inclusion should be indisputable, as apart from being a precondition for social justice, it enables more sustainable economic growth.

The strategy identifies also the nature of obstacles, as well as the intervention nature. With regards to payments, the common thread is that both influence directly or indirectly in restricting the quantity and productivity of the capital and workforce in the country: both required factors for economic growth. The market failure, discouragement of strategic investors, straying from innovation and misuse of our country's resources are only some of the challenges that may cause obstacles of differing natures.

Meanwhile, the nature of interventions in these obstacles is entirely pragmatic and emphasizes economic growth, based on the private sector and the principle of competitiveness. To achieve competitiveness, the Strategy considers that strengthening the private sector is vital. This is achieved only through an active role of the state. The interventions which are determined in essence are not final and detailed interventions but their character is in principle, a guiding and orienting one. Due to various stages at which various sectors in our country are some have defined the priorities and the solution methods while some other are still at more initial stages, and the measures foreseen to be undertaken in these sectors differ from one to the other. Nonetheless, the nature of this document is not static but may evolve at any moment, depending on objective circumstances. The structure of the NDS is divided into four thematic pillars: human capital, rule of law and good governance, development of competitive industries, and development of infrastructure. These pillars make this a strategy that promises Work, Law, Business, and Construction (WLBC – PLAN in Albanian). Therefore, the NDS, as mentioned above, is the PLAN for work, for strengthening the rule of law, for business, and for infrastructure.

In the following chapter we shall focus on more detail and we shall analyse what does the NDS envisage (if it does so), separately for each indicator of higher education. Here we shall summarize the key points of the intervention in the area of education, since our research is dedicated exclusively to education, namely the higher education. **The NDS focuses on improving the overall situation in education by following these steps:**

-
- Inclusion in preschool and elementary education,
 - Improving the quality of teaching at the preuniversity education,
 - Better linkages between the education system and the labour market,
 - Strengthening the functions of tests, inspection, and accreditation in the education system,
 - Optimizing expenses in education through the data system,
 - Engaging on short term experts and students from the Diaspora, and
 - Addressing informal employment and creating work-conducive conditions.
-

Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo (SPEK) 2017 – 2021

The Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo is an essential document to develop education in Kosovo within a specific time interval (in our case, in the time interval 2017-2021). The process for drafting this document started in 2015 and the organisational structure was divided into three levels: Core Group, Plenary Group and thematic subgroups.

The Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo (SPEK) 2017-2021 is a plan based on the sectorial and comprehensive approach through the planning process. Consequently, SPEK seeks to cover all key subsectors in the education system in Kosovo (from preschool education to higher education), even including elements of scientific research in the framework of the higher education objective. The plan includes all segments of strategic planning: mission, vision, key targets, strategic objectives, and all measures of activities to capitalize those. At the same time, SPEK is a voluminous document that includes the framework of risk, the framework of monitoring and evaluation performance, the communication plan, budget, and action plan.

We recall that the initial comprehensive plans for higher education were: the Strategy for Higher Education 2005-2015, the Strategy for Preuniversity Education 2007-2017, and the Strategic Plan for Education in Kosovo 2011-2016. Therefore, to have a normal flow of processes, the SPEK 2017-2021 should have been in complete harmony with the abovementioned plans and not only, as its harmonisation with the National Development Strategy drafted by the Office of the Prime Minister, namely with its first chapter: Human Capital, has been deemed necessary. Likewise, SPEK sought that its strategic objectives and points of intervention to be in complete compliance with the priorities of the Republic of Kosovo Government Program (Republic of Kosovo: Government Program 2015) in the areas of education and science:

-
- Structural reform in education,
 - Increased participation and equal access to education,
 - Ensuring, guaranteeing and achieving education quality,
 - Managing education institutions (including decentralisation of decisionmaking in education),
 - Integration and international cooperation,
 - Promotion of science and research, and
 - Increasing funding for education and science.
-

The Strategic Plan for Education in Kosovo, as it is emphasized in the same place, started to being drafted only after the assessment of the previous Strategic Plan for Education in Kosovo began, and after the Core Group conducted an analysis. This Plan is envisaged to contain seven key dimensions/strategic objectives:

-
1. Participation and inclusion,
 2. Management of the education system,
 3. Quality assurance,
 4. Development of teachers,
 5. Teaching and learning,
 6. Education, vocational education, and adult education, and
 7. Higher education.
-

Since our focus is on higher education, SPEK has established the key challenges that prevent a more rapid development of the higher education. These are:

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- Discrepancy between study programs and the labour market demand,
 - Disfavorable ratio between the academic staff members and students,
 - Failure to encourage research and scientific work at the Higher Education Institutions (HEI),
 - Lack of data in HEI,
 - Low level of capacities to draft projects,
 - Lack of a performance-based funding formula for HEI,
 - Lack of professional practice for students, and
 - Small number of graduates.
-

Through the interventions in envisages, SPEK aims to increase quality and competitiveness, to encourage teaching excellence, to increase the level of scientific research, artistic creativity, innovation, and to focus on internationalisation. **Some of the results planned to be realized through the envisaged activities are:**

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1. Academic staff-student ration in HEI to be at least 1:40,
 2. Professional development mechanisms to be fully functional,
 3. Higher education quality assurance mechanisms are fully functional,
 4. Teaching, research-scientific work, and artistic infrastructure and technology to be advanced,

- 5.** By the end of 2019, the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS) to be fully functional,
 - 6.** Study programs to be in compliance with labour market requirements and career guidance and orientation services to be functional within the HEI,
 - 7.** The number of scientific publications by the academic staff with internationally indexed magazines to increase annually by 25%,
 - 8.** By the end of 2018 to review and complete the legal infrastructure on higher education,
 - 9.** By 2020 to commence implementation of the performance-based funding formula for higher education,
 - 10.** To increase academic staff and student mobility at the HEI, and
 - 11.** To increase participation in higher education international programs and scientific research.
-

Also, SPEK lists a series of possible activities to achieve these results, however we will delve into more detail about these activities and practical implementation in the following chapters.

Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina «Hasan Prishtina» 2017-2019

The University of Prishtina «Hasan Prishtina» is the largest higher education public institution in the country. Therefore, it carries the main burden, and state and civic responsibility to provide genuine education for the young generations of the Republic of Kosovo, making the latter useful citizens for the country. It should be stated that nowadays, when the number of higher education institutions has increased, the UP remains the primary address for most students in the Republic of Kosovo.

