

# Strengthen Integrity and Combat Corruption in Higher Education

## BASELINE ASSESSMENT OF INTEGRITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION



Working together to improve quality of higher education

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**“Strengthen Integrity and Combat Corruption in Higher Education”**

**HORIZONTAL FACILITY  
FOR WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY**

**BASELINE ASSESSMENT OF  
INTEGRITY  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION  
IN KOSOVO\***

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\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Baseline Assessment of Integrity in Higher Education in Kosovo is organised into eight Sections:

- Section 1** Introduction, including General Approaches, Methodologies and Use of Other Work
- Section 2** Domestic Policies on Anti-Corruption
- Section 3** Government Approaches to Higher Education (HE): Strategy and the Law
- Section 4** Public Debate about the Integrity of the University of Pristina
- Section 5** The Public Universities in Other Cities
- Section 6** Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- Section 7** The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA)
- Section 8** Conclusions and Next Steps

Section 1 sets the context for the mission undertaken in Kosovo by the experts for the Council of Europe (CoE), and explains that the 'Baseline Assessment of Integrity in Higher Education in Kosovo' is the first output of the joint European Union (EU)/CoE project on 'Strengthening Integrity and Combating Corruption in Higher Education in Kosovo'. Section 1 also outlines the methodology of the baseline assessment, and emphasises the importance of considering the possible connections between the current EU/CoE joint project and other related international projects in Kosovo.

Section 2 reviews the relationship between Kosovar Government overall strategies and action plans on anti-corruption and any specific focus within these on strengthening integrity and combating corruption in HE. This Section finds that the treatment of HE within overall anti-corruption strategies and action plans should be enhanced.

Sections 3 and 4 combine to present a particularly important line of argument. Section 3 analyses official evidence suggesting the Kosovar Government and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) have generally prepared a positive planning and legal framework for the appropriate development of the HE system. However, Section 4 then reviews a range of evidence from other stakeholders, and concludes that there is a very significant 'dissonance' between the positive 'official narrative' of Kosovar HE development and the 'counter narrative' of other stakeholders which highlights major 'negative' issues and concerns, especially over the University of Pristina. Recommendations are made for addressing this 'dissonance'.

Most of the analysis in Section 4 centres on the University of Pristina. Section 5 moves on to consider the public Universities in other cities. This Section concludes that there is a positive case for these Universities, although recommendations are also made on what should be done to make them a sustained success.

Section 6 reviews the position of private HEIs in Kosovo. It concludes that there are contradictory views on the quality and integrity of private HEIs, and actions are recommended to address quality issues.

Section 7 focuses on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA). This Section recognises the potential for the KAA to make a very important contribution to the positive development of the Kosovar HE system. However, actions are recommended to strengthen the KAA.

Section 8 contains some brief comments on 'Conclusions and Next Steps', particularly re-emphasising the crucial importance of the Kosovar authorities addressing the 'dissonance' between 'official narratives' and 'counter narratives' on the Kosovar HE system (especially on the University of Pristina), as detailed in Sections 3 and 4.

The rest of this Executive Summary essentially comprises a repeat of the Recommendations from Sections 1 to 7 of the baseline assessment (where the Recommendations also appear in bold within the appropriate parts of the main text).

### **Recommendations from Section 1 (on Introduction, including General Approaches, Methodologies and Use of Other Work)**

#### **Recommendation 1(a):**

In implementing activities of the joint EU/CoE 'Strengthening Integrity and Combating Corruption in Higher Education in Kosovo' project, there must be the fullest possible discussions with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that the project's activities add distinctive new value to, and avoid unhelpful duplication with, the outputs of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Learning 'Transformational Leadership Scholarships and Partnerships Program' and also any relevant outputs of the World Bank Project on 'Kosovo Education System Improvement'.

#### **Recommendation 1(b):**

The project should maintain liaison with the joint EU/CoE Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK), especially to ensure that the current project approaches Kosovar Government and Anti-Corruption Agency policies and procedures fully aware of any overall insights from the PECK project.

### **Recommendations from Section 2 (on Domestic Policies on Anti-Corruption)**

#### **Recommendation 2:**

In developing the next Kosovo Anti-Corruption Strategy, and associated Action Plans, from 2017, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo and the Kosovo Anti-Corruption Agency) must ensure that there are enhanced clear links between overall Government anti-corruption policy and action points for strengthening integrity and combating corruption in HE specifically.

The coverage of action points for HE must be comprehensive. These should include clarifying the role of the Anti-Corruption Agency in addressing corruption risks associated with academic plagiarism in the appointment of academic staff. A clear legal basis should be established for any such roles identified for the Anti-Corruption Agency.

Under the leadership of its new Director, the Anti-Corruption Agency should be well-resourced to implement appropriate action points within the next Anti-Corruption Strategy, and associated Action Plans, including all those identified for HE specifically.

### **Recommendations from Section 3 (on Government Approaches to Higher Education [HE]: Strategy and the Law)**

#### **Recommendation 3(a):**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MEST], the Kosovo Accreditation Agency [KAA], and the leadership of public HEIs) must ensure that the many positive features of the 'Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021' relating to HE are implemented fully. In particular, this applies to all the 'Possible activities' specified in par.7.1.1 to par.7.11.4 at pp.79-83 of the Strategic Plan.

#### **Recommendation 3(b):**

On the other hand, these same Kosovar authorities should certainly enhance and supplement the Strategic Plan's current treatment of specific approaches to strengthening integrity and combating corruption in HE.

For example, this should include ensuring that Ethics Committees within HEIs address all aspects of ethical behaviour by staff and students thoroughly and robustly, not just those relating to research ethics more narrowly.

This should also include developing comprehensive and transparent approaches to the fair recruitment and development of HE staff, and enforcing these approaches consistently and robustly.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Minister of Education, Science and Technology and MEST, the KAA, the State Council of HE [SCHE], and the leadership of public HEIs) must ensure that the 'Draft Law on Higher Education, October 2015' is enacted and implemented fully as the underpinning basis for a range of positive developments in Kosovar HE. For example, it will be essential that the criteria for the designation of HEIs (Chapter III, Article 8), and the criteria for academic appointments (Chapter VII, Article 27), are applied rigorously in practice.

#### **Recommendation 5:**

On the other hand, these same Kosovar authorities should give further consideration to a number of aspects of the Draft Law after its enactment, as they continue to progress the HE system. These aspects include:-

- (a) potential issues around how independent the State Council is from the Minister and Government (see Chapter IV, Article 12, par.2.14)
- (b) potential issues with Ministerial appointments to the Board of public HEIs constraining HEI independence from Government (see Chapter VI, Article 22, par.5)
- (c) whether the role of Senate in appointing Rectors actually presents a risk to achieving progressive leadership in public HEIs (see Chapter VI, Article 23, par.4 and Article 24, par.5-8)
- (d) the need for full integrity in the 'listing' process of academic journals judged appropriate when journal publications are being considered for academic appointments (see Chapter VII, Article 27, par.3.2)
- (e) whether the research dimensions of HE are better addressed comprehensively in the main Law on Higher Education, rather than in a separate Law on 'Scientific-Research Activities' (see Chapter VIII, Article 29, par.4)
- (f) ensuring that the conditional language of Chapter XI, Article 48, par. 3 ('may be closed', not 'must be closed') does not lead to any failure to close 'unsatisfactory' private HEIs

#### **Recommendations from Section 4 (on Public Debate about the Integrity of the University of Pristina)**

#### **Recommendation 6:**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) must address the dissonance between the overall 'official narrative' from these authorities, which presents a generally positive picture of a University and HE system moving forward, and the 'counter narrative' from many other key stakeholders, including students but especially wider civic society, e.g. as represented by prominent NGOs, which presents a much more negative and critical view.

In doing this, the Kosovar Government must initiate an open and honest Kosovo-wide discussion about the issues which other stakeholders identify as threatening the integrity of the Kosovar HE system, and the University of Pristina specifically. This discussion must involve the relevant Kosovar authorities being transparent about problems, and providing opportunities for other stakeholders to

present their views without fear of intimidation. These Kosovar authorities must be seen to listen to, and act upon, well-evidenced views of other stakeholders.

This open and honest discussion must cover the range of issues which have been highlighted in Section 4 of this baseline assessment about the overall governance and public attitude to the University of Pristina, and about more particular aspects of its staffing and teaching & learning environment. Recommendations 7 to 12 below should be seen as contributions to this discussion.

**Recommendation 7:**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) must address the criticism that the University of Pristina is a vehicle for 'politicised' and 'clan' control and advancement, including concerns that this also affects student representation.

This should involve developing a more transparent and participatory system of governance in which all staff are committed to the academic mission of the University, rather than any political or 'clan' interests and advancement.

This should also involve developing a culture of student representation in which student representatives are motivated to further the interests of their fellow students, rather than any narrow political or 'clan' interests. This form of student representation will be facilitated by ensuring that student representatives on Senate are chosen in a fully democratic way. It may also be facilitated by giving student representatives sabbaticals, so that they have time to represent students fully and appropriately.

**Recommendation 8:**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) must address the public loss of confidence in the overall validity and reliability of the University of Pristina's academic awards because of the widespread belief that the overall academic integrity of the University is undermined by senior staff obtaining advancement on the basis of inappropriate claims about their published work (e.g., work which is plagiarised, appears in non-refereed 'predatory' or 'fake' open access journals etc.).

Therefore, academic appointments and promotions at the University must be based purely on merit, not political or personal connection.

In particular, the criteria requiring publication at 'international level' must be rigorously enforced to ensure that publications are in reputable peer-reviewed international journals, and are free of plagiarism and 'false' claims of authorship.

More generally on the risks of academic staff plagiarism within their Albanian-language work, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, and MEST) should provide resources to develop a robust Index of Albanian publications and Albanian anti-plagiarism software.

**Recommendation 9(a):**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) should reduce intakes to the University of Pristina until appropriate academic staff:student ratios are achieved equitably across all Faculties.

**Recommendation 9(b):**

These same Kosovar authorities should review the contractual teaching expectations and salary payments of academic staff at the University of Pristina, particularly Professors and other senior staff.



Especially given financial pressures on public budgets and the overall teaching demands from high student intakes, there should be an increase in the number of hours academic staff are expected to teach before they receive additional payments.

The employment of all University of Pristina academic staff, without exception, should also be monitored closely by the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST and senior staff at the University of Pristina) to ensure that their commitment to the University is not being compromised by outside commitments, especially teaching at other HEIs.

**Recommendation 10:**

More generally on academic staff salaries at the University of Pristina, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) must engage in a transparent public discussion about the level of these salaries.

If academic staff salaries are in fact higher than would normally be expected by domestic and international comparison with other professional groups, the authorities must explain this, or adjust this, so that the public is assured that only appropriate, fair and transparent salaries are being awarded.

**Recommendation 11:**

The University of Pristina should engage in on-going fundamental review and development of its teaching and learning approaches, including its assessment methods.

In particular, this review should involve moving to assessment which tests for creative and analytical knowledge, rather than lower-order rote learning.

Such assessment developments should be associated with secure approaches to avoid cheating and plagiarism. For example, as already mentioned in Recommendation 8 above, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo and MEST), should provide resources to develop Albanian anti-plagiarism software. This will be particularly important for preventing student plagiarism in the increased number of assignments and dissertations which are likely within new assessment approaches.

The unsatisfactory position should be addressed where students appear to be able to re-attend or re-sit after failing assessments, with no limit to the number or length of time involved.

**Recommendation 12:**

In addition to the techniques for preventing cheating and plagiarism mentioned in Recommendation 11 above, the University of Pristina should look to an enhanced and strengthened role for a Code of Ethics and a Council of Ethics/Ethics Committee as means to ensuring the ethical behaviours of all staff and students. Robust sanctions should be developed for breaches of the Code of Ethics.

This approach should address all potential risks of 'vulgar corruption' in the relationship between academic staff and students, such as the receiving or giving of bribes, or 'indirect' methods such as academic staff requiring students to purchase their textbooks or attend additional classes for payment.

The Code of Ethics should cover both staff and student behaviour, and should be developed in a participatory way which gives all staff and students a sense of ownership. Similarly, the Council of Ethics/Ethics Committee should function in a way which is seen as fair and transparent by all staff and students.

As indicated in Recommendation 15 below, there should be development of a model for this type of powerful Code of Ethics. The University of Pristina should collaborate with the other public Universities in this development.

### **Recommendations from Section 5 (on The Public Universities in Other Cities)**

#### **Recommendation 13:**

While recognising that the location of public Universities in other cities Kosovo is justified on the basis of sufficient population in their areas and their provision of local access for students who would find a commute to Pristina impracticable, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the other public Universities) must ensure that each University is genuinely viable as a University.

In particular, these Kosovar authorities must ensure that each University:-

- (a) has a sufficient number of students to guarantee a vibrant university community
- (b) has a sufficiently broad range of academic subjects and programmes to achieve healthy academic synergies and appropriate interdisciplinary collaboration across disciplines
- (c) can provide programmes which meet the needs of its local community in a coherent way
- (d) has a sufficient number of appropriately qualified staff to deliver each of its programmes
- (e) can achieve a sufficiently broad base of quality research activity, both to achieve international-class research outputs and to ensure all teaching is fully underpinned by research
- (f) meets the formal requirements for University status under the Law on Higher Education

#### **Recommendation 14:**

In supporting the role of public Universities in other cities within Kosovo's overall HE system, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, the Conference of Rectors, and senior staff at the University of Pristina and the other public Universities) should give serious consideration to reducing the relative size of the University of Pristina, and re-allocating some of its programmes, staffing and other resources to the other public Universities.

