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SELF-EVALUATION REPORT FOR INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

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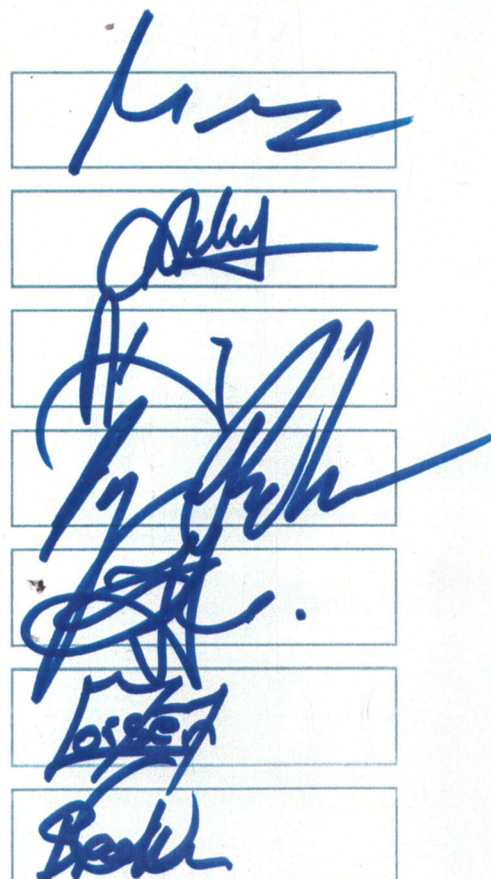


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A. Introduction to the self-evaluation process

The Self-Evaluation Group for the purposes of the Institutional Review launched by the Public Albanian Agency on the Accreditation of Higher Education (APAAL) was established based on the proposal by the Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement (AEQI) Board No. 01, dated 30.05.2016, and the Decision of the Academic Senate No. 2, dated 08.06.2016.

The Institutional Review of Epoka University also coincides with the Periodical Institutional Re-accreditation which according to the Albanian higher education legislation, has to be conducted each six years by all higher education institutions in the Republic of Albania.

The Self-Evaluation Group was composed of academic and administrative staff members who represented the principal units of the university and who had been involved in previous self-evaluation processes. Following the election of the new President of the Student Council for the 2016-2017 academic year, based on the Decision of the Academic Senate No. 04, dated 01.02.2017, the President of the Student Council was also appointed as a member of the Self-Evaluation Group with the principal duty of representing the views and opinions of the Student Council and facilitating the communication between the Self-Evaluation Group and the student community through the Student Council.

The Self-Evaluation Group operated under the overall coordination of the AEQI Board, and in this context, the members the Group had access to all data, documents and information deemed as necessary concerning the preparation of the Self-Evaluation Report.

The Self-Evaluation Group carried out its work and drafted the Self-Evaluation Report in compliance with the provisions of the ESG¹ and the respective Handbook provided APAAL. After receiving the suggestions and feedback from the Departments, the Student Council and the AEQI Board, the content of the Self-Evaluation Report was approved by the Decision of Academic Senate No. 01, dated 05.04.2017.

¹ ESG (2015) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

B. Historical Background of the HEI

1. Epoka University (Epoka) started its academic activities during the 2007-2008 academic year based on the Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania No. 281/2008. It has been established and is owned by the “Turgut Ozal Education SH.A.²”. In 2012, its legal status was changed from “School of Higher Learning” [*Shkollë e Lartë*] to that of a “University”³.

2. The Mission of Epoka University is “[t]o be an innovative and influential teaching and research institution, serving to fundamental human values through the production, dissemination and development of knowledge at an international level as well as to contribute to the improvement of the life quality of society based on national and regional needs. In this context, Epoka University aims at raising well-prepared, productive and competent individuals with a research-oriented spirit, who possess professional ethics and social sensitiveness and are also open towards national and international challenges.”⁴

3. Epoka offers in total 33 study programs: 10 in the first cycle (Bachelor); 17 in the second cycle (9 Master of Science programs, 7 Professional Master programs and 1 integrated second cycle program); and 6 programs in the third cycle (PhD). Epoka is focused on economics and finance (13 study programs), information and telecommunication technology (7), architecture (4), civil engineering (4), and political science (5). The programs are currently provided by the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, and the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, employing 102 academic staff members. Starting from the 2017-2018 academic year, the study programs will be offered by three faculties with the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences starting its academic activities. As of February 28, 2017, the total number of students in all study programs was 1709, whereby undergraduates make 70 percent of the student body.

4. Epoka has an increasing number of partners in USA, UK, Italy, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Turkey etc. In 2016 Epoka had 66 university partnerships around the world and it has been a hosting university for several student and staff mobility programs

² Registered in the National Register Center, NIPT. K12125004O, Turgut Ozal Education JSC.

³ See Annex 2: Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 338/2012.

⁴ See Annex 3: Statute and Web Page: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-about-epoka-mission-vision-1-4.html>

like Erasmus+ and Mevlana. Epoka University is also an associate member of the European Universities Association (EUA) as well as a member of International Association of Universities (IAU), and at the same time, it is a signatory of Magna Charta Universitatum.

5. Epoka actively supports the research of its faculty through the granting of financial support with regard to participation in international conferences as well as publication of articles in international peer-reviewed journals with impact factor. The university has also been part of many international and national research projects, especially under the European Research Area. This year Epoka is involved in two Erasmus+ projects, six COST actions and is a member of a consortium that has successfully passed the first evaluation stage of a Horizon 2020 project.

6. Epoka is located close to the city of Tirana and it is in the vicinity of the only airport of Albania. Its campus has three main buildings, one of which functions as a dormitory⁵.