The Mission presented in the Strategic Plan of the UP 2017-2019 reads as follows: the University is an autonomous higher education public institution that develops academic education, scientific research, artistic creations, professional guidance and other areas of academic activity, whereas its goal are:

1. To act as an institutional and leader center to advance knowledge, creative ideas, and science within the higher education system of Kosovo,
2. To play a leading role in developing education, science, culture, society and economy of Kosovo,
3. To help with the process of promoting civic democracy,
4. To seek to create and support the highest standards in the area of teaching and learning, scientific research and artistic creation,
5. To use its own resources as efficiently as possible,
6. To collaborate in maximum and participate in all higher education activities at the national, regional, and international level,
7. To adapt to European standards, and
8. To be fully integrated in the European Zone of Higher Education, in the European Zone of Scientific Research, and to undertake the adequate reformative steps to achieve this mission.

The Strategic Plan of the UP 2017-2019 addresses issues that are related to the increased quality in all UP services, and for all issues provides the solutions it envisages. Thus, to illustrate how this document considers the problems and planned solutions, the implementation of this document is expected to provide UP with teaching quality by:

- being transparent with the teacher selection process,
- strengthening criteria for selecting the most qualified staff,

- advancing staff only on merit basis observing the institution's Statute,
- training staff in the teaching methods in compliance with the subjects and students' needs,
- ensuring continuous communication student-teacher to achieve best learning results,
- encourage scientific research among teachers and students, offering learning practice along theory, and
- encouraging students to be an active part of learning and a factor of necessary changes of processes within the UP.

Also, the implementation of this document shall encourage the advancement of the quality of administrative services at the UP by:

- updating as needed the digital services for students and staff,
- informing students on time about events, scholarships, conferences, mobility, and free activities in the university campus life,
- offering training for the administrative and academic staff in using online applications to serve students,
- offering access to e-libraries non-stop (24 hours a day), and
- offering services to facilitate the learning process and completing student tasks

Consequently, the quality of programs to ensure their continued accreditation shall be ensured by:

- building an internal quality assurance system,
- analysing and supervising continuously the program progress,
- offering new programs or dissolving current programs depending on the labour market needs and preparing students better for the labour market,
- supervising and assessing the engagement of the academic staff,
- adapting the number of the academic staff with the number of students for effective learning,
- encouraging teachers to incite debates in the classroom in order to develop critical thinking of students and free speech,
- establishing quality assurance mechanisms in all UP departments, and
- including in the quality assurance process the current students and graduates of the UP in order to cultivate a culture of self-control over the quality to provide qualitative education to the students and ensure a continuous growth of the institution along quality.

Whereas this document considers the improvement of the physical structure by:

- increasing the number and area of teaching buildings in accordance with the number of regular students,
- offering learning rooms and laboratories equipped with working tools depending on the program needs,
- offering comfortable spaces/spaces to read,
- equipping libraries with computers to provide access to e-libraries and necessary equipment to facilitate learning,
- equip classrooms/rooms with equipment like: computers. Projectors, Internet, to facilitate teaching and enable the use of teaching that encourages the use of technology, and
- ensure immediate easy access to the UP campus and services by the UP to persons with special needs.

By this document the UP has set the necessary priorities to remain competitive within the short term, and those are:

- Increasing Education, Quality, University, and Studies,
- Encouraging Research Excellence,
- Development and sustainability of programs and degrees,
- Supporting the mission,
- Learning for a diverse world,
- Serving Kosovo, the community, and our graduates, and
- Globalisation and internationalisation of academic programs.

Whereas the eight strategic focus areas and strategic initiatives are:

1. Teaching, research, and services,
2. Accreditation and quality control,
3. Levels/programs in demand by the market,
4. Development of human resources,
5. Development of the system,
6. Fiscal accountability and improvement of financial data information,
7. Development of infrastructure, and
8. Globalisation/internationalisation.

Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina «Hasan Prishtina» 2020-2022

This Strategic Plan is the successor of the Strategic Plan that we just elaborated briefly, and therefore, to a large degree represents the continuation of the strategic objectives and priorities determined by the University of Prishtina. The identification of these strategic objectives by the University of Prishtina was done with a clear goal: advancing the competitive position through offering quality services, without distinction, for the needs of the Kosovo population and beyond.

The Strategic Plan 2020-2022 of the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” is an institutional plan with elements of the strategic planning and operational planning. With regards to this Plan, it must be emphasized that there lacks a unified approach at the institutional level: on one hand, the Action Plan 2020-2022, as unified has been drafted, while at the same time the academic units are required to draft their operational plans: “According to the Strategic Plan, the administrative and academic units are expected to develop plans for the implementation of initiatives, objectives, and tasks, within their units” (SPUP, p. 21). Such approach may lead to overlap of efforts, confusion of competences, and difficulties in monitoring the implementation of the Plan. In fact, at the moment the rectorate drafted the action plan, then the units may find it difficult to understand what other planning is required from them. To illustrate, staff development is envisaged in the central action plan but may also result in a special measure of the operational plans of the academic units. In addition, such measures may then differ a lot from one unit to another which may result in a diverse and incoherent approach for staff development at the institutional level.

The priorities are as follows:

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- Increasing the quality of education and scientific/artistic research,
 - Encouraging scientific/artistic research,
 - Development and sustainability of the programs,
 - Supporting the UP development,
 - Diversity as a process,
 - Serving Kosovo, diversity, and our graduates, and
 - Globalisation and internationalisation of academic programs and student services by the UP faculties.
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Whereas the strategic areas of this Strategic Plan are:

1. Teaching and learning,
 2. Scientific/artistic research,
 3. Quality assurance and accreditation,
 4. Level of studies and programs in demand by the market,
 5. Development of human resources,
 6. Development of IT system,
 7. Fiscal accountability and improvement of financial data information,
 8. Development of infrastructure, and
 9. Globalisation/internationalisation.
-

As mentioned above, according to the Strategic Plan, the administrative and academic units are expected to develop plans to implement initiatives, objectives, and tasks within their units. Indeed, we shall elaborate in the following chapters whether these plans shall be developed and implemented in practice or not in some academic units.

With regards to the monitoring of the implementation of the Plan, during the round table (21 September 2021) organized to discuss the working version of this report, the UP representatives stated they had established the respective mechanism and instruments to follow up on and monitor the implementation of the Plan. A characteristic of this Plan is that it does not differ much in structure or content from the Strategic Plan 2017-2019 of the same University. This may be explained by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021), while at the same time indicates lack of a more genuine approach towards the development and strategic planning on the part of the higher education public institutions.