#### **Recommendation 15:**

These same Kosovar authorities should build upon the apparent perception that the public Universities in other cities are freer from corruption threats to their integrity than the University of Pristina. This should include the public Universities in other cities contributing to the development of a model for a powerful Code of Ethics for HE staff and students, drawing upon the work which each University has already undertaken on Codes.

### **Recommendations from Section 6 (on Private Higher Education Institutions [HEIs])**

#### **Recommendation 16:**

All relevant actors within the Kosovar education system (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency [KAA], and senior staff at the private HEIs) need to maintain vigilance over the quality of provision within the private HE sector. Where institutions are deemed to be providing either poor quality or less than full integrity they should be closed.

#### **Recommendation 17:**

The measures to ensure that academic staff hold no more than two posts must be fully and consistently implemented by the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, the

KAA, and senior staff of the public and private HEIs).

### **Recommendations from Section 7 (on The Kosovo Accreditation Agency)**

#### **Recommendation 18:**

The Government of Kosovo must provide sufficient resources and an ethos of independence for the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) to carry out its statutory role in an effective, efficient and transparently open and honest manner, thus ensuring that KAA is the principal body delivering quality assurance for the Kosovar HE system.

#### **Recommendation 19:**

To help build up the capacity of the HE quality assurance system in Kosovo, KAA should begin to make use of academic experts from Kosovo itself as part of its accreditation panels, not relying solely on international experts.

#### **Recommendation 20:**

KAA should ensure that its processes and procedures are robust and consistently applied over all institutions for an identified time period, say three years.

#### **Recommendation 21:**

KAA should work with the ENIC/NARIC office to ensure that the review of international qualifications attained by HE staff is done in a proportionate manner and within as short a timescale as possible.

## **1 - INTRODUCTION, INCLUDING GENERAL APPROACHES, METHODOLOGIES AND USE OF OTHER WORK**

### **1.1 General Approaches**

**1.1.1** This report follows a Council of Europe (CoE) mission undertaken in Kosovo by the international experts, Professor Ian Smith, Professor Tom Hamilton and Professor Azis Pollozhani, on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> November 2016. This mission was the first activity of the joint European Union (EU)/Council of Europe (CoE) project to 'Strengthen Integrity and Combat Corruption in Higher Education in Kosovo', and the current Baseline Assessment is the first output of the project. This baseline assessment has been written by Professor Smith and Professor Hamilton. Professor Pollozhani added perspectives from his specialist regional expertise and knowledge.

**1.1.2** Meetings were held with a range of Kosovar higher education (HE) stakeholders over two full days during the mission. This included meetings with: the Minister of Education, Science and Technology and senior staff from MEST; senior staff from the Anti-Corruption Agency; senior staff from the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA); senior staff from the University of Pristina; senior staff from the other public Universities; senior staff from a private college; student representatives; representatives of NGOs.

**1.1.3** In considering integrity issues within the current baseline assessment, the Council of Europe's experts will generally follow the approach adopted in other work for the Council. This approach argues that, especially for the long-term, the strengthening of integrity in education (including HE) must be based upon a full commitment to fundamental positive ethical principles and ethical behaviours in professional and public life. Essentially, integrity is then seen as the connection between positive ethical principles and quality in education.

This emphasis on the importance of the overall quality of education means the approach taken is wider than simply a narrow consideration of a deficit 'corruption' agenda and an associated set of top-down, mechanistic 'anti-corruption' measures. Of course, such measures will also have their place, especially in the short to medium term, within the development of the current joint EU/CoE project.

However, it follows from this wider approach that the experts will suggest dialogue with the Kosovar authorities and other senior Kosovar stakeholders not only on the narrower aspects of an anti-corruption agenda, but also on some wider issues seen as relevant to setting the framework for the longer-term strengthening of integrity in Kosovar HE.

The general approaches taken by the experts are expanded on in other work for the Council of Europe, for example in the documents 'Ethical Principles for Education' and 'The Ethical Behaviour of All Actors in Education', available as part of the development of the Council's Pan-European Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED) (Council of Europe 2016a,b in References).

**1.1.4** In approaching a major aspect of public life in Kosovo, such as the HE system, the experts also wish to emphasise their full respect for Kosovar society as it faces the challenges of moving forward from the difficulties of its history, especially those associated with the war of the late-1990s and its consequences. The experts wish their evaluations of Kosovar positions to be viewed in the context of this overall respect.

1.1.5 The baseline assessment is organised into Sections:

<b>Section 1</b>	Introduction, including General Approaches, Methodologies and Use of Other Work
<b>Section 2</b>	Domestic Policies on Anti-Corruption
<b>Section 3</b>	Government Approaches to Higher Education (HE): Strategy and the Law
<b>Section 4</b>	Public Debate about the Integrity of the University of Pristina
<b>Section 5</b>	The Public Universities in Other Cities
<b>Section 6</b>	Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
<b>Section 7</b>	The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA)
<b>Section 8</b>	Conclusions and Next Steps

## 1.2 Methodology of the Report

There have been essentially two methodologies for this baseline assessment.

1.2.1 Firstly, desk research has been carried out on a range of printed and online resources, including official Kosovar documents made available to the experts. All these resources are listed in the References at the end of the baseline assessment.

1.2.2 Secondly, the experts have undertaken content analysis of the series of meetings which they had with a wide range of groups of key stakeholders (see par.1.1.2 above).

## 1.3 Awareness of Other Project Work

1.3.1 In their desk research, the experts have become aware of other projects being taken forward in the area of education by the Kosovar Government in partnership with international organisations, and involving international funding. The main projects are described below, with an initial evaluation of how far they may connect to the themes of the current joint EU/CoE project. This evaluation is important to ensure that the current project avoids unhelpful overlap with other projects, and rather seeks to achieve meaningful new 'added value' to these projects.

### ***World Bank Project on 'Kosovo Education System Improvement'***

1.3.2 There is a World Bank Project on 'Kosovo Education System Improvement', running from 2015 to 2019, with overall funding of US\$ 11M. (See <http://projects.worldbank.org/P149005?lang=en>.)

There appear to be some references to universities within the Project. For example, the December 2016 document 'Kosovo Education System Improvement Project (P149005) – Implementation Status & Results Report' (see website) includes 'Rules for full financial autonomy in universities developed and approved' within the Project Development 'Results' under 'Intermediate Results Indicators'.

However, this is the only specific entry for HE within that document, either under 'Intermediate Results Indicators' or 'Project Development Objective Indicators'. In contrast, there are at least seventeen other entries which appear to relate to the pre-university school sector. In addition, the Report shows 'No rules in place' at November 2016 for 'Rules for full financial autonomy in universities developed and approved'.

In summary, there may be limited aspects of this World Bank Project which relate to HE. However, the overall scale of the World Bank Project, particularly its funding, suggests that the current joint EU/CoE project should at least continue to review the HE aspects of the World Bank Project for potential positive links.

***'Transformational Leadership Scholarships and Partnerships Program', U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Learning***

**1.3.3** There is also a very large project, 'Transformational Leadership Scholarships and Partnerships Program', funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for \$28.2M, and implemented by World Learning, running from February 2014 to February 2019.

This aims 'to help train a new generation of Kosovar leaders to drive significant change in priority economic, political and social areas' by providing scholarships for Kosovars to pursue 185 master's degrees and 160 'professional certificates' at US universities.

However, there is also mention that 'World Learning and its partners will build the capacity of the University of Pristina to prepare graduates to meet the needs of the growing economy and developing state'. (See website at <http://www.worldlearning.org/projects/transformational-leadership-scholarships-and-partnerships-program/>). Partners appear to include Arizona State University, Indiana University, the University of Minnesota and Dartmouth College. More details on 'University Partnerships' are available on the USAID website about the Program (<http://www.usaid-tlp-sp.org/En>).

Activities in 2016 seem to have included University of Pristina professors completing exchanges at US universities and US university academics visiting the University of Pristina (the focus for both of these activities being teaching methods and curricula); University of Pristina administrative staff receiving 'Leadership and Change Management' training; a symposium on enhancing education research in the University of Pristina's Faculty of Education, involving US university staff.

In summary, this suggests that the USAID/World Learning project contains significant aspects addressing the internal development of the University of Pristina. Especially given the scale of the funding involved in the USAID/World Learning project, the current joint EU/CoE project should consider possible synergies with this project.

***The Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo – PECK***

**1.3.4** In addition to these other projects relating to education, the experts have also become generally aware of a project relating to the evaluation and development of the more generic legal aspects of anti-corruption policies and procedures in Kosovo. This is the joint EU/CoE Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK), with PECK I implemented during 2012-2015, and PECK II currently ongoing. The website for PECK is available at: <http://www.coe.int/t/DGHL/cooperation/economiccrime/corruption/Projects/PECK%>

The experts understand that PECK very much focuses on aspects such as legal approaches to prevent such risks as money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The experts also understand that PECK II recent activities have included review of the Kosovar Anti-Corruption Agency around these types of legal dimensions.

In contrast, the current joint EU/CoE project will focus on the assessment of aspects more specific to the Anti-Corruption Agency's interaction with the education sector, and HE specifically. However, it may be relevant for the current project to maintain liaison with the PECK project, especially to ensure that the current project approaches Kosovar Government and Anti-Corruption Agency policies and procedures fully aware of any overall insights of the PECK project.

## **1.4 Awareness of Other Earlier International Assessments of the Kosovar Education System**

**1.4.1** In addition to other current international projects, the experts' desk research made them aware of another recent significant international assessment of the integrity of the Kosovar education system

### ***'Corruption – Risk Assessment in the Kosovo Education Sector', United Nations Development Programme 2015***

This document covers the entire education sector, not just HE, but it does raise issues specifically relevant to HE.

It identifies significant risks on the autonomy of HEIs (p.10). These include issues around budgets (pp.13, 17-18, 26-28). The risks also include those around politicization of appointments (pp.13, 27), and other issues over appointments (pp.21, 27). Student views on issues such as 'bad relationships between students and teachers; cases of sexual harassment; irregularities during exams; etc.' are raised (p.15), and other issues of 'staff behaviour' are discussed, such as 'ghost professors and absenteeism', 'obligation for students to purchase textbooks written by professors', (pp.21-22, 27). The document also talks of the need for programmes to strengthen the capacity of university administrations (p.29).

In summary, the United Nations Development Programme report opens up discussion of risks to the integrity of Kosovar HE which will be returned to much more extensively in Section 4 below. However, the report is not very extensive on recommendations for specific action in the HE sector. Indeed, the main recommendation for HE is that students should develop an e-platform on transparency issues (p.31).

### **Recommendations from Section 1 (on Introduction, including General Approaches, Methodologies and Use of Other Work)**

#### **Recommendation 1(a):**

**In implementing activities of the joint EU/CoE 'Strengthening Integrity and Combating Corruption in Higher Education in Kosovo' project, there must be the fullest possible discussions with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that the project's activities add distinctive new value to, and avoid unhelpful duplication with, the outputs of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Learning 'Transformational Leadership Scholarships and Partnerships Program' and also any relevant outputs of the World Bank Project on 'Kosovo Education System Improvement'.**

#### **Recommendation 1(b):**

**The project should maintain liaison with the joint EU/CoE Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo (PECK), especially to ensure that the current project approaches Kosovar Government and Anti-Corruption Agency policies and procedures fully aware of any overall insights from the PECK project.**

## **2 - DOMESTIC POLICIES ON ANTI-CORRUPTION**

**2.1** As an early topic within the current baseline assessment, it is important to explore the extent to which any overall Government policies and procedures on anti-corruption include a particular focus on combating corruption and strengthening integrity in education, specifically in HE.

### **Evidence from Documents**

**2.2** In Kosovo, there are a number of official documents on recent domestic anti-corruption policies and actions. Some references to education, and HE specifically, may be found in these documents. However, it is difficult to identify any comprehensive and clear link between these policies and strengthening integrity in HE.

### ***Kosovo 'Anti-Corruption Strategy 2012-2016'***

**2.3.1** The document 'Anti-Corruption Strategy 2012-2016', dated November 2011, provides interesting detail on the Kosovo Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) and aspects of the Anti-corruption Strategy, including previous involvement of a Council of Europe expert in developing this Strategy in 2011 (p.4). However, considering that the Anti-Corruption Agency indicated this document should be dated 2013-2017, there is some lack of clarity on the actual timeframe for this Strategy.

**2.3.2** However, leaving the issue of timeframe aside, it is difficult to identify any comprehensive coverage of education in this Strategy.

**2.3.3** Education is not mentioned specifically as a 'priority sector' in this document (see p.5). While there are entries of 'Ongoing Actions' for Education in the tables on implementation of the previous 2009-2011 Anti-Corruption Action Plan, these are not specified and none are listed under 'Actions performed' (see pp.11-14). In Chapter V on 'Specific objectives for priority Sectors', Education is not identified as one of the seven separate 'priority Sectors'.

**2.3.4** There are then some rather confusing references to Education within the section on 'Central Administration'. These mention that Education continues to be 'vulnerable to corruption', but that 'sector anti-corruption programs' for such particular areas are 'still lacking'. Therefore, among Objectives identified as action points in this section is 'Providing special anti-corruption measures for Health, Education, Taxation, Environment and Spatial planning sectors' (see pp.24-25).