7. The main body responsible for academic standards and quality of learning is the Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement (AEQI) Board which is responsible towards the Academic Senate. The Board has eight members, consisting of members of faculty, administration, a student and two external members⁶.

8. Epoka was granted its first institutional accreditation in 2011⁷, when it also accredited seven Bachelor programs. In 2012-2016⁸ the Ministry of Education and Sports accredited all Master of Science (Msc) and Professional Master (PM) programs offered by Epoka University. In 2015-16 Epoka received accreditation for all its third cycle programs (PhD)⁹.

⁵ See <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/cat-visit-connect-1568.html>

⁶ See <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.a/home.html>

⁷ See Annex 2: Ordinance No. 260, dated 07.06.2011 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Albania.

⁸ See Annex 2: Chapter 2.

⁹ See Annex 2: Chapter 2. See also <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/home-external-evaluation-reports-1479-1481.html>

C. Self-evaluation of Institutional Review Evaluation Areas

1. EVALUATION AREA: THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS MANAGEMENT

1.1 Autonomy

1.1.1 Mission and Statute (Standard III, I.1)

9. Epoka University functions in accordance with its Statute adopted in 2007 when the University started its academic activities. The necessary amendments have been carried out in the Statute since then in order to reflect changes in national higher education legislation and to meet evolving institutional needs. In order to ensure full compliance with the provisions of the Law No. 80/2015 “On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania”¹⁰, a new Statute has been adopted by the competent bodies of Epoka in 2016 and has been submitted for approval to the Ministry of Education and Sports. The new Statute was approved based on the Ordinance of the Ministry of Education and Sports No. 146, dated 31.03.2017, and Epoka University was notified on this approval on April 03, 2017.

10. The mission and objectives of Epoka University are in harmony with the mission of higher education in Albania, as stipulated by the Law of Higher Education (80/2015). The mission of Epoka University comprises the whole range of mission statements in article 1 of the Law on Higher Education (2015) concerning teaching, research and professional training regarding the economic priorities of Albania and its democratic values.

¹⁰ See article 2, of the Statute, in: Annex 3: Chapter 2. Statute, EU-STA-EN/2007.

“Epoka ... consistently aims at achieving higher academic standards ..., supporting the educational aspirations and achievements of everyone. ... promoting scientific development ...[,] prepar[ing] senior specialists ..., provide depth academic studies and conduct research ..., continuous training ..., [and] help economic development [...]”. (Article 4, Statute)

11. Epoka has in place a whole set of rules and regulations that are based on the Albanian legislation and its Statute. These regulations regulate the processes and output of all the units and services at Epoka University¹¹.

12. The Statute is approved by both the Academic Senate and the Administration Board of the University (currently called the Higher Board), as stated in article 12 & 14 of the Statute, hence it is in compliance with Article 33 of the Law on Higher Education (80/2015) concerning the Statute¹².

13. Epoka is in compliance with article 18 of Law on Higher Education (80/2015) concerning its status and organization as a University; Epoka is committed to teaching, research and professional development. Epoka offers programs in all degree cycles (Bachelor, Master and PhD.)¹³ and teaching will be provided by three faculties as of the 2017-2018 academic year.¹⁴ The university also has two research centers – the Center for European Studies and the Center for Research and Design in Architecture – and one center which offers continuing education courses and career advising.

The Statute and regulations of Epoka University are improved continuously. The majority of changes have occurred in 2012 with the approval of doctoral degrees and

¹¹ For a whole list of regulations see: Annex 3: Chapter 2.

¹² See Annex 4: Chapter 2.1.8. Decision No. 02, dated 14.12.2016 of the Academic Senate and Decision No. 11, dated 11.01.2017 of the Higher Board of Epoka University.

¹³ See Annex 2: Chapter 2

¹⁴ The Law on Higher Education (80/2015) stipulates that a higher education institution (HEI) holding the ‘University’ status shall have at least three faculties. The said Law also provides that the concerned HEIs shall complete the necessary institutional re-organization within two academic years from the entrance into force of the Law. In order to meet the requirements of the new Law on Higher Education (80/2015), based on the Ordinance No. 116, dated 13.03.2017, of the Minister of Education and Sports, Epoka University has been re-organized into a HEI comprising three faculties: the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, the re-organized Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences and the newly established Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. The Faculty of Law and Social Sciences shall start its academic activities during the 2017-2018 academic year.

in 2016 following on the adoption of the new Law on Higher Education as well as related sub-legal acts¹⁵.

14. The Self-Evaluation Team considers Epoka to be in full compliance with the requirement of National Quality Standard III, I.1, concerning its Statute and its regulatory practices. Regulations are in harmony with the national legislation as well as with the Statute and the mission of the University.

1.1.2 Efficiency and Openness of Management (Standard III, I.2 & I.3)

15. Epoka's management system undergoes every year a review by an internal and external audit. The audit reports demonstrate that the institution's management is improving its management and increasing in efficiency, especially concerning the delivery of academic services to students¹⁶.

16. There is a clear distribution of roles and functions within the university. There are vertical hierarchies of decision-making in the management of administrative, financial and student affairs. In the management of academic affairs and research there are collegial decision-making systems and policies¹⁷.

17. The organizational and management structure of Epoka University is as follows¹⁸:

- The managing bodies at Epoka University are the Higher Board, Academic Senate and the University Administrative Board.

With the entrance into force of the new Statute, the managing bodies at Epoka University will be the Academic Senate, the Administrative Board and the Rectorate.