While comparing the key aspects of these three essential documents for the planning of higher education development in Kosovo we note essential discrepancies between these three documents, both in macro-structure and micro-structure, in terminology, and in the concepts used, as well as in the approach used to plan.

In terms of the macro-structure, the National Development Plan is created based on the program, leaving at the second level the vision, mission, and strategic objectives. The document, as analysed by the research team, does not include the budget, the detailed plan of action, which are essential elements of a strategic plan. On the other hand, SPEK contains all elements of a strategic planning, including the database and situation assessment.

Meanwhile, the Strategic Plan (2020-2022) of the UP determines the general goals and strategic objectives and at the same time (a) leaving it up to the academic units to realize operational plans for the implementation of the Plan, and (b) drafting the three-year implementation Plan! At the same time, of these three documents, only SPEK includes the Preliminary Situation Analysis, Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, Detailed and Analysed Budget, Risk Assessment, and Communication Strategy.

The micro-structure level of the UP Plan lacks the description of strategic measures. It should be recalled that it is exactly the description of measures that which determines the strategy to be used to achieve objectives, thus making the difference between the different ways (read" strategies) applied of all ways available to institutions to achieve objectives. The terminology is the third key difference between these three documents, as in the case of the National Plan we are dealing with concrete goals, intervention areas, and projects, as opposed to the concise and well-structured language of SPEK drafted by MESTI (vision mission, concrete targets, strategic objectives, expected results, measures and activities). The terminology used by the UP confused to a certain degree the formulation of goals, aims, objectives, and results.

Finally, it can be said that SPEK applies a more standardized approach to drafting strategic plans, in the process aspect (comprehensive and structured), structure (from vision to activities) and the internationally accepted terminology on sectoral planning. In this context, it is advisable that the Office for Strategic Planning of the Office of the Prime Minister and PM documents published in the webpage of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo be the key mechanisms to standardize the approach and the strategic planning process.

INDICATORS

The research team has reviewed the implementation of strategic plans in the higher education area starting with five key indicators:

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- transparency and accountability,
 - scientific work,
 - inclusion,
 - linkage between study projects and the labour market, and
 - accreditation.
-

Further, these indicators are dealt with separately, soncering their application in strategic documents of varied levels, relevant for higher education.

Transparency and accountability

Increasing quality in higher education is closely linked with transparency and accountability. These are two processes that increase work efficiency within a university. Transparency and accountability are considered two very important factors which ensure that higher education in a country is noting progress and is keeping up with the competition.

Although it is a very comprehensive Strategy and not focused entirely on education, more so on higher education, the National Development Strategy mentions in several places transparency and accountability, especially in relation to public procurement and education. The NDS deems necessary the intervention in strengthening accountability mechanisms and certification in the education system, because, as it says, it will enable schools and teacher to be accountable to and be rewarded for their work quality, which in turn helps increase education quality. The NDS considers the education system in Kosovo suffers from the absence of effective mechanisms to evaluate success and quality of teaching and learning. One of the causes for this, among many others, is considered to be the lack of autonomy and accountability of accreditation authorities about their own performance. Therefore, improvement of the quality of autonomy and accountability of accredited institutions by developing and expanding the capacities of Accreditation Authorities (KAA and KQA) is concered a concrete activity. NDS deems that increasing the practice of accountability nad quality assurance shall result in better performance of the education system, and consequently, with increased skills and abilities of the workforce.

Due to their importance, transparency and accountability are deemed as strategic objectives of the Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017-2021 (drafted by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation), namely the quality and efficient management of the education system, based on transparency and accountability. Challenges considered in the framework of this strategic objective include:

-
- Insufficient capacities at the central, municipal, and school level,
 - Lack of coherence in the area of legislation and policies,
 - Lack of managerial professionalism and school autonomy,
 - Decision making not based on data, and
 - Conditions that are not so good and environment not conducive to quality lessons.
-

It can be said that such priority treatment for both indicators is a result of the failure to meet some of the measures envisaged in the Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2011-2016. We recall that the key findings of the SPEK 2011-2016 assessment clearly explain that the mechanisms and the practice of quality assurance and accountability remain underdeveloped and the process of implementing the new curricula is far from meeting the deadline set in the planning¹. However, it is assessed that salaries of teachers were raised and the preconditions to lure qualified teachers and improve their accountability have been created². Since financial accountability was mentioned, it should be said that until the moment when SPEK 2017-2021 was drafted Kosovo did not have a regulated methodology on funding higher education institutions which encourages efficiency and accountability despite the fact that the legal framework for higher education determines the establishment of effective mechanisms for performance-based funding³. The expected results of this objective are:

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- Building capacities for an effective and accountable management of the central and municipal level system, and effective management at school level,
 - Determining the professional standards for recruitment and career management mechanisms for leaders of educational institutions,
 - Implementing a functional funding mechanism of preuniversity education that contributes to school development,
 - Preparing and publishing regular reports based on analysis and interpretation of data by the SMIA, and using these analysis for policymaking,

¹Strategic Plan for Education in Kosovo 2017-2021, MESTI, p. 18.

²Ibid.

³Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017-2021, MESTI, p. 29.

- Harmonisation and completion of legislation for the entire preuniversity education sector to reflect changes in the legislation and other policies,
- Creating safe environments for schools, which are friendly and healthy for all,
- Establishing an effective system to manage school buildings that contributes to creating suitable learning environments, and
- Improving the education infrastructure through building, renovating, expanding, and equipping education institutions with the adequate means for the education process.⁴

Indicators that will serve to measure the achievement of this objective according to SPEK 2017-2021 are: the percentage of trained members of school steering councils, the percentage of trained school principals and deputy principals, the number of trained MED staff on education management, the number of primary school students who learn in one shift, school space per student, the number of school equipped with individual lockers for students, the number of schools to receive equipment, the number of schools to be equipped with sport kits, the number of preschool institutions to be built, the renovation of school buildings, the construction of new school buildings, the construction of buildings for higher education institutions, the training of management and teaching staff at schools about security and health at the school, the number of schools to be equipped with first aid kits, the number of MESTI staff trained about planning, policymaking, and monitoring, the number of regulations and procedures adopted for effective communication, the number of established school networks, the number of adopted municipal development plans, the percentage of schools with their own budget code and that manage their own budget, the number of policies on SMIA data management, the number of staff trained on entering data and using data in SMIA⁵.