### ***The 'Anti-Corruption Action Plan 2012-2016'***

**2.4.1** The 'Anti-Corruption Action Plan 2012-2016' begins with 'Horizontal Priorities' such as the 'General Strategy Objective' of 'Advancing the integrity of public institutions and increasing the public trust in them; further strengthening of accountability and transparency'. Associated with this General Strategy objective is the 'Specific Action-Plan Objective' of 'Creation and Implementation of Integrity Framework', and 'Actions/Measures' are identified for this to adopt 'Integrity Plans' for 'Governmental Institutions and across public sector'. Within 'Vertical Sector Priorities', under 'Central Administration', there are 'Sector Strategic Objectives' including 'Implementing ethical codes in public administration and combating nepotism'. However, again at this point in the document it is not clear how these overall public sector Objectives apply to education specifically.

**2.4.2** The document does then move on to 'Providing special anti-corruption measures for Health, Education, Taxation, Environment and Spatial planning sector'. For Education specifically, most of the 'Actions/Measures' for 'Increasing prevention of corruption in education sector' relate to the pre-university school sector. The two relating to HE are 'Ensure transparency of the process of accreditation of private higher education institutions and monitor its implementation' (Responsibility with Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MEST], the Kosovo Accreditation Agency [KAA] and Municipality), and 'Provide anti-corruption training to the staff of MEST, Municipality and University in cooperation with competent institutions for investigation and prosecution of corruption'



(Responsibility with MEST, KAA, Police, Prosecutor). These 'Actions/Measures' are certainly useful, but they do not constitute a comprehensive action plan for HE.

### ***Various Reports on Implementation of Anti-Corruption Action Plan, 2013-2017***

**2.5** The ACA website also includes 'Report on Implementation of Anti-Corruption Action Plan Period: February – May 2013' and 'Report on Implementation of Anti-Corruption Action Plan 2013-2017 for January – June 2014' (again, this second document uses the 2013-2017 dates rather than 2012-2016, as does the text of the text of the first document). Neither of these documents report on any significant specific progress in relation to Education. The first document refers to six 'Planned Actions' for MEST, all 'Unimplemented'. The second document refers to four 'Planned Activities' for MEST, all 'Unreported'.

### ***European Commission Staff Working Document: Kosovo: 2015 Report***

**2.6.1** Moving on from Kosovar Government documents, this European Commission (EC) document provides some overall assessment of the 'fight against corruption' in Kosovo (pp.15-16), but much of the discussion is very 'general', 'legal' and 'political', referring to such matters as the overall position of 'public officials', including their position on declaring property etc. (pp.15, 17).

**2.6.2** However, there is also a more focused evaluation of 'anti-corruption' approaches (p.16). On the Anti-Corruption Agency, it is identified as 'independent and specialised', but not having 'full investigative powers'. Its prevention and 'preliminary administrative investigations' are 'in line with international standards'. Mention is also made of Kosovo's Anti-Corruption Council, the Anti-Corruption Co-ordinator, the Directorate for Investigation of Economic Crimes and Corruption, but there is a comment on the 'disconnect' between these various bodies and posts.

**2.6.3** These comments are not specific to education. However, they emphasise some lack of effective coherence in overall Government anti-corruption policies. This analysis suggests that the lack of effective coherence on anti-corruption policies for education evident from the experts' own review of Government documents is mirrored by similar issues with overall Government anti-corruption policy.

### ***Summary Comments on Evidence from Documents***

**2.7** In summary, review of relevant documents indicates that the recent development of Kosovar anti-corruption policy does not show a fully comprehensive and coherent approach to combating corruption generally, and specifically in HE.

### ***Evidence from Meeting***

**2.8.1** A meeting was held with senior staff of the Anti-Corruption Agency.

**2.8.2** During the discussion, it was indicated that the Agency had tended so far to deal with education officials at the municipal level, and not so much with students or educational organisations. The Agency deals with the 'education' (presumably staff development) of Ministry officials, but not particularly the Ministry of Education. The Agency focuses on legal matters. Education is not an identified priority area yet, but there will be risk assessments and objectives for different fields, and one of these will be education. A future priority for education is likely to be education of municipal officers, but a project has not yet been approved. The Agency can penalise such officers.

**2.8.3** More generally on the public universities, it was suggested there is evidence of cases of grades forged and people being paid bribes. Moreover, there are administrative violations in the appointment of professors, with conflict of interest and professors 'not rightfully appointed'. The Agency investigated these. Issues could involve plagiarism of publications.

**2.8.4** On the other hand, it was indicated that the new rules on admission of students had led to less corruption, and with these improvements criminal sanctions on this aspect had become a thing of the past.

**2.8.5** In terms of how cases come to the Agency, anonymous e-mails can be used by whistle-blowers. This is not just for education. The Agency reviews information to judge how serious it is, and begins investigations if they decide there are grounds for reasonable suspicion. For HE, the University or the Ministry may submit reports to the Agency, but they do not need to report to the Agency.

**2.8.6** On issues of plagiarism of publications in HE, the new Strategy will address these issues, and a legal basis will be needed for action, although the Agency currently has copyright powers.

**2.8.8** Private HEIs were also a topic of discussion, but comments on these will be returned to in Section 6 below.

### ***Summary Comments on Evidence from Meeting***

**2.8.9** In summary, points emerged from the meeting which indicated that the Agency's work on HE so far needs to be strengthened. However, there is also evidence of the Agency having a good general awareness of where and how this could be progressed.

### **Recommendations from Section 2 (on Domestic Policies on Anti-Corruption)**

#### **Recommendation 2:**

**In developing the next Kosovo Anti-Corruption Strategy, and associated Action Plans, from 2017, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo and the Kosovo Anti-Corruption Agency) must ensure that there are enhanced clear links between overall Government anti-corruption policy and action points for strengthening integrity and combating corruption in HE specifically.**

**The coverage of action points for HE must be comprehensive. These should include clarifying the role of the Anti-Corruption Agency in addressing corruption risks associated with academic plagiarism in the appointment of academic staff. A clear legal basis should be established for any such roles identified for the Anti-Corruption Agency.**

**Under the leadership of its new Director, the Anti-Corruption Agency should be well-resourced to implement appropriate action points within the next Anti-Corruption Strategy, and associated Action Plans, including all those identified for HE specifically.**

### **3 - GOVERNMENT APPROACHES TO HIGHER EDUCATION (HE): STRATEGY AND THE LAW**

**3.1** Official evidence from documents and a meeting indicated positive approaches by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) in relation to HE.

#### **Evidence from Documents**

##### ***Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021***

**3.2.1** In the Minister's Foreword to the 'Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021', there is a comprehensive commitment to 'the purpose of making education serve the country's economic and social development', with specific emphasis on 'inclusion, quality and accountability'. There are particular references to HE under 'quality', with the commitment that 'we will strengthen the quality assurance mechanisms, applying the accreditation criteria and procedures rigorously, but also helping higher education institutions meet quality standards'.

**3.2.2** On the other hand, most of the rest of the Foreword deals more specifically with pre-university school education. Therefore, of the seven 'Strategic objectives' in the Strategic Plan, only Strategic objective 7 deals with HE. Five of the other objectives essentially relate to pre-university school education, and one to vocational education and training (VET).

**3.2.3** However, the aspects addressed within Strategic objective 7 are appropriate and important. The main priority is 'the improvement of quality'. This is seen to involve improved staff-student ratios; strengthened quality assurance mechanism; cooperation with 'representatives of the economy' to ensure HE meets the needs of the labour market; ensuring a strong 'integrated link between higher education and scientific research'; achieving 'sustainable funding of higher education'; promotion of international cooperation (see p.77).

**3.2.4** Eleven 'Expected Results' are specified to progress these developments (these 'Expected Results' also include results proposed on professional development of academic staff, infrastructure for teaching and research, and the legal framework for HE). These are summarised at p.79, and related 'Possible activities' are detailed at pp.79-83.

**3.2.5** The development of these approaches to HE within the Strategic Plan are also placed in the context of a careful analysis of the 'Challenges' facing HE: 'Non-Compliance with the quality standards in higher education institutions'; 'Non-alignment of study programs with labour market requirements'; 'Insufficient scientific research work in higher education institutions'; 'Incomplete legal framework in higher education'; 'Performance independent higher education funding'; 'Inefficient international cooperation in higher education' (see pp.77-78 , pp.27-28). In addition, there is clear recognition of the 'Unfavourable ratio between the number of teaching staff and students' (p.28), the excessively high number of HEIs in Kosovo (see p.27), and the growth in student numbers not being matched by a parallel growth in numbers graduating successfully (see p.27 and p.20).

**3.2.6** The Strategic Plan also shows a good awareness of 'Assumptions and risks' in its proposals for HE (see pp.83-84).

**3.2.7** In addition, the interconnections between HE developments and other aspects of the Strategic Plan are stressed, e.g., diverse participation of students from marginalised groups can only be achieved in HE if it has previously been achieved in pre-university education (see p.36).

**3.2.8** The experts have closely studied the detailed 'Possible activities' specified from par.7.1.1 to 7.11.4 in pp.79-83 of the Strategic Plan. They do not disagree with any of these, and would support them all.

**3.2.9** However, in terms of the current baseline assessment's specific focus on strengthening integrity and combating corruption in HE, the experts would certainly suggest that this dimension is

underdeveloped in the Strategic Plan's 'Possible activities'. There is a single explicit activity (7.7.3) 'Making Ethics Committees operational in HEIs', but this is under 'Result 7.7', 'The number of scientific publications in international indexed magazines authored by the academic staff increases by 25% every year'. Presumably, therefore, the reference here is specifically to research ethics, rather than ethical behaviour more generally. There is a reference to 'the implementation of fair and transparent process of recruitment and development of staff' within activity 7.3.3 ('Supporting HEIs in implementing quality assurance policies'). However, no detail is provided on what is required to make processes 'fair and transparent', or what is currently undermining 'fairness and transparency'.

***Kosovo Education Strategic Plan, 2011-2016: Evaluation Report: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, December 2015***

**3.3.1** The Kosovo Education Strategic Plan, 2017-2021 builds upon the MEST December 2015 Evaluation Report on the previous Kosovo Education Strategic Plan, 2011-2016.

**3.3.2** In highlighting a range of issues, this document generally anticipated the 'Challenges' facing HE which were identified in the 2017-2021 Strategic Plan. It identified the need to improve the match between labour market needs and study programmes (pp.110, 115-116, 82, 83, 84, 85). It discussed the challenges associated with the increased demand for HE, including the establishment of new universities. It emphasised that student numbers are increasing but the numbers graduating have not increased proportionately (p.16). Challenges included that expenditure per student was declining as the system was expanding (pp.106-7, 77, 79, 86-87, 90). There were particular challenges in the need to increase the number of academic staff and advance their qualifications (pp.79, 91). There were also challenges in promoting science and research, including around funding. Current spending is low (p.27), future funding needs reviewed (pp.93-94, 109, 115-117). There were issues on the connection between research and academic advancement (p.92).

**3.3.3** In summary, the close consistency between the issues highlighted in the Evaluation of the 2011-2016 Education Strategic Plan and the 'Challenges' identified in the 2017-2021 Plan demonstrates a coherent approach to ongoing planning for HE developments by the MEST.

***Program of the Government of Kosovo, 2015-2018***

**3.4.1** The 'Program of the Government of Kosovo, 2015-2018' provides coherent links between this type of overall Government document and the education-specific Strategic Plan.

**3.4.2** The 'Program of the Government of Kosovo, 2015-2018' explicitly mentions the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan, 2017-2021. More specifically, it also highlights the similar issues around the need to improve the match between labour market needs and study programmes (pp.63-64); the need to advance the qualifications of academic staff (p.64); the need to promote science and research, including funding (p.67); the importance of increasing university autonomy (p.66); the importance of University Ethics Committees (p.66); the overall need to improve the quality of HE (p.65).

***Kosovo Draft Law on Higher Education, October 2015***

**3.5.1** The Kosovo Draft Law on Higher Education, October 2015, also produces evidence of overall comprehensive and coherent approaches to HE. The Draft Law has twelve main Chapters:

I: General Provisions; II: Principles and Objectives of HE; III: Organisation of the HE System; IV: Governance of the HE System; V: Public HEIs; VI: Governing Structures of Public HEIs; VII: Personnel of Public HEIs; VIII: Scientific Research at Public HEIs; IX: Students at Public HEIs; X: Financing, Reporting and Accountability of Public HEIs; XI: Non-Public HEIs; XII: Transitional and Final Provisions.

### 3.5.2 Interesting aspects include:

#### In Chapter I

There are clear references to accreditation, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency and licensing at Article 3, par. 1.18, 1.19, 1.20.

#### In Chapter III

There is helpful identification of the types of HEIs at Article 8, including the criteria for a University at par.2.1, 2.2, and for University College, HE College, and Professional College in par.3.1-5.3.

It may be particularly important to note that the criteria for a University at par.2.1 in Article 8 include 'doctoral level' in the awards in disciplines, and at par.2.2

five (5) broad disciplines in which it offers accredited programmes at the Doctorate level. A University must have at least one hundred twenty (120) academic staff working full time and at least half of them must have the highest scientific title and must be actively engaged in research and publication activities carried out at the university'.

The status of 'University College' requires

'study programmes at doctorate level in a range of a least two (2) disciplines belonging to the same or related broad knowledge area. A University College must have at least thirty (30) teaching staff members working full time and at least half of them must be actively engaged in research and publication activities carried out at the University College' (par.3.2).

A 'Higher Education College' 'cannot offer scientific (academic) doctoral programmes, but can offer programmes 'up to the Master level' (par.4.1).