- The managing authorities at Epoka University are the Rector, the Secretary General and the Deans of each Faculty.

¹⁵ For a list of changes see in Annex 3: Chapter 2, Table 2.

¹⁶ Epoka has met the ISO 9001:2008 requirements (updated into ISO 9001:2015) as certified by an external audit, PGM-Turkey. See the ISO Certificate: <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/home-external-evaluation-reports-1479-1481.html>; According to the Standards Catalog the standards specify "requirements for a quality management system where an organization needs to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide product that meets customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, and aims to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement of the system and the assurance of conformity to customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements." See ISO 9001:2008, Quality management systems: Requirement (n.d.) http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue_detail?csnumber=46486

¹⁷ See for instance Regulation No. EU-REG-001-EN "Basic Regulation", Annex 3; See also a sample of the audit report 2015 in Annex 6: Chapter 1.1.

¹⁸ See a more detailed organization chart in Annex 3: Chapter 1.1.

With the entrance into force of the new Statute, the managing authorities at Epoka University will be the Rector, the University Administrator and the Deans of each Faculty.

18. The University Administrative Board formulates criteria for the allocation of financial, material and human resources and submits them for approval to the Higher Board. The Higher Board approves the budget and investment plan, sets out ways of controlling expenditure and budget implementation and investment plan of the University, as well as any other financial activities.

Before the beginning of each academic year, the Rector's office requests from all Departments to provide their justified requests with regard to human resources as well as physical, material and IT infrastructure needs for the subsequent academic year. After evaluation by the Rector's Office, these proposals are submitted for approval to the Higher Board¹⁹.

In terms of the support for the promotion of academic staff, the University Administrative Board is the competent body to take decisions on the granting of financial support to academic staff members with regard to their participation in international conferences and related scientific events as well as with regard to the granting of financial reward to academic staff members who publish in international peer reviewed journals.²⁰

19. The Administrative Board of the University is a collegial decision-making body concerning administrative and financial matters, consisting of the Rector as chairman, Vice Rectors, Deans of Faculties, Secretary General, Dean of Students, Vice-Dean of Students and the head of unit responsible for the institutional and legal matters. The duration of the mandate of the Administrative Board of University members' is two years.

The Administrative Board of the University has as main functions the drafting of long-term institutional development plans; the formulation of criteria for the allocation of financial, material and human resources and their submission for approval to the

¹⁹ See in Annex 6: Chapter 2.2.1.

²⁰ See EU-DIR-004-EN in Annex 3: Chapter 2 and in Annex 4: Chapter 2.1.5.

Higher Board as well as the monitoring and publication of evaluation activities of the University²¹.

20. The Academic Senate is the highest collegial decision-making body concerning academic matters, consisting of the Rector as chairman, Vice Rectors, Deans of each Faculty, Heads of Departments of each Faculty, the Secretary General, the Dean of Students, the Vice-Dean of Students and the head of unit responsible for the institutional and legal matters.

The Academic Senate has as main functions the definition of development policies of the institution; scheduling, coordination, direction and control of teaching and research activities and assessment of their effectiveness as well as the decision-making on important problems concerning teaching and scientific aspects²².

21. The Ethics Board discusses on ethical problems of higher education life concerning academic and administrative staff members as well as students, and makes proposals to the Rector on these issues. The members of the Ethics Board are appointed by the Academic Senate, for a two-year period²³.

Aiming at the positioning the Ethics Board at a more central place in the decision-making processes of the University, through the new Statute, the Ethics Board has been conferred additional powers. It shall prepare the Ethics Code and after its approval by the Academic Senate, the Ethics Board shall ensure its implementation by the academic and administrative staff members as well as students. At the same time, for the first time, the student community will be represented in the Ethics Board through the Vice-President of the Student Council²⁴.

22. Currently two collegial decision-making boards operate at the Faculty level. The Faculty Board determines the scheduled activity of teaching and research of the Faculty according to the proposals of Departments. The Faculty Board consists of the Dean as a Chairman, the Heads of Departments, the directors of research-

²¹ See article 15 of the Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: Statute, EU-STA-EN/2007.

²² See article 14 of the Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: Statute, EU-STA-EN/2007.

²³ See article 16 of the Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: Statute, EU-STA-EN/2007.

²⁴ See article 29 of the new Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: New Statute.

development centers, and a member of the academic staff for each Department elected by the respective Departments²⁵.

On the other hand, the Administrative Board of the Faculty is a collegial decision-making body that sets and schedules the use of human and material resources available to the Faculty according to the proposals of Departments. The Administrative Board of the Faculty consists of the Dean as a chairman and at least four academic staff members appointed by the Faculty Board, taking into consideration their academic titles²⁶.

With the entrance into force of the new Statute, the Decanate (*Dekanati* in Albanian) will be the prominent collegial decision-making body at the Faculty level combining the current powers of the Faculty Board and Faculty Administrative Board²⁷. At the same time, the Assembly of Academic Staff of each Faculty comprising all full-time academic staff members will elect three members at the Academic Senate and it will also appoint the members of Permanent Commissions at Faculty-level²⁸.

23. The Dean is the managing authority of the Faculty, representing the Faculty and acting on its behalf. The Dean exercises the control of compliance with the legal framework by the Heads of Departments/Directors of research centers and s/he carries out other functions stipulated in the Statute and other legal acts of the University. Currently, the Dean is appointed based on the proposal of the Rector and the approval of the Higher Board²⁹.

With the entrance into force of the new Statute, the Dean will be appointed by the Rector after approval by the Academic Senate³⁰.