Since the key focus of this research is higher education, we note that for the higher education this objective envisages:

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- in the framework of the result «Preparing and publishing regular reports based on analysis and interpretation of data from SMIA, and the use of such analysis in policymaking» increasing the capacities for users of data from schools, MED, central level, and universities.

⁴Plani Strategjik i Arsimit në Kosovë 2017-2021, MASHTI, fq. 53.

⁵Plani i Veprimt i PSAK 2017 – 2021, MASHTI, fq.10.

Building such capacities should be linked with procedures for data collection and data entry in the system, with special focus on their use in decisionmaking⁶. In the framework of this activity the training of SMIA data users is foreseen⁷,

- in the framework of the result «Establishing an effective system to manage school buildings that contributes to the creation of suitable environments for learning» the development of norms and standards to design education buildings for all level⁹. The drafting of norms and standards for the design of school buildings in envisaged in the framework of this activity . Also, in the framework of the same result, SPEK envisages the advancement of the database on education buildings¹⁰,
- in the framework of the result «Improvement of the education infrastructure through building, renovating, expanding and equipping education institutions with adequate means for the learning process» the expansion and improvement of education environment in higher education institutions¹¹. In the framework of this activity it is foreseen that one building for higher education institutions is built in 2018, 2019 and 2020¹².

Likewise, transparency and accountability are key part of the Strategic Plans of the University of Prishtina (2017-2019 and 2020-2022). Firstly, transparency and accountability are mentioned in the framework of the strategic area «Fiscal accountability and improvement of financial data information». Specifically, it envisages the drafting and implementation of superior finances and budget systems (policies, softwares, processes, training, and usage) to improve management of the University and improve transparency and accountability¹³. **This strategic initiative envisages several objectives:**

-
- Achieving the monthly budget reporting,
 - Developing systems capable of budgets in real time and financial systems to be accessed by the executive staff,
 - Achieving accountability and transparency on all financial matters,
 - Daily improvement of the institution and allocated means, and
 - Improving planning and execution.¹⁴
-

⁶Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p. 57 – 58.

⁷Action Plan SPEK 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p.13.

⁸Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p. 59.

⁹Action Plan SPEK 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p14.

¹⁰Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p. 60.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²SPEK Action Plan 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p.16.

¹³Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina 2017 – 2019, UP, p. 17.

¹⁴Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina 2017 – 2019, UP, p. 54.

Whereas the tasks or activities envisaged are:

-
- Developing a dashboard for internal use on the part of managers, including financial indicators,
 - Obtaining, executing, and training new financial softwares,
 - Creating and training staff on UP financial policies,
 - Developing automated forms,
 - Reforming the budget process in line with the European and / or ISO9000 standards etc.; and
 - Establishing a comprehensive process for the annual planning which includes the bottom-up budget development.¹⁵
-

Whereas the measures for these activities include the following:

-
- Achieving implementation within the time limits,
 - Putting in place measures to use the budget and improve (reducerënies) the cost structure by 5%,
 - Measuring the use of automated and dashboard systems, and
 - Measures against the aimed financial indicators for the performance of financial officers and executive actions.¹⁶
-

It should be stated that the majority of these activities/measures are repeated in the Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina 2020 – 2022.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Scientific work

The research work is ranked among the ten key dimensions of the Bologna Process, whereas an integrated link within the higher education and scientific research is a distinct feature of modern universities. Research work is one of the most important components of each university, and publications are among the three key components of engaging academic staff.

Although not a priority of the National Development Strategy, the research-scientific work is mentioned nonetheless. Since, as we have mentioned above, the NDS is oriented towards economic development, in the measure «SMEs¹⁷ get into activities with added value», specifically envisages as an activity of this measure to establish a scheme to support innovation that would provide stimuli (corresponding grants) for SME investment in research and scientific work. This scheme is envisaged to be part of the Employment and Development Fund¹⁸. According to the Program of the Government of Kosovo 2015-2018, this Fund was considered to be the key tool to address the high unemployment rate (by creating new jobs), reduce continuous trade deficit, increase innovation development in the private sector (by increasing labour force skills, attracting foreign investment, and scientific research) and reduce dependence on remittances (through generation of internal revenues).¹⁹

As mentioned above, scientific research is a key indicator related to quality of education in a country, mainly the university education level. There cannot be a quality University, which at the same time is passive in the scientific research area. Modern universities, apart from being the hearth of teaching, dedicate a large part of their activity and focus to scientific research. Therefore, this should be taken more seriously by the institutions in charge in our country, and by the University of Prishtina itself (and other public universities in Kosovo). We recall that according to a report of the Organisation for the Increase of Quality in Education, based on the professors who have published their CVs on the University webpage, a total of 1,838 works are considered as valid for academic promotion, i.e., as first or corresponding author. A significant increase by 369 works compared to 2019 when 1,469 works were noted, and a difference of 1,091 compared to 2017 when 747 works were noted, and when this research commenced.²⁰

¹⁷ SME – Small and Medium Enterprises.

¹⁸ National Development Strategy 2016 – 2021, OPM, p. 33.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 54.

²⁰ Integriteti akademik në Universitetin e Prishtinës, ORCA, fq.12.

The Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017-2021 considers scientific research of priority. It is given due attention under the Strategic Objective «Higher Education (HE)». It envisages the increase of quality and competitiveness of higher education through encouraging excellence in teaching, scientific research, artistic creativity, innovation and internationalisation. SPEK 2017-2021 deems that added funding for scientific-research activity may increase the research capacities in the area of education, while it may result in various research body that provide new practical recommendations to address problems in education²¹. When making the assessment of the previous SPEK it is said that the Government spending in research-scientific work is very low (0.1% of GDP)²². Also, failure to encourage research-scientific work in HEI is considered as one of the key challenges of higher education. SPEK considers research-scientific work is not entirely integrated in the usual activities of the higher education institutions in Kosovo. The number of scientific publications in internationally indexed journals by the staff of higher education institutions is extremely low. Increasing the number of scientific publications by the staff of higher education institutions in internationally indexed journals require supporting researchers in publishing their work and presenting the scientific results at international conferences. Apart from that, the non-conducive environment for research-scientific work requires improvement bearing in mind the lack of suitable physical infrastructure, laboratories, and non-functional equipment, and lack of access to scientific resources in electronic libraries.²³

The expected results under the abovementioned objective are deemed to be:

-
- The ratio academic staff-student at HEI is at least 1:40,
 - Mechanisms for professional development of HEI academic staff are fully functional,
 - Mechanisms for quality assurance in higher education are fully functional,
 - Teaching infrastructure and technology, research-scientific and artistic work,
 - Until 2019, the System for Information Management in Higher Education (SIMHE) is fully functional,
 - Study programs are in compliance with the labour market demand and orientation and career guidance services are functional in HEI,
 - The number of scientific publications in internationally indexed journals by the academic staff increases by 25% every year,
-

²¹ Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p. 18.