These points about criteria for the types of HEI, especially University, will be returned to below.

#### In Chapter IV

There are interesting statements on the role of the Minister (Article 12) and the State Council of HE (SCHE) (Article 12, par.2.14); the KAA, including its Board and its role on accreditation (Article 13 and 14), and details on licensing (Article 15).

On the SCHE, it may be particularly important to note that 'The Minister proposes the SCHE members, who are then appointed by the Prime Minister' (Article 12, par.2.14).

This point about the SCHE will be returned to below.

#### In Chapter V

Statements are given on the approach to creating new HEIs, merging or closing existing HEIs (Articles 16-17), and there are important statements on institutional autonomy (Article 18).

#### In Chapter VI

Details are provided on the Board, Senate and Rector of public HEIs (Articles 21-24). The following points may be particularly important to note:

Article 22, par.5 states

'The Minister appoints external members of the Board, whose number should be by one (1) smaller than the number of those selected by the institution', and par.6 'Members of the Board cannot be: a person who has a position in the Government of Kosova and/or has the status of a senior public official within the meaning of the Law...or a member of...a political party...'

Article 23, par.4 states

'Senate members are elected from among the academic staff; the non-academic staff and students. Rector, vice-Rectors, Deans and other staff that holds executive positions within the

institution cannot be members of the Senate. At least 15% of the Senate members with voting right must be from students’.

Article 24, par.5-8 covers the appointment of the Rector, with par.7 indicating that Senate ranks 2 to 3 of the candidates shortlisted (who must have the support of 25% of the ‘academic units’ – see par.6), then par.8 indicating that the Rector is then chosen by the Board from the Senate ‘ranked list’.

These points about appointment to the Board, election of Senate and appointment of the Rector will be returned to below.

#### In Chapter VII

There is general coverage of academic staff (including Professorial) and statements on academic freedom.

More particularly, within Article 27, on ‘Academic titles’, par. 3.2 states clear criteria for the title of ‘Regular professor’, requiring five publications at ‘international level’ with definitions of ‘international level’ in terms of the types of international journals in which articles should appear. However, ‘The list of these journals should be prepared from academic units and must be approved by the Senate of the higher education institution’.

These points about ‘Academic Titles’ will be returned to below.

#### In Chapter VIII

This is on ‘Scientific Research at Public Higher Education Institutions’. There are details here, but these are rather underdeveloped and there is a reference to a separate Law on ‘Scientific-Research Activities’ (Article 29, par.4).

Given the emphasis on the need to develop scientific research within HE further, as highlighted in the various Government Strategic Plan documents discussed above, the Government should undertake continuing review of the current legal position to ensure that HE research issues are, in fact, given sufficient coverage and prominence in law.

#### In Chapter IX

This is on ‘Students at Public Higher Education Institutions’. There are specific references that students should respect the Code of Ethics of the HEI (Article 32, par.2.5)), to the fact that student councils should not be politically linked externally (Article 33, par.4), to the Student Union of Kosovo (Article 33, par.7).

The overall position of students within HE will be considered in Section 4 below.

#### In Chapter XI

This is on Non-Public HEIs. There is coverage of accreditation by the KAA and licensing by the Minister (Article 45, par.2).

However, Article 48, par.3 states only that a non-public HEI ‘may be closed’ (i.e., not ‘must be closed’) if ‘the accreditation by KAA is withdrawn or not renewed or if the institution’s license by the Minister is withdrawn’. The Government should ensure that this more ‘conditional’ language does not lead to failure to close ‘unsatisfactory’ private HEIs.

**3.5.3** In summary on the October 2015 Draft Law on Higher Education, its enactment will be generally helpful in progressing Kosovar HE because of its comprehensive nature and its appropriate and specific clarification on a number of important points. For example, it should provide clear criteria for the designation of an HEI as a University, and it should also provide the basis to develop clear criteria for appointment to academic posts such as Professor. Of course, it will be essential that these criteria for the designation of HEIs, and the criteria for academic appointments, are applied rigorously in practice. The integrity of these aspects of the HE system will depend on the universal application of these criteria in practice. These must not simply be ‘paper’ criteria which are breached in practice.

**3.5.4** On the other hand, some aspects of the Law will require careful consideration of potential issues in their application.

For example, returning to points initially highlighted above, there are potential issues around how independent the State Council of HE is from the Minister and Government.

Regarding the Board of a public HEI, despite the stipulation that those appointed by the Minister are in a minority and there are exclusions of Government office holders etc., there may still be potential issues with Ministerial appointment constraining independence from Government.

On the role of Senate in appointing Rectors, this may appear to be a democratic strength. However, as will be explored in Section 4 below, this apparent democratic strength may present risks to achieving progressive leadership in public HEIs.

On the criteria for appointment to academic posts such as Professor, there is the potential for inappropriate journals, such as 'predatory' journals, to be included in the lists of journals 'prepared from academic units and...approved by Senate'. Given the importance of appropriate journal publications for academic appointments, there must be full integrity in this 'listing' process.

### **Evidence from Meeting**

**3.6.1** A meeting with the Minister of Education, Science and Technology and senior MEST officials confirmed evidence of positive approaches in relation to HE.

**3.6.2** For example, the Minister emphasised the importance of universities connecting to the labour market by specialising in market needs. He also emphasised the importance of integrating the Serbian community within these approaches.

**3.6.3** The Minister repeated his strong commitment to quality in HE, including the use of performance indicators.

**3.6.4** The Minister also discussed scientific research and HE. He emphasised that scientific research is a compulsory category of activity for all HEIs, both public and private, and will be a criterion for judging university performance. Universities with more research will benefit from more funding. Ministry budgets will go the universities. Universities are autonomous and can come up with plans for resources. Universities will be stimulated to work with public companies.

**3.6.5** The Minister also explained that the draft Law on Higher Education had been approved by Government, and was now in the Assembly. He suggested that the support of the Serbian community was needed, and that the University of Mitrovica/Mitrovicë North had not been mentioned in the Law. The Law will be progressed after this issue had been resolved.

**3.6.6** In discussions, MEST seemed to suggest that the Inspectorate had a unit for HE, which especially dealt with the private HEIs.

**3.6.7** Although the 2004 Law on Inspection of Education in Kosovo includes Higher Education (both public and private) within the 'Scope of work of this law' at Article 2, and 'students' are mentioned at various points within Article 4.3 (on what it is the 'main duty' of Education inspectors to inspect), the Law generally reads as more applicable to the inspection of schools. It does not really contain any substantive details which appear specific to HE.

Such approaches to Inspection do not seem consistent with contemporary best practice on quality assurance and enhancement for HE.

## **Summary Comments on Official Evidence from Documents and Meeting**

**3.7.1** Although there are some aspects of Government strategy and the proposed legal framework for HE which require further strengthening, the evidence from official documents and a formal meeting with the MEST indicates that the Government and the Ministry have generally prepared a positive planning and legal framework for the appropriate development of the Kosovar HE system.

**3.7.2** Of course, this framework will only produce an HE system which has full integrity and a strong capacity to combat corruption if actual practices in HE are consistent with the positive dimensions of the formal strategic and legal framework. The extent to which actual practice meets apparently positive official positions will be explored through the views of other stakeholders in Section 4 below.

### **Recommendations from Section 3 (on Government Approaches to Higher Education [HE]: Strategy and the Law)**

#### **Recommendation 3(a):**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MEST], the Kosovo Accreditation Agency [KAA], and the leadership of public HEIs) must ensure that the many positive features of the 'Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021' relating to HE are implemented fully. In particular, this applies to all the 'Possible activities' specified in par.7.1.1 to par.7.11.4 at pp.79-83 of the Strategic Plan.

#### **Recommendation 3(b):**

On the other hand, these same Kosovar authorities should certainly enhance and supplement the Strategic Plan's current treatment of specific approaches to strengthening integrity and combating corruption in HE.

For example, this should include ensuring that Ethics Committees within HEIs address all aspects of ethical behaviour by staff and students thoroughly and robustly, not just those relating to research ethics more narrowly.

This should also include developing comprehensive and transparent approaches to the fair recruitment and development of HE staff, and enforcing these approaches consistently and robustly.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Minister of Education, Science and Technology and MEST, the KAA, the State Council of HE [SCHE], and the leadership of public HEIs) must ensure that the 'Draft Law on Higher Education, October 2015' is enacted and implemented fully as the underpinning basis for a range of positive developments in Kosovar HE. For example, it will be essential that the criteria for the designation of HEIs (Chapter III, Article 8), and the criteria for academic appointments (Chapter VII, Article 27), are applied rigorously in practice.

#### **Recommendation 5:**

On the other hand, these same Kosovar authorities should give further consideration to a number of aspects of the Draft Law after its enactment, as they continue to progress the HE system. These aspects include:-

- (a) potential issues around how independent the State Council is from the Minister and Government (see Chapter IV, Article 12, par.2.14)



- (b) potential issues with Ministerial appointments to the Board of public HEIs constraining HEI independence from Government (see Chapter VI, Article 22, par.5)**
- (c) whether the role of Senate in appointing Rectors actually presents a risk to achieving progressive leadership in public HEIs (see Chapter VI, Article 23, par.4 and Article 24, par.5-8)**
- (d) the need for full integrity in the 'listing' process of academic journals judged appropriate when journal publications are being considered for academic appointments (see Chapter VII, Article 27, par.3.2)**
- (e) whether the research dimensions of HE are better addressed comprehensively in the main Law on Higher Education, rather than in a separate Law on 'Scientific-Research Activities' (see Chapter VIII, Article 29, par.4)**
- (f) ensuring that the conditional language of Chapter XI, Article 48, par. 3 ('may be closed', not 'must be closed') does not lead to any failure to close 'unsatisfactory' private HEIs**

## **4 - PUBLIC DEBATE ABOUT THE INTEGRITY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PRISTINA**

**4.1** Having established the overall approach taken by the Government of Kosovo to the development of strategy and the legal framework for HE, the experts explored more specific aspects with a range of stakeholders, focusing particularly on the University of Pristina.

### **Senior Staff at the University of Pristina**

**4.2.1** A meeting took place with senior staff at the University of Pristina.

#### ***Research***

**4.2.2** At this meeting, approaches to quality control of research were outlined. On quality of journals, certain data bases are used to establish if the journal is indexed. Procedures are in place for the approval of Ph.D. theses, and for the recruitment and advancement of staff. Senior staff claimed that an 'unexpected outcome' of recent initiatives is that the number of articles published in respected journals has 'expanded exponentially'.

**4.2.3** On the other hand, senior staff explained that, as is common across Eastern Europe, the University is at the very beginning of the process of having a sustainable office to offer services on 'technology transfer/transfer of knowledge'. It was stated that the University needed support through the development of software to address academic plagiarism, with the suggestion that MEST should provide infrastructure support here.

**4.2.4** However, one member of senior staff did suggest that this is not so much an issue of software as the need for laws/by-laws to require universities to submit their papers (presumably through any software system).

Publication in English can be delegated to the 'peer review' system. There also needed to be a budget line to support attempts to publish in high impact journals.

#### ***Teaching and Learning***

**4.2.5** On teaching and learning, senior staff emphasised that the University has been implementing the Bologna agreement. On student assessment, the University had been used to the inherited system of 'end of course' final examinations. It is trying to develop 'continuous assessment' in parallel with teaching. There is also the issue that half of students pass examinations while attending the course, but the other half only sit examinations having attended in previous years.

#### ***Staffing***

**4.2.6** There are very significant budget challenges over staffing. Recruitment and advancement of teaching staff is 'problematic', and budget constraints currently prevent the hiring of administrative staff.

**4.2.7** According to the senior staff, Professors are expected to undertake 6 hours of teaching per week. On the issue of staff also working at private universities, the experts were told that University of Pristina staff cannot work elsewhere between 8.00am and 4.00pm. If students attend between 4.00pm and 5.30 pm and staff are not there, this is recorded.

#### ***Ethical Behaviour within the University***

**4.2.8** The senior staff stated that each Faculty has a Disciplinary Committee for students. The University has a Council of Ethics for staff. This has five members, 'the most credible Professors'. A Declaration on Ethics has been introduced to all staff, although there was also reference to a Code of Ethics which 'needs more work'. The Council of Ethics deals on a 'cases basis'. A Senate group is

working to develop disciplinary measures to support the Council of Ethics, looking at sanctions and by-laws and other documents. Regulations on Ph.D. studies and research ethics will also be considered.

### ***Institutional Strategic Planning***

**4.2.9** The Rector explained that the University is at the first stage of approving a Strategic Plan to 'measure everything', with timeframes.

### ***Some Concluding Remarks on Meeting with Senior Staff***

**4.2.10** Generally, a positive image of the University was presented as addressing a range of developments in enhancing research, teaching and learning, with these including approaches to ethical integrity.

Within the topics discussed, there seem to be issues around staffing. In the context of budget challenges on staffing, six hours teaching a week seemed a low expectation on Professors.

On this issue, and more widely, it was important to hear the perspectives of other stakeholders.

### **Students**

**4.3.1** A meeting took place with two student representatives, who showed enthusiasm and obvious commitment to progressing HE issues.

### ***The Nature of Student Representation***

**4.3.2** However, in this meeting with student representatives, it was difficult to establish the position of student representation in relation to political affiliation.