24. The Head of Department is the managing authority of the Department. The Head of Department is responsible for the teaching and research activities at every level of the Department and for the orderly and efficient conduct of any activity in the said Department. Currently, the Head of Department is selected by the Dean from the full-

²⁵ See article 25 of the Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: Statute, EU-STA-EN/2007.

²⁶ See article 26 of the Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: Statute, EU-STA-EN/2007

²⁷ See article 25-26 of the new Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: New Statute.

²⁸ See article 28 of the new Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: New Statute.

²⁹ See article 23 of the Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: Statute, EU-STA-EN/2007.

³⁰ See article 51 of the new Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: New Statute.

time academic staff members of the Department, approved by the Rector and appointed by decision of the Higher Board³¹.

With the entrance into force of the new Statute, the Head of Department and the Head of Research Center as a base unit under the Faculty will be proposed by the Dean among the full-time academic staff members of the Department and will be appointed by the Rector after approval by the Academic Senate³².

25. The Council of Professors functions at Faculty-level with regard to the organization and management of PhD study programs offered by Epoka University.³³

26. As referenced above, the roles and appointment of the authorities at Epoka University, as well as the monitoring and controlling of those functions, are based on Epoka's Statute and its regulatory framework.

27. Epoka University is committed to further deepen the formal division of roles and activities between the management, administrative staff and academic personnel. This is obvious in the statute and the regulatory framework of Epoka University³⁴.

28. At Epoka University all university authorities and its administrative and academic units are involved in the decision-making process relevant to their area of competence and expertise.

29. The meeting agenda and related materials are distributed before the meetings and the decision-making takes place³⁵. This procedure is stipulated in the regulations.

30. The Academic Senate and other decision-making boards of the university meet regularly, this is also according to the statute³⁶. For instance in 2016 the Higher Board convened in 11 meetings, the Academic Senate convened in 15 meetings³⁷, the University Administrative Board convened in 46 meetings while the AEQI-Board met

³¹ See article 28 of the Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: Statute, EU-STA-EN/2007.

³² See article 55 of the new Statute in: Annex 3: Chapter 2: New Statute.

³³ See: EU-REG-033-EN and EU-REG-034-EN in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

³⁴ See EU-REG-001-EN "Basic Regulation", Annex 3: Chapter 2 which defines the role of each authoritative body at Epoka University

³⁵ See for instance a meeting agenda of AEQI Board on 30 of May 2016 in Annex 6: Chapter 1.2.2.

³⁶ According to the Statute, Annex 3: Chapter 2, Article 14/d "the Senate meets in ordinary session at least at the beginning and the end of the semester with the call of the Rector. ... It may also meet in extraordinary session with the call of the Rector."

³⁷ See a sample of minutes from the meeting of Academic Senate on 9 December 2015 in Annex 6: Chapter 1.2.1. The meetings of all decision-making boards are protocolled according to a specific form and archived in a special folder.

7 times. At the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, the Board of Faculty met 9 times, the Administrative Board of Faculty met 34 times and the Council of Professors convened in 3 meetings. At the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, the Board of Faculty met 7 times, the Administrative Board of Faculty met 23 times and the Council of Professors convened in 3 meetings.

31. Opinions and proposals of the Academic Senate and other boards are always considered for implementation. The rectorate monitors the implementation process within the given deadlines³⁸.

1.1.3 Accountability (Standard III, I.4)

32. In compliance with standard and guidelines (No. 1.1) of ESG, Epoka has set up a whole system of accountability and monitoring. The main collegial bodies are the Administrative Board, the Academic Senate, the Ethics Board and the AEQI Board. They ensure the legal compliance and the application of the rules and regulations of the university³⁹.

33. Epoka University consistently makes use of external stakeholders, such as external consultants and its alumni. For instance, AEQI Board has two external experts, one of which is an alumnus, and the other one has an extensive experience in policymaking in higher education⁴⁰. To improve its organization and management Epoka has also used the consultancy of PGM from Turkey⁴¹.

34. Because of its financial policies and the administration of funds Epoka has been eligible to participate in EU programs such as COST, Erasmus+ and in one national project as well as to apply in a Horizon 2020 project⁴².

1.1.4 Development Strategy (Standard III, I.5)

35. The first institution's development strategy was developed in 2012 for the period of 2013-2017, Strategic Plan "On Creating Public Value"⁴³. The strategy was subject

³⁸ See for instance in Annex 6: Chapter 1.2.1 the same Sample of Minutes (Annex 6) from the Academic Senate meeting in the above paragraph (30), proposal No. 2.

³⁹ See for instance, Annex 3: Statute. The role of the Senate is to "monitor, assess, provide and maintain responsibility for providing quality academic institution, in accordance with contemporary standards."

⁴⁰ See the composition of AEQI Board, <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/cat-aeqi-board-1408.html>

⁴¹ See PGM Company auditor visits Epoka University (1 March, 2013) <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-pgm-company-auditor-visits-epoka-university-518.html>

⁴² See Annex 5: List of Research Activities. During 2015-2016 Epoka has participated in six COST projects, Erasmus+, and numerous other international and national research projects.

⁴³ See Annex 7.

to a wide discussion and every year it has been evaluated by the members of AEQI board based on the indicators set in the strategy⁴⁴. Measured by their outcome, most of the goals were met, especially those comprising academic and students affairs. This ongoing evaluation of the strategy allows for a better and efficient management as it provides continuous information to all authorities.

36. The 2013-2017 Strategic Plan has set the goals and objectives for the future development of the University in order for it to fulfill its mission and obligations. Chapter 6 of the Strategic Plan contains the strategic goals and their respective performance indicators to measure the outcome. In Chapter 7 there is an estimated budget for each of the objectives and goals.