²² Ibid, 19.

²³ Ibid, 94.

- Until 2018 the legal infrastructure for higher education is reviewed and completed,
- By 2020 begins the implementation of the performance-based funding formula for higher education,
- Mobility of academic staff and HEI students is increased, and
- Participation in international programs for higher education and scientific research is increased.²⁴

Indicators to serve as the measure of achieving this objective are: the number of students per 100,000 inhabitants, percentage of persons aged 30-34 with higher education, gender parity index in higher education, "survival" rate, professor-student ratio, increased number of papers in indexed journals in Scopus and Web of Science, number of students enrolled in doctoral programs in the country, number of students receiving scholarships to pursue doctoral studies abroad, total number of realized professional development hours, number of students in EQF level 5 programs, number of months of mobility for academic staff, number of months of mobility for students, teaching mobility in higher education, percentage of study programs conducted in the language English.²⁵

Since, at this point we are focused only on scientific research and not on other indicators of higher education, below are listed the measures expected to be undertaken:

-
- in the framework of the result «Mechanisms for professional development of academic staff in HEI are fully functional» the establishment and functionalisation of teaching excellence offices²⁶. Meanwhile, the development of professional capacities of staff in the offices for teaching excellence, namely organisation of a three-day seminar in Kosovo with international experts, is envisaged²⁷;
 - in the framework of the result «Teaching infrastructure and technology, research-scientific and artistic work is advanced» the assessment of teaching and research-scientific work infrastructure needs, institutional support to develop research-scientific infrastructure, drafting of plans to maintain and update laboratory equipment²⁸. Whereas in the framework of these activities, the opening of three new laboratories for lessons and research-scientific work is envisaged for 2018, and in 2019 the opening of two such laboratories.

²⁴ Ibid, 96.

²⁵ SPEK Action Plan 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p. 41.

²⁶ Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p.97.

²⁷ SPEK Action Plan 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p. 42.

²⁸ Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017 – 2021, MESTI, fq.98.

- Also, the drafting of the regulation to use, maintain, and update laboratory equipment, train academic and administrative staff throughout the years 2018-2020 (one seminar per year) to use laboratories,²⁹
- in the framework of the result «Number of scientific papers in internationally indexed journals by the academic staff is expected to increase by 25% each year» the analysis of research activities of the academic staff, developing action plans for research-scientific activity, supporting publication of scientific papers in indexed journals and presenting results in international conferences, creating a national register of scientific researchers³⁰. Whereas in the framework of these activities, the assessment of research activity of the academic staff in public HEI, the drafting of the National Science Program (NSP), namely the organisation of three workshops, the drafting of action plans for public HEI for research-scientific activity, namely the organisation of three workshops, support for participation in international conferences (50 grants, including travel, accommodation and quotation expenses) throughout 2017-2021, supporting research and publication of scientific papers (50 mobility grants, 10 publication grants, 20 small research projects grants) throughout 2017-2021, developing a database of scientific researchers, are envisaged³¹, and
- in the framework of the result «Increased participation in international higher education and scientific research programs» support to apply in European programs on higher education and scientific research, and promotion of European programs on higher education and scientific research³². Whereas in the framework of these activities, the creation of a fund to support project=applications with the European programs Erasmus+ and Horizon2020 (10 grants) throughout 2017-2021 and the organisation of 10 info-sessions (2017-2021) for the academic staff and students on the opportunities, conditions, and financial aspects of applying in EU framework programs³³ is envisaged.

Scientific research also takes a relatively important part in the Strategic Plans of the University of Prishtina. It is mentioned in the University Mission, and further in the strategic areas of focus and strategic initiatives of the Strategic Plan of the UP, such as: teaching, research, service which is expected to increase the research results of academic staff in internationally accepted competitive journals in their field, and accreditation and quality control which provides for the creation of a scholarship fund for short-term research visits abroad, increased and improved research results at the UP.

²⁹ Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017 - 2021, MESTI, fq.100.

³⁰ SPEK Action Plan 2017 - 2021, MESTI, p. 46-47.

³¹ Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017 - 2021, MESTI, fq.102.

³³ SPEK Action Plan 2017 - 2021, MESTI, p.50.

In the framework of the strategic focus area «Teaching, research, service» the following strategic initiatives related to scientific research are mentioned³⁴:

Strategic initiative: Increase faculty research results in internationally approved competitive journals in their fields and provide professional development and support in research methodology, statistical analysis, journal writing and publication cost as needed, and

Goal 1: Implement the Research Center with staff and funds.

Tasks/activities:

-
- The faculty to go through mandatory training for research development,
 - The faculty to establish and plan how to meet the international standard for their discipline, and
 - Develop cooperation in the field of research and teaching with UP colleagues and other global universities.
-

Measures:

-
- Meet the set training deadlines / standards,
 - Set standards, and
 - Measure the basic productivity of the research result and measure the achievements (to be measured in comparison with the global standards in each discipline).
-

Goal 2: In 5 years increase the verifiable publications of all regular faculty do they can compete with global standards for faculty in their respective study areas.

Goal 3: Build research competence so the faculty learns and models research for their students.

Measures:

-
- Meet the set training deadlines / standards,
 - Set standards, and
 - Measure the basic productivity of the research result and measure the achievements (to be measured in comparison with the global standards in each discipline).
-

³⁴ Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina, UP, p. 20 – 21.

Whereas in the framework of the strategic focus area «Accreditation and quality control» the strategic initiative «Improving and increasing research results at the UP», which has the following objective is mentioned:

-
- Encourage the inclusion of diaspora capacities in research / arts and development activities, and
 - Drafting and implementation of three-year plans for scientific research / art activities at UP.

Whereas the Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina 2020-2022, in the framework of the strategic area «Research scientific/artistic work» envisages the following objectives³⁵:

- Increasing the research-scientific / artistic results of the academic staff in internationally accepted competitive journals in their field,
 - Providing professional development and support in research methodology, statistical analysis, journal writing, journals and the cost of publication as needed,
 - Increasing opportunities for the realization of works and services that are a source of university income, and
 - Creating conditions for scientific activities in cooperation with international institutions.
-

³⁵ Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina 2020 – 2022, UP, p. 17

Inclusion

Numerous international studies (including from OECD and UNESCO) demonstrate that the more inclusive education systems are more successful in developing child and youth competencies. This has been confirmed also by the results of the international test PISA, where the best results come from countries like Finland, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and others, which provide similar quality and services in all parts of the country. The application of the principle of inclusion in education, paves the road towards social emancipation, including all without any gender, racial, socio-economic, etc.