**4.3.3** There appear to be a number of student organisations, some with political affiliations and some without. For example, mention was made of the 'Union of Albanian Students', which seems to have been involved in 2004 in collaborative action with students in Albania, but now acts independently, while still cooperating with students in Albania. It seems that there can be issues with student organisations being 'politically biased', and also linked to particular groups of professors. Some groups can support Rectors, Senate, and Dean's office, while other oppose. It was suggested that current University leaders and University governing bodies were part of political organisations. If student leaders are also, then there can be an issue around whether or not student representatives 'challenge' the University authorities.

**4.3.4** The student representatives were rather 'evasive' on this, suggesting that there could be both negative constraints on 'challenging' and positive achievements through 'challenging'. The example was given of successful challenges on the price of meals and dormitories, although the importance of political support from the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) was also mentioned here.

**4.3.5** 7 students are on the 47-person Senate of the University of Pristina. At the University of Pristina, each Faculty has a Student Council, with 21 members. Voting seems to be proportional representation, but from closed lists of organisations, not individuals. It was not clear how the Senate student representatives emerged from the Student Council level (see below). Student Councils meet with the Faculty Educational and Scientific Council, as well as other Faculty Committees.

**4.3.6** There is a Student Parliament. This includes 17 members from the University of Pristina, and 9 from other Universities (including 1 from a private University). There seems to be direct voting by all students for the Student Parliament. Further details around the Student Parliament then seemed somewhat unclear. Some answers seemed to indicate that the Student Parliament picked the Senate representatives, and also interacted with various University Committees, such as the Committee for

Science, the Committee for Culture, and the Committee for Student Admissions (all of which comprise academic staff as well as students). On other hand, it also seemed to be suggested that Senate representatives were proposed by the Faculty Councils.

**4.3.7** One point which did seem clear is that student representatives are not given sabbaticals to undertake representative duties. Therefore, it can be a heavy burden to undertake these duties at the same time as meeting academic course requirements. According to the student representatives, this may partly explain why it is difficult to find students to put themselves forward for representative roles. Level of student interest and participation is low, even if involvement in student representation can be a 'bridge to get into politics'.

### ***Students' Views on the Quality of the HE System***

**4.3.8** The students raised a number of issues relating to the quality of the HE system. They complained of Professors delegating to Assistant Professors, and Masters students being taught by recently completed Masters graduates. Some Professors teach too much, while some do not teach enough.

**4.3.9** Students have to take too many subjects. They have issues with student evaluation forms not being handed out at the appropriate time, and issues with the same Professors drafting and marking tests. If students wish to make complaints, they can go through the Students' Council to the Committee for Complaints. The student representatives said that protests can then be used, if the Committee has not looked 'appropriately' at the material case.

**4.3.10** Admission to Ph.D. is too restricted. This blocks new staffing, which is particularly needed because the students said there are now seven Universities.

**4.3.11** The student representatives were asked about 'vulgar corruption' (i.e. such potential abuses as staff seeking or accepting bribes from students etc.). Reference was made to student demonstrations in 2013 over 'assessment abuses', which had involved students and professors colluding over 'illegal' passing of grades. They spoke quite forcefully about arrests in 2013. They mentioned blackmail, abuse of power, bribes, 'suspicious' promotions (based on 'spurious' publications, i.e. plagiarism). Policy makers themselves were involved in this, and all of this was lowering the quality of HE in Kosovo. They mentioned Professors failing students so that students had to come back to classes. Abuses mentioned included students being required to undertake additional classes for payment, being required to purchase Professors' textbooks as a condition of passing, exchange of favours in Senate voting. There was mention of students being told to 'go through a particular organisation' if they wished to pass.

**4.3.12** Another problem highlighted is the fact that there is no restriction to the number of times a student can take an assessment.

**4.3.13** There is a Code of Ethics, but 'it does not apply much'. The student representatives suggested that there were people on the Ethics Committee who were themselves accused of corruption. They said that the Code of Ethics is not consistent with the Kosovar Law on Corruption. It was suggested that this gave Professors 'double protection' by giving them a 'double punishment' defence. It was suggested it is a weakness that it is academic staff who have written the Code of Ethics, yet it applies to themselves.

### ***Some Concluding Remarks on Meeting with Students***

**4.3.14** The commitment and enthusiasm of the students to discuss the issues of integrity and ethics in HE was clear.

However, the meeting with the students raised a range of issues. While there appears to be a comprehensive set of student representative mechanisms, some specific aspects are not clear (e.g.

around student representation on Senate), and there is the broader issue of the relationship between student representation and party politics. More fundamentally, the students suggested there are serious threats to the integrity of HE. This challenges the generally positive picture presented by Government and senior staff of the University of Pristina.

## **Evidence from NGOs**

### **NGO Meetings**

**4.4.1** More fundamental criticisms of the HE system, specifically the University of Pristina, came from meetings with NGOs, and from publications which related to the themes discussed by NGO representatives.

### ***General Approaches to Evidence from Meetings***

**4.4.2** The experts have decided to report the views from these two NGO meetings without explicitly naming the specific NGO and its representative in each case. The views are presented simply as 'NGO Meeting A' and 'NGO Meeting B'. The experts wish to respect appropriate confidentiality and do not want to quote particular individuals directly. The underlying point is that both NGO representatives made the same depth of criticism of the current HE system, even if each had slightly differing specific points of emphasis.

### ***NGO Meeting A***

**4.5.1** The representative of this NGO argued very strongly that there are now fundamental problems with the University of Pristina. The establishment of the University in 1969 had been a great victory for Albanian Kosovars. However, when Albanian Kosovars had been pushed out of the legal system in the 1990s, corruption had started.

**4.5.2** It was argued that standards for using academic titles had been lowered, and standards for scientific work had been reduced. Academic titles were being given to people who did not deserve them. It was claimed that all attempts at protecting the integrity of academic society have failed. There had been Rectors of the University with falsified research claims. Recently, a Dean had been exposed of such malpractice, but is still Dean (largely because of political connections). It was claimed that there are many such staff at the University of Pristina, with good professors in a minority, and put at the periphery.

**4.5.3** The representative of this NGO argued that there are many cases of fraud based on plagiarism in claims about scientific research work and publications. An Index of Albanian publications is lacking, as is Albanian anti-plagiarism software. According to this NGO representative, it is easy for Albanian Kosovars to steal from international publications, and this has almost become acceptable behaviour.

**4.5.4** This NGO representative forcefully expressed the view that there must now be suspicion about the credibility of every academic degree in Kosovo. There was a consequent public loss of confidence in professions such as medicine and civil engineering. For example, the experts were told that people went to Serbia and Montenegro for medical treatment.

**4.5.5** It was also suggested that the University is a huge political machine bringing lots of votes (with 20,000-30,000 students). Student numbers had been increased as an alternative to youth unemployment.

**4.5.6** The experts were told there had been a Rector who had recently attempted to address these issues (the experts take this to refer to Ramadan Zejnullahu). However, he had been inflexible and tried to address problems on all fronts simultaneously. All the Deans had turned against him, and he left about a year ago after less than two years as Rector. The current Rector had been accepted as a pacifying personality, but he did not have a strategy for improvement. The predecessor of the

reforming Rector had been accused of academic fraud, and students (not the student organisations) had protested. With strong backing from civil society and the international community, the Senate had been pressurised to select the reforming Rector, but the democratic procedures of Senate had then been used to block him.

**4.5.7** This NGO representative described the student organisations as recruiting organisations for political parties and other interests, including religious beliefs. Student representatives are future party militants. These groups come together in the so-called Independent Parliament, and the seats they have on Senate give them some kind of regulatory position.

### ***NGO Meeting B***

**4.6.1** The representative of this NGO emphasised that the basic issue is the poor quality of HE provision, linked to the fact that Kosovo has the highest participation rate in Europe, but very poor staff:student ratios (1:52 in Pristina).

**4.6.2** This NGO representative emphasised the fundamental problem of academic staff claiming spurious publications, e.g. in non-peer reviewed Indian journals, like the example of the then University of Pristina Rector who was accused of this in 2014. The accusation was that this Rector had published a paper on minerals (not his specialism) in a non-peer reviewed journal, and the same paper was published later under another name. However, the NGO representative claimed that this person had returned to academic life and had the status of a leading intellectual within a major political party.

**4.6.3** Furthermore, it was said that all of this links to a major integrity crisis in society, e.g. a high % of students align to non-integrity. Since the war of the late-1990s, the University of Pristina had been the victim of the greediness of political elites, with many of the political elite wanting into the University, acquiring Masters and Ph.D. degrees. This NGO representative claimed that Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) Vice-Presidents had become Vice-Rectors, the University being seen as a fall-back for jobs, and a voting machine source of votes, mainly for the PDK. Against this back-drop, the reforming Rector from September 2014 to March 2016 had been forced to resign because opponents were bigger and better organised.

**4.6.4** This NGO representative spoke powerfully about Professors only being required to teach 6 hours a week, with additional payment for any teaching beyond that. Academic staff now start as Assistant Professors, and the 6 hours teaching expectation applies to them and to Associate Professors. This should leave time for research. However, no resources were available for fieldwork.

**4.6.5** The NGO representative argued that salaries, especially compared to other 'related' professional groups, are high. It was claimed that full Professors have a net monthly salary of €2,200, and other academic staff €1,400. This will incorporate €25 per hour for additional teaching beyond 6 hours. As comparisons, the experts were told that specialists in hospitals earn €600-800, Directors of gymnasia €550, school teachers €400-450. Subsequently, the experts were provided with online material which had been made available in the public domain, and which seems to confirm the information on academic salaries.

**4.6.6** On student perceptions, according to the NGO representative, 80% of students believed the University of Pristina to be corrupt.

**4.6.7** This NGO representative also gave critical views on the other public Universities. He said that these had essentially been established to deal with youth unemployment. They have to rely on University of Pristina staff to travel and teach in them. There had been over-expansion because there are not enough qualified staff. For example, the University of Pristina is struggling to support the reaching of Computing, but there are now two Computing programmes in Prizren, and an architect is teaching on these Computing programmes. This NGO representative said the President is making

decisions on other public University expansion. These comments on the other public Universities will be returned to in Section 5 below.

## **NGO Publications**

### ***General Approach to Evidence from NGO Publications***

4.7 Further evidence for what was claimed during the NGO meetings was gained through various NGO publications. Without linking publications specifically to particular meetings, broadly two categories of publication have been accessed:-

#### ***Publications in the Press***

4.8 Articles have been accessed associated with the work of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) organisation. These are from Pristina Insight, the digital and print magazine published by BIRN Kosovo in English every two weeks since September 2008. Relevant articles include:

'*New rector of University of Pristina promoted suspiciously*', 16<sup>th</sup> June 2016 (<http://Pristinainsight.com/new-rector-university-Pristina-promoted-suspiciously/>), which raises 'fraudulence' issues around the previous promotions of the recently-appointed Rector of the University of Pristina;

'*The unbearable lightness of ignorance: Higher education in Kosovo*', 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016 (<http://Pristinainsight.com/the-unbearable-lightness-of-ignorance-higher-education-in-kosovo/>), which is a wider critique of Kosovar HE, covering issues like claimed decline in academic standards in Kosovar HE, the alleged control of public universities 'by interest groups and clans whose interests and motives are financial rather than political';

'*Never give UP!*', 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015 (<http://Pristinainsight.com/never-give-up/>), which highlights October 2015 student demonstrations in support of the 'reforming' Rector Ramadan Zejnullahu, and develops into a wider argument in favour of 'combating crime, corruption and the abuse of power' in the University of Pristina.

#### ***Research Report Publications***

***'Reforming the University of Pristina – Mission Possible? – Top nine challenges and their remedies', November 2015***

4.9.1 The research report '***Reforming the University of Pristina – Mission Possible? – Top nine challenges and their remedies***' was also accessed. This report was produced in November 2015 by Dukagjin Pupovci and Gersi Gashi for the Democracy for Development (D4D) Institute (in partnership with the Heinrich Boll Foundation). This seems a very thorough and comprehensive piece of work. The report is 64 pages, with 57 Endnotes and 37 Publications listed. Apart from general 'background data collection and analysis', the report draws specifically on a survey of 625 randomly selected students from various academic units of the University, and focus-group interviews with students and others (see pp.12-13).

4.9.2 The Report focuses on the 'top nine problems afflicting the UP and offers practical remedies how to address them' (p.9). The Report lists these on p.3, and develops them from pp.14-51:-

'Problem 1 – The Need to Compete with High-Skilled Labour'

'Problem 2 - Towards Qualitative Teachers'

'Problem 3 – From Centralisation to Dynamic Accountability'

'Problem 4 – Student Organizations: From Clan-like Party Structures to Student Representation'

'Problem 5 – From Majority Promotion Towards Individual Meritocracy'

'Problem 6 – How to Ditch Fake Degrees if so Many Have Them?'

'Problem 7 – Reporting Corruption May Get One into Greater Trouble'

'Problem 8 – From Universal Enrolment to Meeting Future Labour Market Needs'

'Problem 9 – Diploma Now, Skills Later'

### ***Some Concluding Remarks on Evidence from NGOs***

**4.10.1** The ***'Reforming the University of Pristina – Mission Possible? – Top nine challenges and their remedies', November 2015*** report is a particularly thorough and comprehensive example of the fundamental criticisms of the Kosovar HE system, and the University of Pristina specifically, presented by NGOs. Certainly, the report is dated November 2015, and seems to have been written a little before then. However, any full discussion of current issues affecting Kosovar HE and the University of Pristina should certainly include a careful analysis of the current situation for the appropriateness of the report's 'Diagnoses' and 'Remedies'.