37. Both Epoka's Strategic Plan 2013-2017 and the draft-strategic plan of 2018-2022 are in alignment with the mission and purpose of the university. They both refer to its mission and status in their preamble⁴⁵.

38. The Strategic Plan has been discussed in detail and approved by the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board⁴⁶.

39. The Strategic Plan sets out the appropriate objectives and the means to achieve the expected outcome: it has a financial plan, a working plan, names the responsible units for each of the outcome and Epoka has established a Strategic Planning Board (5 members and one rapporteur) in order to monitor the implementation of the Strategy⁴⁷.

40. The draft-strategic plan of 2018-2022 is currently being drafted with the participation of the all the management bodies, academic staff and administrative units, by building heavily upon the Strategic Plans of Departments⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ See Epoka's Strategic Plan 2013-2017 and its evaluation in Annex 7: Chapter 1 and 2. See also <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/cat-strategic-plan-1409.html>

⁴⁵ See Annex 7: Chapter 1.

⁴⁶ See Decision of the University Administrative Board No. 01, dated 27.12.2013 and Decision of Academic Senate No. 01, dated 30.12.2013.

⁴⁷ See Annex 7: Chapter 1.

⁴⁸ See Annex 7: Chapter 3.

1.1.5 Transparency (Standard III, I.6)

41. Every year since 2009 Epoka has published and submitted its annual report to the Ministry of Education and Sports according to the Law on Higher of Education No. 9741/2007⁴⁹, and later according to the Law No. 80/2015.

42. The report contains the most important internal and external activities of the institution, its achievements and data on particular themes and subjects. The report is disseminated among the University's personnel and to interested parties through the web⁵⁰ and in form of a brochure⁵¹.

43. The information provided by the annual report ensures transparency for the stakeholders and helps the institution with the internal and external assessment. The report is discussed both at Academic Senate and at the meetings of the AEQI Board, as part of the report is used in the evaluation of the implementation process of the Strategic Plan⁵².

1.2 Organization and Management of Epoka University

1.2.1 Appropriate institutional structures (Standard III, II.1)

44. Epoka has established appropriate structures to accomplish its mission and purpose. The organization and management structures are stipulated in the Statute of the University and they act in compliance with the Albanian legal framework.

45. In compliance with the law of higher education, the University has ensured full autonomy to the Academic Senate⁵³ and academic freedom to its academic staff. The academic staff enjoys full autonomy and academic freedom. These norms and provisions are stipulated in both the statute and the regulation and are in accordance with the requirements of the law on higher education. The definition of academic freedom comprises freedom of teaching, scientific research and freedom of creation⁵⁴.

⁴⁹ See: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-annual-reports-6-48.html>

⁵⁰ See Annex 6: Chapter 1.3: Extracts from Annual Reports.

⁵¹ Available from the Media and Public Relations Office.

⁵² See also paragraph 38.

⁵³ See Statute, Article 3 and 14 in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

⁵⁴ Article 6 of the Statute states that: *"Teaching – scientific staff of Epoka University enjoys academic freedom in the education process and scientific research in terms of Law no. 9741, dated 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education in the Republic of Albania", as amended"*. Article 3/3 of Law no. 9741, dated 21.05.2007 "On Higher Education in the Republic of Albania" stated that "The academic freedom of the

46. All basic organizational constituent units are autonomous within their competencies⁵⁵.

47. Epoka University is in full compliance with its status as university according to the Law on Higher Education No. 80/2015, article 18. The university has three faculties: Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences and Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. There are two research centers which conduct applied research in the field of European Studies and Architecture⁵⁶. Epoka offers first, second and third cycle study programs⁵⁷. (For a more elaborated statement on publication in applied and basic research see paragraph 237.)

48. Epoka's staff offer high professional education in professional fields (engineering, design, administration and business) and in social sciences (political science and economics).

49. According to the Statute and Regulations, each Faculty has three basic units, out of which two are departments.⁵⁸ Each department has 7 effective members as academic staff, three of whom have at least PhD. or higher academic title⁵⁹.

50. The above information has been published online. Since 2009 Epoka University has had a website with .edu domain registered in Albania⁶⁰. Epoka's website has consistently been the highest or second-highest ranked among those from other higher education institutions in Albania⁶¹. This is an indicator that the website has

institutions of higher education is expressed in the freedom of teaching, the freedom of scientific research, freedom of creation, in conformity with the provisions of this law". According to Article 5 of the new Statute which is in compliance with the provisions of the 2015 Higher Education Law: "*Academic freedom is guaranteed through the right a) to organize teaching, scientific research and creative activities; b) to prepare and develop study programs and to define scientific research areas; c) to organize the process of the promotion of academic personnel*". See Statute and new Statute in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

⁵⁵ See for instance Annex 3: Chapter 2: EU-REG-009-EN/2007, "Regulation on the Center for European Studies"; EU-REG-037-EN/2013, "Center of Research and Design in Architecture".

⁵⁶ See Annex 3: Chapter 2. For relevant research activities see Annex 5: "List of research activities."

⁵⁷ See Annex 2: Chapter 2 and Annex 3: Chapter 2.

⁵⁸ See paragraph 47.

⁵⁹ See Statute in Annex 3: Chapter 2 and Annex 6: Chapter 4.1.4.

⁶⁰ See <http://www.epoka.edu.al>

⁶¹ See Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (July, 2016) Webometrics Ranking of World Universities. Retrieved from: <http://www.webometrics.info/en/Europe/Albania>

continuously been used by students and other interested parties and that it contains relevant information for its users.