The National Development Strategy 2016-2021 deems inclusion as necessary not only because it is a precondition for social justice and cohesion but also because as such, it enables greater and more sustainable economic growth.³⁷

With regards to the Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017-2021, when inclusion is mentioned, it mainly implies the lower education levels and less so the higher education. **The main challenges related to inclusion are**³⁸:

- Low level of involvement in preschool education,
- Non-functioning of the licensing system and monitoring of private preschool education institutions,
- Insufficient inclusion in education of children with special needs,
- Low inclusion in education of children from marginalized groups, and
- The phenomenon of school dropout still present.

Participation and inclusion represent the first strategic objective of this Strategic Plan. The central problem in this strategic objective is the low participation in preschool education. The best way to solve this problem would be to build a significant number of specialized preschool institutions, which implies an increase in capital expenditures and the creation of hundreds of jobs in the public sector.³⁹ **Expected results in the framework of this objective are:**

- Inclusion in quality preschool education reaches out to 20% of children aged 0-5,
- All children under the age of five are included in quality preschool education,
- 50% of children with special needs are included in the preuniversity education system,

³⁷ National Development Strategy 2016 – 2021, OPOM, p. 5.

³⁸ Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p. 22.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 40.

- Inclusion of children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in primary education has increased by 10%, while in lower and upper secondary education by 20%,
 - All repatriated children are involved in the education system and the mechanisms for organizing learning in the diaspora are strengthened,
 - There are mechanisms and programs to identify and support children with extraordinary intellectual potential and special talents in the academic, creative and artistic fields, and
 - There are effective mechanisms and policies in place to promote diversity through an integrated education system.⁴⁰
-

On the other hand the Strategic Plans of the University of Prishtina 2017-2019 and 2020-2022 do not have any strategic objective or concrete measure for inclusion of all vulnerable groups in the country, including ethnic groups, persons with disabilities, and others.

⁴⁰Ibid, p. 43.

Linking study programs with the labour market

Linking study programs to the job market is a XXI century requirement. If in the past, for various reasons, the completion of schooling, especially university education, provided jobs for the graduates. Due to many factors this has now changed. Therefore, it is very important that the focus of all relevant actors is on this type of interconnection.

The best linkage between the education system and labour market is mentioned in the National Strategy for Development 2016-2021 and as concrete activities of this measure are:

- Expediting the process of developing professional standards in compliance with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and the revised National System for the Classification of Professions,
- Defining higher priority areas in VET consulting the development policies in Kosovo and priority sectors. The development and implementation of core curricula in a modular format, as per the priority VET areas and the realization of the training program for VET teachers for those sectors, based on the occupational standards,
- Implementation of the combined pilot system of VET with elements of dual learning (combination of learning in schools and enterprises) starting with the priority areas in VET and following the core curriculum. The wage subsidy system will be coordinated with priority areas, in order to enable better integration of VET graduates in the labor market,
- Development and implementation of the National Skills Needs Forecasting System. This will be done by linking the in-school career guidance system and employment/lifelong learning services, and
- Linking research work in universities with industry through the approach of smart specializations in line with the Europe 2020 strategy. This means public and private investment in research and development (R&D) in a number of industrial sectors.⁴¹

Whereas, SPEK 2017 – 2021 considers linking the labour market with the education system as mainly a part of the strategic objective «Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education». Meanwhile, the University of Prishtina dedicates in its Strategic Plans a special attention to this indicator. In the framework of the strategic area of SPEK 2017-2019 «Levels/programs in market demand» the following strategic initiatives are listed, along with the strategic objectives, activities, and their measures⁴²:

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- Implement diploma programs in line with market needs, together with another strategic initiative; conduct market analysis to identify which programs are relevant to market needs; provide guidance and structure on what degrees are needed to meet employment needs in Kosovo. The activities are foreseen to be: establishment of advisory committees in specific industries within the framework of UP academic units, cooperation with the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, institutionalization of internship programs as part of curricula, legal basis, and others. Whereas, some of the foreseen measures of these activities are: creation and approval of the legal basis for the establishment of advisory groups, creation of an advisory committee from each faculty, support / training of each faculty for organizing internships as part of the curriculum, implementation of practice from each study program as part of the curriculum of each subject, implementation of professional programs in accordance with market demand, review of programs that do not conform to the needs of the labour market (reduction of existing programs 10% by reallocating resources to adequate interdisciplinary programs), and
 - Develop measurable results of the program, whose strategic objective is to seek development of the program level according to the needs of the labour market. Its activities are: implementation of labor market studies, use of strategies of the Ministry of Labour and other government strategies, use of external labour market forecasts (EU, USAID, GIZ) in order to absorb funds. Some of the measures of these activities are: development of mechanisms for implementation of the study of labour market requirements, use of existing external market studies, preparation of reports on the results of market studies, preparation of reports / documents showing the orientations of the labour market.
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⁴² Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina 2017 – 2019, UP, p. 46 – 48.

Meanwhile, the SPEK 2020-2022 envisages the following strategic initiatives in the framework of the strategic area «Levels/programs in market demand»:

-
- Achievement of competencies in line with market demands,
 - Development of study programs with the development of information technology,
 - Development of study programs in accordance with the requirements of the region and beyond, and
 - Increase cooperation with the wider public and private sector.⁴³
-

⁴³ Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina 2020 – 2022, UP, p. 53 – 58.

Accreditation

Accreditation is a process of evaluating study programs offered by public university faculties and not only for students of the Republic of Kosovo. In Kosovo there are two bodies dealing with the accreditation process: the Kosovo Accreditation Agency and the State Quality Council.