**4.10.2** The above comments illustrate a more general point. In both their meetings with NGOs, and in the NGO literature which they have reviewed, the experts have found the arguments and evidence of the NGOs for problems with the Kosovar HE system, and specifically the University of Pristina, to be very persuasive. Of course, the experts appreciate that they have had a very limited opportunity to engage with the Kosovar system. They understand that they are not in a position to interrogate further evidence more directly and widely. However, even with these qualifying comments, the experts certainly think the positions and materials from NGOs need to be addressed directly by 'official' stakeholders in any open debate about the development of HE in Kosovo.

### **Some Concluding Comments on Section 4 (on Public Debate about the Integrity of the University of Pristina)**

**4.11** Going beyond these comments about the evidence from NGOs specifically, the experts see the overall evidence in Section 4 as beginning with an initial reinforcement by senior staff at the University of Pristina of the 'official narrative' on the positive development of the Kosovar HE system, as presented by Government of Kosovo evidence in Section 3.

However, some more 'negative' and 'critical' concerns began to emerge in the evidence from students. Then, the evidence from NGOs fully developed into a 'counter narrative' to the 'official narrative', presenting strong arguments, with apparently compelling supporting evidence, for major 'negative' issues with the Kosovar HE system, and the University of Pristina specifically.

While the experts are not in a position to access any more evidence directly at this time on the relative merits of the 'official' and 'counter' narratives, they think that the clash between these different narratives creates a 'dissonance' in Kosovar public life which the Kosovar authorities must address.

### **Recommendations from Section 4 (on Public Debate about the Integrity of the University of Pristina)**

#### **Recommendation 6:**

**The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) must address the dissonance between the overall 'official narrative' from these authorities, which presents a generally positive picture of a University and HE system moving forward, and the 'counter narrative' from many other key stakeholders, including students but especially wider civic society, e.g. as represented by prominent NGOs, which presents a much more negative and critical view.**

**In doing this, the Kosovar Government must initiate an open and honest discussion about the issues which other stakeholders identify as threatening the integrity of the Kosovar HE system, and the University of Pristina specifically. This discussion must involve the relevant Kosovar authorities being transparent about problems, and providing opportunities for other stakeholders to present their views without fear of intimidation. These Kosovar authorities must be seen to listen to, and act upon, well-evidenced views of other stakeholders.**



This open and honest discussion must cover the range of issues which have been highlighted in Section 4 of this baseline assessment about the overall governance and public attitude to the University of Pristina, and about more particular aspects of its staffing and teaching & learning environment. Recommendations 7 to 12 below should be seen as contributions to this discussion.

**Recommendation 7:**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) must address the criticism that the University of Pristina is a vehicle for 'politicised' and 'clan' control and advancement, including concerns that this also affects student representation.

This should involve developing a more transparent and participatory system of governance in which all staff are committed to the academic mission of the University, rather than any political or 'clan' interests and advancement.

This should also involve developing a culture of student representation in which student representatives are motivated to further the interests of their fellow students, rather than any narrow political or 'clan' interests. This form of student representation will be facilitated by ensuring that student representatives on Senate are chosen in a fully democratic way. It may also be facilitated by giving student representatives sabbaticals, so that they have time to represent students fully and appropriately.

**Recommendation 8:**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) must address the public loss of confidence in the overall validity and reliability of the University of Pristina's academic awards because of the widespread belief that the overall academic integrity of the University is undermined by senior staff obtaining advancement on the basis inappropriate claims about their published work (e.g., work which is plagiarised, appears in non-refereed 'predatory' or 'fake' open access journals etc.).

Therefore, academic appointments and promotions at the University must be based purely on merit, not political or personal connection.

In particular, the criteria requiring publication at 'international level' must be rigorously enforced to ensure that publications are in reputable peer-reviewed international journals, and are free of plagiarism and 'false' claims of authorship.

More generally on the risks of academic staff plagiarism within their Albanian-language work, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, and MEST) should provide resources to develop a robust Index of Albanian publications and Albanian anti-plagiarism software.

**Recommendation 9(a):**

The relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) should reduce intakes to the University of Pristina until appropriate academic staff:student ratios are achieved equitably across all Faculties.

**Recommendation 9(b):**

These same Kosovar authorities should review the contractual teaching expectations and salary payments of academic staff at the University of Pristina, particularly Professors and other senior staff.

**Especially given financial pressures on public budgets and the overall teaching demands from high student intakes, there should be an increase in the number of hours academic staff are expected to teach before they receive additional payments.**

**The employment of all University of Pristina academic staff, without exception, should also be monitored closely by the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) to ensure that their commitment to the University is not being compromised by outside commitments, especially teaching at other HEIs.**

**Recommendation 10:**

**More generally on academic staff salaries at the University of Pristina, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the University of Pristina) must engage in a transparent public discussion about the level of these salaries.**

**If academic staff salaries are in fact higher than would normally be expected by domestic and international comparison with other professional groups, the authorities must explain this, or adjust this, so that the public is assured that only appropriate, fair and transparent salaries are being awarded.**

**Recommendation 11:**

**The University of Pristina should engage in on-going fundamental review and development of its teaching and learning approaches, including its assessment methods.**

**In particular, this review should involve moving to assessment which tests for creative and analytical knowledge, rather than lower-order rote learning.**

**Such assessment developments should be associated with secure approaches to avoid cheating and plagiarism. For example, as already mentioned in Recommendation 8 above, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo and MEST) should provide resources to develop Albanian anti-plagiarism software. This will be particularly important for preventing student plagiarism in the increased number of assignments and dissertations which are likely within new assessment approaches.**

**The unsatisfactory position should be addressed where students appear to be able to re-attend or re-sit after failing assessments, with no limit to the number or length of time involved.**

**Recommendation 12:**

**In addition to the techniques for preventing cheating and plagiarism mentioned in Recommendation 11 above, the University of Pristina should look to an enhanced and strengthened role for a Code of Ethics and a Council of Ethics/Ethics Committee as means to ensuring the ethical behaviours of all staff and students. Robust sanctions should be developed for breaches of the Code of Ethics.**

**This approach should address all potential risks of ‘vulgar corruption’ in the relationship between academic staff and students, such as the receiving or giving of bribes, or ‘indirect’ methods such as academic staff requiring students to purchase their textbooks or attend additional classes for payment.**

**The Code of Ethics should cover both staff and student behaviour, and should be developed in a participatory way which gives all staff and students a sense of ownership. Similarly, the**

**Council of Ethics/Ethics Committee should function in a way which is seen as fair and transparent by all staff and students.**

**As indicated in Recommendation 15 below, there should be development of a model for this type of powerful Code of Ethics. The University of Pristina should collaborate with the public Universities in other cities in this development.**

## **5 - THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN OTHER CITIES**

**5.1** The experts were conscious that the public discussion about university integrity, as analysed in Section 4 above, essentially focused on the University of Pristina. Certainly, one of the NGO representatives whose perspectives are given in Section 4 had highlighted their view on issues with the other public Universities (see par.4.6.7 above). However, this was only one perspective, and the experts welcomed the opportunity to discuss the public Universities in other cities more extensively at a meeting with senior staff from these Universities.

### **Meeting with Rectors from the Public Universities in Other Cities in Kosovo**

**5.2** At this meeting, Rectors or Vice-Rectors were present from the University of Gjakovë/Đakovica, the University of Gjilan/Gnjilane, the University of Pejë/Peć, and the University of Prizren.

#### **The Individual Universities**

**5.3** The experts sought to establish the nature and scale of activity at each University. The purpose of doing this was to help the experts evaluate the 'viability' of the Universities.

Most of the information now presented in this baseline assessment was given to the experts at the meeting, and the experts hope they have interpreted this information accurately. Some supplementary information was obtained by the experts from desk research. However, in this context, the experts were only able to gain very limited access to University websites in English.

#### ***University of Gjakovë/Đakovica***

**5.4.1** Information was provided that the University of Gjakovë/Đakovica has 2,800 students (75-78% female). It is a successor of University of Pristina activities in the city, and includes a Faculty of Education (pre-school and elementary), a Faculty of Medicine (midwifery and nursing), and a Faculty of Philology. The University has also applied for the accreditation of some new programmes. Previously, this University had been a High School for Higher Education, then a branch of the University of Pristina.

**5.4.2** The University is attempting to develop branches of its Faculty of Medicine which are not in other Universities, e.g. Pristina is not accredited for midwifery. Gjakovë/Đakovica's Faculty of Medicine students are not from Pristina, but from other towns.

**5.4.3** Gjakovë/Đakovica is 83 km from Pristina, and the journey takes c.90 minutes. The population of the town is c.90,000, with the municipality (including surrounding villages) totalling c.150,000.

#### ***University of Gjilan/Gnjilane***

**5.5.1** Information was provided that the University of Gjilan/Gnjilane is in its fourth year. It has four main programme areas, Computer Science, Economics, Education (pre-school and primary), Law. It has 5 Masters programmes. The University has 6,500 students.

**5.5.2** Gjilan/Gnjilane is 47 kms from Pristina, with the journey taking c.45 minutes to 1 hour. The population of the city and its surrounding areas is 133,000.

### ***University of Pejë/Peć***

**5.6.1** Information was provided that the University of Pejë/Peć has been in the city since 1984. It was a Higher Education School of the University of Pristina in the 1990s, and has been a University for 5 years. There are 5 Faculties (Business, Law, Agricultural Business, Tourism and Hospitality, Arts) and 18 programmes (12 at Bachelor, 6 at Masters, and starting to offer at Ph.D level). The University has 12,000 students.

**5.6.2** The University also includes students from Montenegro (Bosnian language) and Albania (Albanian language). The University is important for poorer students who face financial challenges in going to Pristina.

**5.6.3** The journey to Pristina takes c.90 minutes in normal conditions. The population of Pejë/Peć whole municipality is c.98,000, with c.60,000 living in the city itself.

### ***University of Prizren***

**5.7.1** Information was provided that the University of Prizren has Faculties of Economics, Education, IT, Law, Life Sciences, Philology. There is a Faculty of Bosnian and Turkish Languages. The University has 15,000 students. It has 12 Masters programmes.

**5.7.2** The city and municipality of Prizren has c.200,000 population, and very considerable historical status. Prizren is 62 kms from Pristina, and the journey takes c.90 minutes.

**5.7.3** The presence of the University further enhances the status of the city. The experts were told that the University challenges the dominance of the University of Pristina. It meets economic and social needs of its region, and also attracts students from Albania and Macedonia.

### **Summary Comment on the Individual Universities**

**5.8.1** As mentioned in par.4.6.7 above, an NGO representative had implied that the creation of the public Universities in other cities had been an unjustified over-expansion of the University system. However, the basic information obtained from the meeting with senior staff of the other Universities suggests that there is an underlying case for these Universities. From general international standards, each of them seems to be in an area with a sufficient population to provide the basis for a University. Each of them gives local University access for potential students for whom the journey back and forth to the University of Pristina is too long to be a practicable commute.

**5.8.2** Of course, this does not mean there are no concerns about the current viability of the Universities in other cities. For example, 2,800 students seems a low number for a contemporary University, and 3 Faculties also seems a limited number to provide appropriate curricular range in a modern multi-disciplinary University. Other issues associated with viability are explored below.

### **Some Discussion Issues on the Public Universities in Other Cities**

#### ***Coherence of Domestic Provision?***

**5.9** All these Universities were described as successors of the Faculties of the University of Pristina. The experts were told the Conference of Rectors considers what each University needs to provide which is attractive for its region, and seeks to avoid duplication with provision elsewhere, specifically at the University of Pristina. The experts were told it was often better to study at a public university in another city than to attend the University of Pristina. In terms of international regional comparisons, senior staff from the Universities in other cities pointed out, for example, that Serbia has 11 public universities, and Albania 9.

### ***Formal Requirements for University Status***

**5.10.1** In general discussion, it was conceded by the senior staff that the other public Universities did not necessarily meet all the criteria for University status, but it was important for this expansion in the number of Universities to move forward.

**5.10.2** The experts were told the formal requirements raised problems. Formally, each study programme is required to have one full Professor and two other staff with Ph.D.s. There are problems with this. It was pointed out that many of Kosovo's 'first wave' of Professors were now over 70 and had retired. Some statistics mentioned in the meeting seemed to suggest that 500 study programmes have been accredited across Kosovo, which would imply 1500 staff at Ph.D level, yet there are only 140 full Professors and 600 Ph.D.s. In future, hopefully more people with 'competent' Ph.D.s would come through.

**5.10.3** These issues over a shortage of appropriately qualified staff are consistent with the NGO criticisms which the experts heard over staffing problems at the other public Universities (see par.4.6.7 above).

### ***Research and the Public Universities in Other Cities***

**5.11.1** If there are shortages of Ph.D. qualified staff for the public Universities in other cities, this connects with questions about the research capacity of these Universities. Each University responded on the broader question of research (research activity, teaching underpinned by research, and research active staff).

**5.11.2** The University of Gjakovë/Đakovica highlighted the need for facilities for research. This University proposed joint Ph.D. programmes with EU universities. Programmes did not need 3 full-time staff with Ph.D.s, but could involve staff from partners in Masters/Doctoral programmes in English.

**5.11.3** The University of Gjilan/Gnjilane also indicated that it cannot meet the current staffing requirements, especially because budget constraints prevented appointing the required number of Professors. This University also mentioned international collaboration on Ph.D. and Masters programmes, including programmes in English. Erasmus+ should be used to develop staff and student mobility.

**5.11.4** The University of Pejë/Peć mentioned the hope that students obtaining Ph.D.s in other countries would return to work in Kosovar HE.