1.2.2 Decision-making process and inclusion (Standard III, II.3)

51. Consistent with the points mentioned in chapter 1.1.2, collegial decision-making bodies operate at every unit level.

52. Boards give opinions and proposals and make decisions that are sent to managing bodies and authorities for the final decision to be taken⁶².

53. Academic staff are involved in internal debate under institutional procedures prescribed by statute. The Department is composed of all academic staff members and as such, academic staff members are involved in the decision-making process of all areas under the responsibility of the Department⁶³. Furthermore, according to the new Statute, all full-time academic staff are members of the General Assembly of Academic Staff of each Faculty⁶⁴.

1.3 Partnership

1.3.1 Evidence based decision-making (Standard III, III.1)

54. Decision-making and policies at Epoka University are evidence-based and following the best education and administration practices of the world class universities concerning cooperation and strategic partnerships.

55. The Strategic Plan is based on research conducted at Epoka University⁶⁵ and other institutions⁶⁶. The focus of the university lays primarily on architecture, civil engineering, information technology and business, which are also the most promising areas for the development of the Albanian economy and employ more than 50% of the workforce⁶⁷. This is also consistent with the employment strategies of the Albanian

⁶² See Annex 4: Chapter 2.1.

⁶³ See Article 27, c) and d) in the Statute in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

⁶⁴ See Article 28 in the new Statute in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

⁶⁵ For a reference list, see Annex 7. See also the most recent market research by Rectorate on the opening of an integrated second cycle study program in Law in Annex 6: Chapter 8; and the study at the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences conducted by Turan et al. (2016) 'Graduate Skills and Employability at the Labor Market: Graduates' Expectations and Employers' Perspective. Epoka University. Retrieved from <http://eco.epoka.edu.al/cat-project-1732.html>

⁶⁶ For a whole list of references on labor market surveys conducted in Albania upon which Epoka has based its development policies, see Annex 7: Chapter 4.

⁶⁷ Elezi, P., Muca, E., Muraku, E., & Filipi, G. (2014). Shqipëri Dinamikat e tregut të punës 2001 - 2011. Retrieved from http://www.instat.gov.al/media/241753/dinamikat_e_tregut_t_pun_s_2001-2011.pdf

government emphasizing the role of vocational education in the fields of IT, business and construction for the expansion of small and medium enterprises⁶⁸.

56. Epoka University also has a tracing program to trace student employment⁶⁹ which is managed by the Career Planning and Alumni Office. The data is published in Epoka's Annual Reports⁷⁰. There is a very high employment rate among Epoka graduates. 75% of those graduated in 2014-15 found a job within their first year after their graduation⁷¹. Turan et al. (2016) in their study at the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences report very high satisfaction rates among graduates concerning the practical relevance and high employability prospects⁷².

57. Both the Turgut Ozal Education SH.A., the parent company, and Epoka University comply with the legal framework of the Republic of Albania concerning competition⁷³ in the education market. This commitment has also been incorporated into the new Statute of Epoka University⁷⁴.

⁶⁸ See the latest National Employment and Skills Strategy (2014-2020) of the Albanian Government in http://www.sociale.gov.al/files/documents_files/Albania_EMP-SKILLS_STRATEGY_ActionPlan_2014_.pdf

⁶⁹ See also Standard I, III.9, paragraph 293.

⁷⁰ See page 31 of the Annual Report 2015-2016 in Annex 6: Chapter 1.3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² 86% of the respondents among graduates in the survey stated that the programs were very effective or simply effective for their future employment (Turan et al., 2016, p. 10). Employers also were very pleased with the program, perceiving it as very effective (*ibid.*, p. 31).

⁷³ See Law No. 9121, dated 28.07.2003 "On Competition Protection" in Annex 8: Chapter 1.1.

⁷⁴ See Article 3 in the new Statute, Annex 3: Chapter 2.

1.3.2 Cooperation strategy (Standard III, II.3)

57. Epoka University has conceptualized a cooperation strategy of collaboration and partnership at a regional, national and international level. The concept is included both in the Statute and its Strategic Plan 2013-2017.

Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Chapter 2.1.c Institutional Relations

Epoka supports the relations between its departments and the industrial sector, in order to initiate and support international projects, with member teams composed of different institutions, producing and rewarding projects between the different disciplines.

The main interest of Epoka University in this context is to create the necessary conditions for the technology transfer and constitute a useful resource to bring ahead projects that can develop the industrial sector in the country.

58. The cooperation priorities are set in the Strategic Plan under the strategic objectives EG:3⁷⁵ and have been discussed with the academic personnel. The Strategic Plan, both the draft for the next five years, and the current one (2013-2017) consider the development of the Albanian economy⁷⁶. The goals and objectives of the cooperation strategy are part of the institution's long term development plan.