Strengthening the examination, inspection and accreditation functions in the education system is one of the measures envisaged to be taken by the National Development Strategy 2017-2021. Concrete activities of this measure, related to accreditation, are envisaged:

- Increase the capacity of the National Quality Council to implement the European Standard Guidelines and recommendations of ENQA/EQAR, and complete the accreditation with a more comprehensive program ranking process according to the European Multidimensional Framework, and
- Improve the quality of autonomy and accountability of accredited institutions through the development and expansion of the capacities of the Accreditation Authorities (KAA and NQA).⁴⁴

A review of the existing study programs in HEI is envisaged within this to reflect the demands of the labor market. HEI will establish specialized groups for research and evaluation of labour market demand according to the respective fields. Also, all new study programs will have to prove adaptation to the needs of the labour market as a legal prerequisite for their accreditation, through studies conducted according to the standards set by KAA.⁴⁵

Also, accreditation and quality assurance is a strategic area of SPEK 2017-2019, which envisages to achieve these results:

- Improve teaching and learning to achieve better learning outcomes,
- Increase the quality of academic staff, student progress, course evaluation and overall results,
- Develop and implement a system for measuring student results,
- Establish a scholarship fund for short-term research visits abroad,
- Develop doctoral programs at the University of Prishtina in accordance with the

⁴⁴ National Development Strategy 2016 – 2021, OPM, p. 15.

⁴⁵ Strategic Plan of Education in Kosovo 2017 – 2021, MESTI, p. 99.

- Increase and improve research results at UP,
 - Strengthen the university's relationship with the world of work and civil society, and
 - Institutionalise student involvement in quality assurance⁴⁶.
-

SPEK 2020-2022, in the framework of the same strategic area, envisages to achieve the following results:

- Improve teaching and learning to achieve better learning outcomes and increase interest in the knowledge provided,
 - Increase the quality of academic staff, student progress, course evaluation and overall results,
 - Establish a scholarship fund for short-term research visits abroad,
 - Develop doctoral programs aimed at English language and in accordance with the Bologna system,
 - Increase and improve scientific and research results at UP,
 - Strengthen the university's relations with the labor market and the community,
 - Institutionalise student involvement in quality assurance, and
 - Design and implement key indicators of academic performance (KPI-A)⁴⁷
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⁴⁶ Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina 2017 – 2019, UP, p. 16.

⁴⁷ Strategic Plan of the University of Prishtina 2020 – 2022, UP, p. 17.

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INDICATORS THROUGH QUALITY RESEARCH

The degree to which the abovementioned indicators are implemented can be measured only by evaluating their implementation in practice. Influenced by several technical factors but mostly by the COVID-19 pandemic, to measure the implementation of the strategic objectives and the envisaged measures we have taken as samples three UP faculties: Faculty of Electric and Computer Engineering, Faculty of Philosophy and Faculty of Education. For this matter, we conducted interviews with the deans of these faculties.

Inter-institutional discussion is one of the key factors in the process of drafting strategic plans. Practices so far show that the drafting of these plans has always gone from top to bottom, therefore many of the measures envisaged to be taken have failed. It is an immediate and more than necessary requirement for strategic planning to take place from the bottom up, ie to receive recommendations from all academic units of public universities on where to act. We asked the deans about this issue during our interviews and all three answered that direct communication with MESTI was lacking, while UP during the drafting of the Strategic Plan received some recommendations from them. Also of special importance is the assessment of the situation before the drafting of the Strategic Plan. This is especially true for UP Strategic Plans. From the interviews with the deans, we have concluded that there is a large gap between the planning, monitoring and practical implementation of the planned interventions. It should be noted that, unlike the PSUP, the KESP has gone through a monitoring process. Thus, starting from this premise of the existence of a gap between planning and implementation in practice, we saw fit to ask the deans what they would change and what they would include in the strategic planning for their Academic Unit. The Dean of the Faculty of Education, Mr. Blerim Saqipi said he «has the faculty development plan as this is required by the accreditation process», the Dean of the Faculty of Electric and Computer Engineering, Mr. Isak Shabani said «we sorely lack the PR aspect, the establishment of a Quality Office within the Academic Unit and increasing our IT staff, thus establishing an IT Office. Also, the reorganisation of the administration», whereas the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Mr. Dashamir Bërxulli said «the primary thing in this is to decentralise executive competencies of the academic units, namely the deans.»

The above chapters mention the relevance of transparency and accountability and the necessity of respecting these two criteria in higher education. The University of Prishtina (UP), according to the website research we conducted, but also from the information received from the deans we interviewed, has marked a significant increase in transparency. Decisions, regulations, announcements, strategic plan and other documents of UP are published on its website. The three interviewed deans also agree that there is an increase in transparency.

In addition to the above, one of the points of KESP includes the improvement of the infrastructural condition of educational facilities. It is also very important to know if the equipment is made with a scientific laboratory or library. On this issue, the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Mr. Blerim Saqipi told us that «the building of our faculty is new, now 10 years, so we do not need much investment, we need more maintenance. There have been some very small laboratory equipment at very limited values that have been brought in recent years, and investments in technology have been made mainly through donations», the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Mr. Dashmir Bërxulli said that «with the World Bank project we have ensured the façade of the building and the new windows, as well as we have a budget forecast for some renovations of the halls. In terms of library and laboratory, in the last four years there has been no investment, while earlier yes. We also have plans for the future,» while the Dean of FIEK, Mr. Isak Shabani said that «there have been investments and we are in the process of investments. Also, the equipment with laboratories has been done and at the moment we have four projects under implementation».

A very important indicator of higher education is scientific research too. Although the latter, according to KESP, is not fully integrated into the usual activities of public educational institutions in Kosovo. The main reason for such non-integration, according to the dean of FIEK, Mr. Isak Shabani, is the lack of institutes and not joint, but individual scientific work. The Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Mr. Dashmir Bërxulli explains that «UP is more oriented towards teaching than science.» He recommends that «doctoral students should be part of the university staff, as long as they are within the university.» «Anyone who is doing a doctorate should teach here and do research with students and professors.» For the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Mr. Blerim Saqipi are two main reasons: «the first is the non-existent mechanism of proper financing. So, universities should receive funds for science, as for teaching. The second is the internal mechanism at the level of UP. So, in a way, within the work tasks, the staff must have a mandatory percentage of commitment to produce science.» Regarding the level of scientific research work within these academic units, the situation is improving.