**5.11.5** The University of Prizren argued that there should be more co-operation across the public Universities in running Ph.D. programmes. In the meantime, staff were mostly obtaining Ph.D.s from abroad (e.g. Albania, Macedonia and Serbia).

### ***The Council of Rectors and Relationships between the Public Universities in other cities and the University of Pristina***

**5.12.1** The Council of Rectors was created three months previously. It is attended by the Minister and the Head of the Accreditation Agency. There was general support for the creation of the Council of Rectors as a good idea.

**5.12.2** However, in further individual discussion with one of the senior University staff, it was suggested to the experts that inter-University collaboration is essentially between the six Universities, and the University of Pristina does not get involved. The six I Universities in other cities meet informally. It was also suggested that the failure rates and repeat rates are nowhere as high in the other Universities as they are in the University of Pristina. When asked by the experts, this individual

seemed to agree that there may be some merit in reducing the size of the University of Pristina and switching Pristina programmes elsewhere.

### ***Ethical Behaviour and the Public Universities in Other Cities***

**5.13.1** Codes of Ethics were discussed with the representatives of the public Universities in other cities. The experts were told that all public universities have a statute, each University has its own regulations, and each has a Code of Ethics. There is not one domestic model for these Codes of Ethics. The University of Pejë/Peć explained that, when producing their Code, they took best examples from different countries. At the University of Prizren, academic staff, students and administrative staff were all involved.

**5.13.2** In terms of how the Codes are implemented, the University of Prizren has a Commission to deal with the Code. Generally, the representatives of other public Universities said that actions depended on the nature of cases, but all cases which are not criminal acts are dealt with under the Codes. Examples were given of the use of sanctions against students cheating in examinations. On student plagiarism, the example was given of a Code requiring students to sign declarations, although this may be more at Masters and Doctoral level. One University emphasised that it has separate Codes for staff and students.

### ***'Vulgar Corruption' and the Public Universities in Other Cities***

**5.14.1** The representatives of the public Universities in other cities were asked about 'vulgar corruption' (i.e. such potential abuses as staff seeking or accepting bribes from students etc.).

**5.14.2** In the University of Pejë/Peć, the experts were told that mechanisms were in place to check such cases. There were complaints boxes. If cases emerged, they are reported to the Prosecutor's Office and the police. The Rector may dismiss staff. The Rector can hold meetings with students without staff being present. This senior member of staff thinks that it is now much more difficult for 'vulgar corruption' to take place.

**5.14.3** For the University of Gjilan/Gnjilane, it was emphasised that it is very hard for bribes etc. to be passed without knowledge in small universities. Staff certainly do not seek sexual favours. The phrase was used - 'want to stop the bad from Pristina'.

### ***Some Concluding Remarks on the Public Universities in Other Cities***

**5.15.1** There are clearly issues which must be addressed in the ongoing development of the other public Universities. It will be essential to ensure that each University reaches a size to provide a genuine university experience for its students, and with a sufficient number of Faculties and subject programmes to offer a curricular range broad enough to underpin the academic synergies and cross-disciplinary collaborations expected of a modern University. It will be necessary for each University to meet the formal criteria for University status, particularly on the number of appropriately Ph.D. qualified staff. This level of staffing must then provide a broad enough base for research activity which meets international standards and underpins all teaching with research.

**5.15.2** However, while there are challenges to be met, there appears to be an intrinsic case for the public Universities in other cities. In general terms, each of them has sufficient population in their area to provide the basis for a University, and each gives local University access to students for whom commuting to the University of Pristina is impracticable. More specifically, there seems to be a more positive sense that these public Universities have fewer issues than the University of Pristina with 'unethical behaviour' of staff and students. Given such comparisons, and to ensure the viability of the public Universities in other cities, there seems to be a serious case for some significant re-distribution of staff and other resources from Pristina to the other public Universities.

## **Recommendations from Section 5 (on The Public Universities in Other Cities)**

### **Recommendation 13:**

While recognising that the location of public Universities in other cities in Kosovo is justified on the basis of sufficient population in their areas and their provision of local access for students who would find a commute to Pristina impracticable, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, and senior staff at the other public Universities) must ensure that each University is genuinely viable as a University.

In particular, the Kosovar authorities must ensure that each University:-

- (a) has a sufficient number of students to guarantee a vibrant university community
- (b) has a sufficiently broad range of academic subjects and programmes to achieve healthy academic synergies and appropriate interdisciplinary collaboration across disciplines
- (c) can provide programmes which meet the needs of its local community in a coherent way
- (d) has a sufficient number of appropriately qualified staff to deliver each of its programmes
- (e) can achieve a sufficiently broad base of quality research activity, both to achieve international-class research outputs and to ensure all teaching is fully underpinned by research
- (f) meets the formal requirements for University status under the Law on Higher Education

### **Recommendation 14:**

In supporting the role of public Universities in other cities within Kosovo's overall HE system, the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, the Conference of Rectors, and senior staff at the University of Pristina and the public Universities from other cities) should give serious consideration to reducing the relative size of the University of Pristina, and re-allocating some of its programmes, staffing and other resources to the other public Universities.

### **Recommendation 15:**

These same Kosovar authorities should build upon the apparent perception that the public Universities in other cities in Kosovo are freer from corruption threats to their integrity than the University of Pristina. This should include the public Universities contributing to the development of a model for a powerful Code of Ethics for HE staff and students, drawing upon the work which each University has already undertaken on Codes.



## **6– PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs)**

### **The Scope of Private HE**

**6.1.1** According to the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 there are thirty licensed private HEIs in Kosovo. However, the website of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) lists only twenty-nine. (This discrepancy of one may simply be a question of timing with an institution having recently either been awarded or lost its license.)

**6.1.2** The Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 gives a figure of 122,000 students in Higher Education (HE) but it is unclear how many of that number are enrolled in private HEIs. What is clear from the KAA website is that the institutions vary in the number of accredited programmes they offer (from only one or two to up to thirty-two) and in the range of subject areas covered. Fitting in with the Kosovo Government's desire to improve linkage between study programmes and employment many of the programmes offered appear to have a vocational focus on areas such as, for example, Business and Finance and Health related fields.

**6.1.3** Some of the private HEIs have links with universities in other countries but none have met the criteria within Kosovo to attain full University status with the legal power to award Doctorates.

### **Range of Evidence Gathered on Private HEIs**

**6.2.1** Due to limited time, only one meeting was held with representatives of a private college to discuss the college, its development and history, and staff views of the place of private HEIs within the Kosovo education system. This will be expanded on below and in the section on the KAA.

**6.2.2** As well as this meeting, the experts gained insight into the private HE sector at various meetings and through desk research.

### **Evidence from Meetings**

#### ***Anti-Corruption Agency***

**6.3.1** The agency does have some powers to investigate suspected wrongdoing in the HE sector, including in the private HEIs. This can be at the criminal level but also at the level of administrative misconduct.

**6.3.2** While the Agency was aware of concerns around issues within the public university sector such as plagiarism, false journal publication and manipulated promotion processes, greater trust was still expressed in the public university sector than the private HEIs - although the Agency had no real concerns about Private HEIs acting as degree mills.

**6.3.3** The one area of concern expressed was the number of staff in the private HEIs who were also working in the State university sector - reportedly 80% of the private HEI staff. Steps to restrict the number of posts staff could simultaneously hold were in the forthcoming Draft Law but at the time of the meeting this was still being considered by the Kosovar Parliament.

#### ***Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST)***

**6.4.1** In the meeting with the Minister and senior Ministry staff, the Minister stated that all private HEIs had University College status with none yet attaining full University powers. He noted some concerns about the quality of private HE provision and about the number of institutions there were.

**6.4.2** To encourage quality the Minister pointed out that some private HE provision had been closed (including one 'phantom' university) and that the closer inspection and monitoring of the HE system in meeting its legal requirements planned for the future would help. He also stated that in the last twelve

months over the entire HE system seventy-one programmes had been unsuccessful in gaining accreditation from the KAA, which suggested that poor quality provision was being reduced.

### ***Kosovo Accreditation Agency***

**6.5.1** The role of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency will itself be dealt with in a separate Section (Section 7) below but in terms of private HEIs the following points should be noted.

**6.5.2** For the private HE sector there were set criteria that had to be met to become accredited. At the time of the meeting it was stated that thirty institutions and four hundred plus programmes had been accredited but six private HEIs were currently not permitted to recruit students because of concerns about them. KAA accreditation and Government licensing were both necessary for HEIs to operate. The KAA looked at the quality of provision while the Government licensing process was a technical exercise ensuring that set criteria were met. There was a clear awareness of the danger of overlaps in these two exercises and attempts were made to avoid repetition. It was also noted there was ongoing concern about there being too many institutions.

**6.5.3** International accreditation was possible but if the HEI wished to award a Kosovar degree then KAA 'validation' of the international accreditation was a prerequisite. This needed further development and had to be a meaningful process. It must not be seen as simply a rubber stamp of the international accreditation.

**6.5.4** In terms of institutional status, KAA measures HEIs against the set criteria to determine whether they are, for example, a University College or a University. Recommendations are then made to the Government which actually awards the status to the Private HEIs.

**6.5.5** There was concern about the dangers to integrity from academic staff holding multiple posts, often within both the public and private HE sectors. Legally no more than two posts should be held and steps were being taken by the KAA to ensure greater compliance with this requirement. Specifics of these steps will be dealt with in Section 7 below on the KAA.

### ***Non-Governmental Organisations***

**6.6.1** Two NGOs were met with and each had criticisms of the private HEI system. One claimed that private HEIs were blatant in accepting bribes - although no supporting evidence was presented. The other commented on academic staff from the public sector moonlighting in the private HEIs in order to top-up their salaries.

### ***Public University sector***

**6.7.1** Two meetings were held with senior staff from the Public university sector. Initially senior staff from the University of Pristina were met and then separately there was a meeting with senior staff from other public universities.

**6.7.2** Regarding Private HEI provision the only comment that was made was a recognition that academic staff may be involved in having multiple posts. However, it was stressed that steps were being taken to ensure that legal requirements over holding no more than two posts were being met. These steps included requiring staff to be available for teaching within the public university between 8.00am and 4.00pm thus ensuring that their principal commitment was to that post.

### ***Private University sector***

**6.8.1** As noted above a meeting was held with staff from a private college and during this meeting it was reported that many of the college's staff had studied overseas and hence, it was argued, had greater awareness of quality assurance processes and how to ensure an ethos of integrity. It had been the first HEI in Kosovo to have its own Quality Assurance Handbook and steps were taken

through having a Code of Ethics to minimise cheating such as plagiarism. All students also completed an introductory module on ethics. Use was also made of the UK University's QA processes and its anti-plagiarism system Turnitin.

**6.8.2** It was recognised that staff having multiple academic posts was problematic and a potential challenge to integrity. However, it was also commented that system requirements which currently restrict the private HEIs to University College status mean that it is impossible for staff to have appropriate career progression (such as moving to professorial status) and hence staff who might wish to work solely within the private HEI sector also have to work within the public sector to have such titles awarded.

**6.8.3** The institution had a strong commitment to quality but seemed less convinced of the overall quality of the private HEI sector. They recognised the need for the Kosovo education system to assure itself of quality and integrity but clearly found some of the strictures (such as an annual inspection visit) burdensome for their own institution. They argued that a more nuanced approach for trusted providers would be appropriate.

### **Students**

**6.9.1** A meeting was held with student representatives but only two students attended, both from the public HE sector. While this clearly limits the number of views, the range of comments and the level of debate between the two student representatives was impressive and gave a remarkably thoughtful picture of the system from the student point of view.

**6.9.2** Private HEI students were included in domestic student representation so there were opportunities for the sharing of perspectives across both public and private sectors.

**6.9.3** It was reported that students from the private HEIs generally had fewer complaints about their lecturers and the quality of teaching. Negative comments tended to be around private HEIs not making enough use of textbooks, relying more heavily on lots of presentations for teaching. (This could of course be seen as private HEIs endeavouring to be innovative while many of their students have traditional assumptions around what constitutes appropriate teaching methods.)

**6.9.4** Comment was also made about public university staff missing teaching commitments because they were also working for personal profit in private HEIs. This was seen to be to the detriment of students in the public universities.

**6.9.5** Both student representatives were aware of past accusations of corruption involving KAA staff and private HEIs. They also suggested that there were some public concerns over the quality of the private HE sector with stories of illiterate students gaining qualifications.

### **6.10 Evidence from Desk Research**

**6.10.1** Various sources were considered regarding private HEIs. The following points were particularly noted.

**6.10.2** Regarding HE, the 'Program of the Government of Kosovo 2015-2018' mainly makes general points about how HE is to be supported and developed. Greater emphasis is to be put on the sector improving its quality. This clearly applies to all institutions, including private HEIs, but a specific point is made about 'increasing the demands and quality control of non-public providers' (p65). Also of significance is the emphasis (p66) on HEIs ensuring that ethics committees are in place and operating appropriately and on all universities having strengthened quality assurance units.

**6.10.3** The United Nations Development Programme (2015) 'Corruption-Risk Assessment in the Kosovo Education Sector' identifies (p21) the issue of HEI staff having multiple posts in several institutions.

**6.10.4** The 'Draft Law on Higher Education in Kosovo' (2015) sets various requirements for private HEIs. They must set up and maintain formal quality assurance systems, including the use of student evaluation mechanisms (Article 9). Chapter XI then sets further specific requirements for non-public HEIs such as staffing requirements and financial stability.