⁷⁵ See Annex 7: Chapter 1

⁷⁶ See Annex 7: Chapter 1

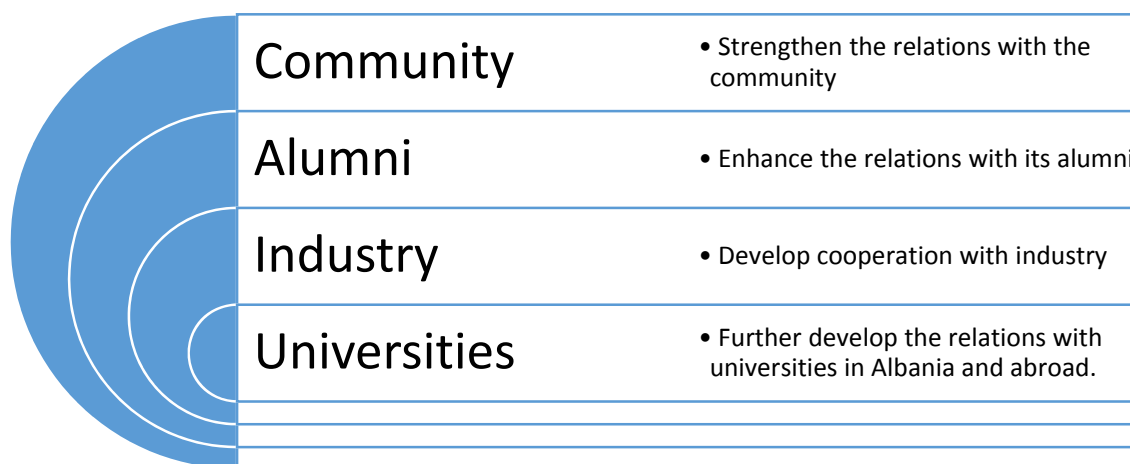


Figure 1: Cooperation Priorities according to the Strategic Plan 2013-17

59. The scientific research projects Epoka has applied to, mainly in the framework of the EU projects, or is in the process of completion, have as their primary rationale the development of Albanian economy⁷⁷, especially in the field of information technology and construction.

60. The cooperation with university and industry partners occurs in the framework of formal agreements⁷⁸. Epoka has currently more than 30 partners from a broad range of sectors of the Albanian economy⁷⁹. The University is also an associate member of the European Universities Association (EUA)⁸⁰, a member of International Association of Universities (IAU)⁸¹ and other university associations in the region⁸².

61. The collaboration with the industry is part of the Strategy⁸³. The industry has been recognized as an important stakeholder for the University and the “Institutional Collaboration”, EG.3.2 is one of the main objectives of the Strategic Plan 2013-2017⁸⁴.

⁷⁷ See for instance COST MP106 project: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-epoka-university-joins-a-cost-action-1974.html>. See also Annex 6: Chapter 1.3.

⁷⁸ See example of an agreement. Annex 6: Chapter 1.4.2.

⁷⁹ See Annex 9: Chapter 1 and 2.

⁸⁰ See European University Association: <http://iro.epoka.edu.al/home-european-university-association-1141-1636.html>

⁸¹ See International Association of Universities: <http://iro.epoka.edu.al/home-international-association-of-universities-1141-1142.html>

⁸² See a full list of associations: <http://iro.epoka.edu.al/home-balkan-universities-association-1141-1580.html>

⁸³ See also standard II, I.8, paragraph 244.

⁸⁴ See also paragraph 58. An analysis and evaluation of this policy is in the Interim Evaluation Report of the Epoka University's Strategic Plan 2013-2017 in Annex 7: Chapter 2.

62. The agreements with counterpart higher education institutions are also a part of the Strategy and have been mainly in offering mutual recognition of curriculum to facilitate mobility and the framework of EU's exchange programs, for instance Erasmus+⁸⁵.

1.3.3 Cooperation with supporting institutions (Standard III, II.3)

63. In order to better serve its student population, Epoka collaborates with other national entities. Through its business partners, Epoka offers transportation to and from the city of Tirana, catering, printing facilities etc.⁸⁶

64. Epoka also collaborates with about 50 institutions and enterprises in order to provide internships or facilities to carry out the curriculum requirements⁸⁷.

1.3.4 Mobility policies (Standard III, II.4)

65. Epoka encourages the mobility of its academic personnel and its students at both the national and international level. The University supports the participation of its academic staff in international activities financially and logistically. Furthermore, international scholars and students find at Epoka University a welcoming environment that enables them to socialize and enhance their professional experience.

66. Based on its strategic priority, as specified in its Strategic Plan 2013-2017⁸⁸, Epoka organizes international conferences and participates regularly in international activities. The University has increased substantially the number of participation in such activities⁸⁹. Only during 2015-2016 Epoka's staff participated in about 31 international conferences and 17 national and international events⁹⁰, the majority of which were supported financially by Epoka University.

⁸⁵ For a full list of cooperation agreements see Annex 9. Chapter 1 and 2.

⁸⁶ See Annex 9: Chapter 2.2 and 4.

⁸⁷ During 2015 and 2016 students of Epoka completed their internships in 40-50 Albanian companies that are also the largest employers in Albania (e.g. Vodafone, Raffeisen Bank etc.). See Annex 9: Chapter 2.1.

⁸⁸ See Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Annex 7: Chapter 1, Evaluation Goal 1.3.1 and 2.1 Strategic Plan 2013-2017 on policies for student and staff mobility and participation in scientific events.

⁸⁹ By 2013 the total number was 280 since the establishment the University. The average number is about 10-15 events every year. See Interim Evaluation Report of the Epoka University's Strategic Plan 2013-2017 in Annex 7: Chapter 2; and the annual reports for the successive years. See also paragraph 201 & 218, Standard II, I.3 (Chapter 4.2.2).

⁹⁰ See the Annual Report 2015-2016, in Annex 7: Chapter 1.3.

67. Epoka as a set of policies⁹¹ and guidelines to promote the mobility of its students⁹² and the academic staff⁹³. The strategic objectives set in the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 concerning the mobility were met. The number of students conducting exchange programs in Turkish universities through the Mevlana exchange program increased by more than 100%, from zero to 19. The number of academic staff participating in the same exchange programs grew as well (28). The number of students participating in Erasmus+ program (5) is still relatively low, however, the University is increasing its efforts to boost the program and encourage students to apply.