In the Faculty of Education, according to Dean Saqipi, about 40 works have been completed within a year and a half. In FIEK, according to Dean Shabani, several projects are being implemented, but there is also an orientation for scientific research. Whereas, in the Faculty of Philosophy, according to Dean Bërxulli, there is an increase of publications in SCOPUS per professor. From what we noticed during the research, a very positive impetus in motivating the academic staff for scientific publications, has been the Regulation on Financing of Publications brought by the University of Prishtina (UP). Regarding scientific research, a very important issue is the cooperation with the Diaspora and the use of assistance that can come from the Diaspora. The Scientific Seminar held with the Albanian Diaspora in the fields of Electrical and Computer Engineering, organized by FIEK, followed this spirit. While, regarding the mechanisms for professional development of the academic staff, the deans mentioned some basic teaching trainings, which of course are not enough. More needs to be done on this. Linking study programs to the labor market is among the most common requirements mentioned by many higher education stakeholders. This issue was among our main concerns that we discussed with the deans and asked to know more. The Dean of the Faculty of Education, Mr. Saqipi, told us that «in our country this is quite simple, because we are guided by the legal regulations approved by the MEST and we remain faithful to this.» The Dean of FIEK, z. Shabani said that «the study programs offered by the faculty are very much in line with the demands of the labor market,» while the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Mr. Bërxulli told us that «we try to link study programs with the labor market, given where they can be employed. In some departments we have 83% employed in the profession, e.g. in psychology, while in some other departments it is difficult to change the curriculum at any time.» In addition to liaison with the labor market it is important to know the mobility of students and academic staff. In FIEK, according to Dean Shabani, the mobility of students and academic staff is carried out. The Faculty of Education, according to Dean Saqipi, has had three agreements negotiated with the faculties of Education in Europe, agreements which include 30 students and 10 to 15 professors. Whereas, the Faculty of Philosophy, according to Dean Bërxulli, has some ERASMUS agreements which have been used by the students of this faculty. It should be noted that the mobility agreements of the academic staff and students are managed at the Rectorate level and all students have access to them to apply and then follow the following recruitment procedures. Just as important as student mobility is the professional practice performed during studies. Therefore, we received information from the deans whether the students of these faculties do professional internship during their studies and thus we were

informed that the students of the Faculty of Education have mandatory internships within the curricula and all do it, the students of the Faculty of Philosophy do internships in institutions that are related to the study programs offered by this faculty, such as: Center for Social Work, various ministries, clinics, etc., while FIEK students have professional practice in special subjects during their studies, as well as an internship.

A very important principle to be observed by the academic units is the principle of inclusion. Therefore, we were interested to find out whether the academic units have students with special needs and from non-majority communities, as well as whether the facilities for students with special needs meet the conditions. The Dean of the Faculty of Education, Mr. Blerim Saqipi, said «we have students from non-majority communities, but not many. Even last year, not all the quotas provided for students from non-majority communities were met.» While, for students with special needs, the Dean said that «the facility meets the conditions, we have access for wheelchairs and we have the elevator". The Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Mr. Dashamir Bërxulli, said that «We have students from non-majority communities». As for students with special needs, he added: «We have students with special needs, and while we cannot meet much the conditions for these students, they come with someone to the faculty. We are not satisfied because we have not thought in this direction and we do not have funds. The Faculty of Philosophy has no records of these students. The Dean of FIEK, Mr. Isak Shabani said that «we have students from non-majority communities", while for students with special needs he said that «the facility meets the conditions: the entrance works, also the elevator, but there are no students declared as such».

The last indicator we examined was accreditation. We received information from the academic units about the latest accreditation process and in principle the impressions were positive. The Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy, Mr. Dashamir Bërxulli told us that «this year 9 programs were accredited: 3 in Bachelor, 6 in Masters, 2 programs are accredited for 5 years, while the others for 3 years. Courses, assessment methods, syllabi, etc., have changed in the re-accredited programs.» The Dean of the Faculty of Education, Mr. Blerim Saqipi, explained that «we had 15 programs, of which 1 program was not accredited, and for which we agreed with some remarks, but we think that the experts did not understand well the relevance of this program: pedagogy for vocational schools. This master's program was requested by MESTI, but the expert said that such a program does not exist anywhere in the world.» Whereas, the Dean of FIEK, Mr. Isak Shabani said that «we have applied with 8 programs, of which 6 have been approved, 1 has not been approved and 1 is in the process of accreditation. The Electro-energetics Program is not accredited and the expert report is public. All programs have changed in name and content, in line with modern and contemporary programs».

RECOMMENDATIONS

After analysing all the documents, we conducted interviews and field meetings, during ongoing consultations and discussions with the reviewer and consultant of this report, prof. Xhavit Rexhaj. we have come to the conclusion that the recommendations should be as follows:

On the country local:

Ensuring coherence and standardization of the approach to strategic planning is required. The Office for Strategic Planning in the Office of the Prime Minister may be responsible for coordinating these efforts. This standardization can be standardized in accordance with the planning guidelines contained in the handbook of this office on the government website. Standardization would mean:

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- planning methodology and approach,
 - providing information,
 - coherence between strategic goals and objectives at different levels, and
 - key planning terminology and concepts and others.
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Inter-institutional cooperation (vertical and horizontal) should be ensured to enable coherence of goals and approaches in planning. This would provide synergy of effort instead of overlap and collision between them.

On the sectorial level: MESTI

At the MESTI level, better liaison and coordination with subordinate institutions in the education sector should be ensured. This can be achieved through comprehensive participation in the planning process, the development of joint monitoring methodologies and mechanisms (especially for the implementation of the funding segment) and the development of an integrated or complementary database in the education sector.

On the institutional level: University of Prishtina

- A thorough review of the 2020-2022 strategy is suggested (to better coordinate with relevant government and ministry plans),
 - Drafting a unique Plan at the UP level and extensive participation in the planning process is recommended. Academic units would be required to draft annual action plans,
 - Standardisation of the Framework, the mechanism and building the capacities for monitoring the implementation of the Plan,
 - Ensure increased transparency for the implementation of the plan both inside and outside the HEI institution,
 - Achieve the organic connection of the Plan's measures with the budget and accreditation, as required in the relevant legal and sub-legal provisions, and
 - KESP could serve as a model for drafting the Strategic Plan of higher education institutions.
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Also, a number of very useful recommendations have emerged from the roundtable discussion held on 21 September 2021. Some of them are listed below:

- HEI and authorities should engage in proper planning processes and not in formal planning,
 - Planning should be done based on real situation assessment. The real situation assessment should have an increased participation rate in all planning bodies,
 - To have coherence and convergence between the planning on different levels as well as a unique strategic plan at the level of HEI and then operationalization of the same in the operational plans. Clarify the level and form of planning. Special mechanisms for monitoring and implementation of strategic plans at relevant levels should be provided,
 - Strategic data-driven planning should be done, because there can be no proper planning without relevant, accurate and reliable data, and
 - We should focus more on scientific work based on authentic scientific projects and on the development of institutional capacities-scientific institutes in academic units.
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- [5] National Development Strategy (SKZH) 2016-2021, OPM;

STRATEGIES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION AREA IN KOSOVO