**6.10.5** The 'Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021' (July 2016) identifies (p18) the issue of cheating in the education system and highlights a worrying general acceptance of the problem. Strategic Objective (SO) 7 is on Higher Education but the text clearly makes the point that it is intrinsically linked to the overall strategy. The principal focus of SO7 is the improvement of quality within the overall HE system, both Public and Private, with various facets then being identified. It is noticeable that the need to enhance ethics, transparency and integrity is said to need 'significant consideration' (p77). Expected Result 7.2 looks to staff development and then 7.3 specifically focuses on ensuring that quality assurance mechanisms are fully functional in HE. Possible activity 7.7.3 (p82) suggests that making ethics committees operational in HEIs should be carried out, which is to be welcomed. These are positive steps but it is also noted that in the Assumptions and Risks section a lack of interest from academic staff in capacity building programmes is identified (p84). Clearly these points relate to HE generally but it will be important for the private HEIs to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Strategy so that their quality and integrity is beyond question.

### **Some Overall Comments on Private HEIs**

**6.11.1** Regarding the private HE sector various contradictory views were evident. There was both trust and distrust in the sector, over both quality and integrity. The staff from the private college stated that they were striving for quality education, emulating best international practice. However, multiple sources expressed concern about the number of institutions and the quality of some. Another common view was a concern about academic staff having multiple posts in different institutions.

### **Recommendations from Section 6 (on Private Higher Education Institutions [HEIs] within the HE System)**

#### **Recommendation 16:**

**All relevant actors within the Kosovar education system (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency [KAA], and senior staff in the private HEIs) need to maintain vigilance over the quality of provision within the private HE sector. Where institutions are deemed to be providing either poor quality or less than full integrity they should be closed.**

#### **Recommendation 17:**

**The measures to ensure that academic staff hold no more than two posts must be fully and consistently implemented by the relevant Kosovar authorities (the Government of Kosovo, MEST, the KAA, and senior staff of the public and private HEIs).**

## **7 – THE KOSOVO ACCREDITATION AGENCY (KAA)**

### **Range of Evidence Gathered on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency**

#### **Evidence from Meetings**

##### **Meeting with the Acting Director of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency**

**7.1.1** The Acting Director of the KAA outlined the small size of the organisation but stressed that it was endeavouring to meet its remit which was the accreditation of all HEIs in Kosovo and related quality assurance matters. KAA is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Nominally the agency is independent but is Government funded plus also charging fees for accreditation. (Any excess funds are channeled back to the Government.) Staff are Civil Servants and are answerable to a Board of nine, three of whom are international representatives. All Board members are Ministry appointments.

The Acting Director also was open about the previous difficulties the Agency had experienced and which had led to the resignation of senior staff and her subsequent appointment as Director.

**7.1.2** For the HE sector there were set criteria that had to be met to become accredited. At the time of the meeting it was stated that thirty institutions had been accredited and four hundred plus programmes, but six private HEIs were currently not permitted to recruit students because of concerns about them. KAA accreditation and Government licensing were both necessary for HEIs to operate. The KAA looked at the quality of provision while the government licensing process was a technical exercise ensuring that set criteria were met. There was a clear awareness of the danger of overlaps in these two exercises and attempts were made to avoid repetition. It was also noted there was ongoing concern about there being too many institutions.

**7.1.3** International accreditation was possible but if the HEI wished to award a Kosovar degree then KAA 'validation' of the international accreditation was a prerequisite. This needed further development and had to be a meaningful process. It must not be seen as simply a rubber stamp of the international accreditation.

**7.1.4** For 2017 the Accreditation Agency was introducing a new data management system which would register all academic staff (previously this had only been a requirement for Private HEI staff). The new system would mean that holding multiple posts (beyond the permitted two) would be easily identifiable and hence more effectively enforced. The system would also allow for the checking of qualifications and details such as residency status for HEI staff.

**7.1.5** The Acting Director stressed the need for the provision of online systems which would allow open access to the public (particularly parents and students) so that there could be transparency around accreditation decisions. She also argued for greater open access to data from the HEIs.

**7.1.6** Currently accreditations were carried out only by international experts. These were people known to the KAA through links with other Quality Assurance Agencies. This helped to ensure the probity of the system but, in discussion, it was agreed that the exclusion of academic staff from Kosovo was counter-productive as having them involved would help to develop accreditation expertise, a sharing of academic standards and a sense of moral purpose across the education system. It was therefore agreed that the gradual introduction and integration of Kosovar academic staff into accreditation teams would be a positive step.

**7.1.7** Links were also being developed with the European Students Union for the provision of student representation for accreditation panels but, because of costs and practicalities, having students involved in accreditations was only an occasional exercise. However, the Acting Director argued strongly that there was a need for students within the Kosovar HE system to have greater and more formal involvement in HEI quality assurance processes. Students evaluations of programmes needed

to become more generally used and a central part of quality assurance processes. She also acknowledged that HEIs need to build their capacity in how they dealt with student complaints.

**7.1.8** In discussion, it was acknowledged that the HE system needed to build a more positive and supportive ethos for quality assurance. It was suggested that institutions tended to be rather ad hoc in their approaches and hence would benefit from being more strategic. This would enhance quality but also help to increase integrity. HEIs should be actively profiling themselves so that there was greater public (particularly student) awareness of both the quality of their provision and the high standards of integrity they were maintaining.

### ***Anti-Corruption Agency***

**7.2.1** The new Director of the Anti-Corruption Agency expressed his support for the Acting Director of KAA and hoped that there would be a continuation of positive work which had been done in the past.

### ***Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST)***

**7.3.1** The Minister was positive about the developing relationship between KAA and the Inspectorate and stressed his strong belief in the need for public accountability in education.

### ***Non-Governmental Organisations***

**7.4.1** One NGO raised concerns about the integrity of KAA itself. Its recent difficulties with accusations of seeking bribes for accreditation were highlighted, as was the related public scandal. Comment was also made on its Board members being political appointees and the question was raised of how independent this meant they actually were.

### ***Public University sector***

**7.5.1** During the two meetings held with public university staff there was an acknowledgement that there was a need to build the capacity of the HE system in Kosovo and that KAA had a part to play in this process if quality and integrity were to be progressed.

**7.5.2** It was suggested that KAA was playing a positive role in HE, meeting its requirements to employ competent staff, and that through engagement with KAA there was a sharing of successful pedagogies. The involvement of international experts was also a positive feature in helping to guide and calibrate the Kosovar HE system.

**7.5.3** KAA was also said to be encouraging the HEIs to think more strategically but it was recognised that both Faculties and Universities needed to cooperate more so that good practices could be better shared.

**7.5.4** It was however also suggested that KAA should, in the short term, be more relaxed about its criteria for University status, to recognise the realities of where the HE system in Kosovo currently is.

### ***Private University sector***

**7.6.1** Staff from the private college agreed with the need for there to be criteria to attain particular HE statuses but thought that KAA had not applied the criteria consistently across the sector, meaning that some institutions appeared to be claiming a status to which they were not entitled.

**7.6.2** They also claimed that frequent rule changes in how accreditations were to be carried out (sometimes once the process had actually commenced) were problematic and meant that institutions were confused about the demands being set. There needed to be greater clarity from KAA on the steps to move from College to University College and eventually University status and then the criteria applied for a set period of time. It was felt to be a political decision that no private HEI could attain

University College status, while new public 'Universities' already had.

**7.6.3** The representatives from the private college stated that their college supported academic staff to complete Ph.D.s, often outside of Kosovo, but real concern was expressed about the role of the ENIC/NARIC office in recognising such internationally attained Ph.Ds. The rationale behind having such checks was recognised (to ensure they were genuine qualifications, honestly obtained) but the process was described as being very time-consuming (up to 18 months) and, it appeared, essentially a re-assessment of the entire Doctorate. The names of the ENIC/NARIC committee members involved were in the public domain but only the result of the process (recognised/not recognised) was provided, with no feedback given.

### **Students**

**7.7.1** The students interviewed were clearly aware of the recent scandal at KAA and the involvement of private sector institutions in it had lessened trust in the private HEIs.

### **7.8 Evidence from Desk Research**

**7.8.1** Various sources were considered regarding KAA. The following points were particularly noted.

**7.8.2** The 'Program of the Government of Kosovo 2015-2018' does not explicitly mention KAA but various points within the Programme clearly depend on its work and success. There is a strong emphasis on improving the quality of HE and encouraging greater autonomy for institutions but this will be within a framework of accountability - within which KAA should have a central role. There is also a commitment to ensuring the Kosovar HE system is comparable to other European systems and that too is a function in which KAA should be central.

**7.8.3** As noted in the section on Private HEIs, the United Nations Development Programme (2015) 'Corruption-Risk Assessment in the Kosovo Education Sector' identifies (p21) the issue of HEI staff having multiple posts in several institutions. It also emphasises (p21) that KAA has a role during its accreditation processes in checking the qualifications and CVs of HEI staff. However, it then goes on (p22) to identify as one of the risk areas for HE high-level university staff and professors making use of false academic credentials to gain positions.

**7.8.4** The Draft Law on Higher Education in Kosovo (2015) restates the role of KAA in providing accreditation (Article 3: 1.19) and also the role of the government in thereafter licensing institutions (Article 3: 1.20). Article 13 deals with KAA stating that it is an independent body, able to determine its own statutes - 'subject to their approval by the government' (Article 13, 2). Article 13: 7 details the KAA board and how it is to be appointed. Article 13: 9 states that such appointees 'cannot be high public officials who currently hold political posts in the institutions of Kosovo' and Article 13: 10 then describes how and why they can be removed from the Board, including for being found guilty of a criminal offence, punishable by imprisonment. Article 14 details the accreditation process to be followed and Article 15 then details the licensing process for HEIs.

**7.8.5** European Commission Staff Working Document Kosovo 2015 Report points out (p46) that while KAA has achieved membership of ENQA its reputation has been considerably tarnished, both inside of Kosovo and internationally by the scandal involving some of its senior staff.

**7.8.6** The 'Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021' (July 2016) identifies (p80) the need to enhance and develop KAA's human resources and financial capacities as one of the possible ways to help achieve Result 7.3 'Mechanisms for QA in HE are fully functional'.

## **Some Overall Comments on KAA**

**7.9** KAA has clearly been tainted by the recent scandal regarding its performance of its remit. It now needs to move beyond this and be an absolute role model of professionalism and integrity. The Kosovar Government has to ensure that it is suitably resourced and able to act an independent entity. The latter point means that the Ministry and the Government have to be scrupulous in ensuring that the appointment of Board members is not seen as a sinecure for party activists. KAA itself has to work with ENQA, and its other international links, to ensure that its processes and procedures are in line with best international practice. It must also build up the experience of those within the Kosovar education system rather than relying too heavily on external international expertise. Using such external experts may help in the short term to ensure integrity, but the longer term ambition must be for Kosovo to be able to demonstrate both the expertise and the integrity of academic staff from within its own system.

### **Recommendations from Section 7 (on the Kosovo Accreditation Agency)**

#### **Recommendation 18:**

**The Government of Kosovo must provide sufficient resources and an ethos of independence for the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) to carry out its statutory role in an effective, efficient and transparently open and honest manner, thus ensuring that KAA is the principal body delivering quality assurance for the Kosovar HE system.**

#### **Recommendation 19:**

**To help build up the capacity of the HE quality assurance system in Kosovo, KAA should begin to make use of academic experts from Kosovo itself as part of its accreditation panels, not relying solely on international experts.**

#### **Recommendation 20:**

**KAA should ensure that its processes and procedures are robust and consistently applied over all institutions for an identified time period, say three years.**

#### **Recommendation 21:**

**KAA should work with the ENIC / NARIC office to ensure that the review of international qualifications attained by HE staff is done in a proportionate manner and within as short a timescale as possible.**



## **8 - CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

**8.1** The experts hope that the analysis in the baseline assessment, and particularly its Recommendations, will provide a helpful basis for future discussions with Kosovar stakeholders in the context of progressing the European Union/Council of Europe project on 'Strengthening Integrity and Combating Corruption in Higher Education in Kosovo'. In particular, there will be opportunities to discuss the baseline assessment specifically at a round table for major stakeholders in March 2017.

**8.2** A wide range of topics have been covered in this baseline assessment, with Recommendations over the entire range. Of course, Kosovar stakeholders are asked to consider all these topics and Recommendations fully. However, particular emphasis should be given to the topics and Recommendations covered in Section 4 of this document. It is the experts' view that the key immediate priority for the relevant Kosovar authorities is to address the dissonance between the positive official narrative of Kosovar HE development and the very critical counter-narrative presented by other stakeholders, particularly NGOs, and also students. The experts wish to emphasise this as their concluding comment because they have found the critical counter-narrative to be persuasive.

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[https://rs.boell.org/sites/default/files/reforming\\_the\\_university\\_of\\_pristina\\_d4d\\_eng\\_2015.pdf](https://rs.boell.org/sites/default/files/reforming_the_university_of_pristina_d4d_eng_2015.pdf)

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	Kosovo Anti-Corruption Agency
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
CoE	Council of Europe
CV	Curriculum Vitae
D4D	Democracy for Development Institute
EC	European Commission
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESU	European Students Union
ETINED	Pan-European Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IT	Information Technology
KAA	Kosovo Accreditation Agency
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PDK	Democratic Party of Kosovo
PECK	Project against Economic Crime in Kosovo
Ph.D.	Doctor of Philosophy
SCHE	State Council of Higher Education
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UP	University of Pristina
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VET	Vocational education and training

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

**[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)**

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