68. In its Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Goal 4.1 “Develop Epoka University institutional culture and identity”, the University has laid out its purpose to increase the satisfaction of its students and academic staff, including those coming from other countries⁹⁴. The International Relations Office organizes Orientation Sessions for all incoming student and staff members in the framework of mobility programs. The Human Resources Office assists all foreign staff members with the procedures related to the obtaining of work permit, residence permit, health certificate and other related documents.

69. An Orientation Program is organized by the Human Resources Office for every newly employed staff members, including foreign employees⁹⁵. In order to ensure a more comprehensive and smoother integration of newly staff members into the institution, as of the 2016-2017 academic year, Epoka University has adopted a more detailed Induction Program⁹⁶.

1.4 Conclusion and Judgment

70. Regarding the standards of the organization and management of the Epoka the Self-Evaluation Group concludes that Epoka’s organization and management is in full compliance with the Albanian higher education legal framework. The organization and management is based on the mission of Epoka and its principle of academic management and administration such as autonomy, efficiency and openness, which

⁹¹ See Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Annex 7: Chapter 1. Goals 1.3, 2.3 and 2.4.

⁹² See for instance regulation: EU-REG-035-EN/2013, “On Student Exchange”, Annex 3: Chapter 2.

⁹³ See regulations: EU-RG-038-EN/2014, “Regulation on Scientific Research”, and EU-DIR-004-EN/2009, “On the promotion of scientific publication”. Annex 3: Chapter 2.

⁹⁴ See also paragraph 234-37, and paragraph 253.

⁹⁵ For further detail see also paragraph 173 in Curriculum, and 236 & 237 in Teaching and Research.

⁹⁶ See Staff Guide in Annex 6: Chapter 7.

are laid out in Epoka's statute. Epoka's best practices are in alignment with the European standards and guidelines (e.g. ESG 1.1), concerning its policies, structures and processes of quality assurance.

71. Epoka's best practices show that the standards of accountability and transparency are also fully met. While the Strategic Development Plan sets out clear goals, indicators and monitoring structures to pursue Epoka's mission, policies and regulations are transparent for students and other relevant stakeholders. In compliance with standard 1.8 of the ESG Epoka publishes information about its activities on daily basis on its website. The Self-Evaluation Group recommends that the Board of Ethics has to increase its role in the management and its engagement with both students and staff.

72. Epoka's management and administrative structures are organized in a manner that provides efficiency, while its decision-making process is transparent and evidence-based, taking into consideration both institutional and environmental inputs (market demands, government policies etc.). Standards pertaining to this area of evaluation have also been met. However, Epoka has to work out a better budgeting plan to meet the increasing enrollment demand and to improve the use of its human resources. It would be efficient to implement a budgeting model that allows for a more bottom-up decision-making process, especially now that Epoka is increasingly becoming financially independent from its Parent Company.

73. Epoka's reliable network of partners enables the University to implement its strategy and fulfill its higher education mission. Epoka has demonstrated that it fully meets the standards concerning this area of evaluation.

2. Evaluation Area: Resources

74. Epoka University strives to manage its resources in the most effective, efficient and transparent manner. There are clear rules and guidelines that ensure the adequate utilization of human resources, financial assets, of the infrastructure and of the learning resources.

2.1 Management of human resources

2.1.1 Transparency of human policy resources (Standard III, IV.1)

75. The organization chart of Epoka University is public on the web⁹⁷, in the statute and in its annual reports.

76. Epoka draws support from a large pool of part-time faculty that are engaged professionally and academically with the subject they teach⁹⁸. The recruitment process is transparent as set in the regulation EU-REG-011-EN/2007, “Employment and Performance Assessment of the Academic Staff Regulation”⁹⁹.

77. Epoka announces the employment criteria for each vacant job position on its website. The announcement is in compliance with the EU-REG-011-EN/2007 regulation (see above.¹⁰⁰) Epoka also has an online application form for “Cold Calling” if qualified and highly motivated candidates want to apply for a full-time or part-time teaching job¹⁰¹.

78. The policies and regulations for the assessment and the vertical or horizontal promotion of academic staff are set out in the (1) Statute EU-STA-EN/2007, Chapter VII “Employment and Qualifications”, Article 41; and regulations (2) EU-DIR-007-EN/2009 “Directive on Assignment to Duty”; (3) EU-REG-011-EN/2007, “Employment and Performance Assessment of the Academic Staff Regulation”; and (4) EU-REG-

⁹⁷ See <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-organization-scheme-6-46.html>

⁹⁸ The number of part-time faculty engaged in teaching for the academic year of 2015-2016 was 38. See Annex 6: Chapter 1.3, Annual Report 2015-2016, p. 24. See web: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-annual-reports-6-48.html>

⁹⁹ See Annex 3: Chapter 2 EU-REG-011-EN/2007, “Employment and Performance Assessment of the Academic Staff Regulation”, Article 6-8 & Article 10 set out the process of application and recruitment of academic staff.

¹⁰⁰ See announcement at: <http://hr.epoka.edu.al/cat-job-opportunities-1465.html>. A sample of job announcement is in Annex 6: Chapter 1.4.1

¹⁰¹ See the online application form: <http://hr.epoka.edu.al/cat-online-application-form-1464.html>

033-EN, "Regulation on the organization and Functions of the Council of Professors of Epoka University". Practically the award of academic titles has been in cooperation with Albanian public universities, such as University of Tirana and Tirana Polytechnic University¹⁰².

79. The hiring regulations and policies are in accordance with the law on higher education (No. 80/2015), Articles No. 64-66, and the Labor Code 2961/1995. The internal regulation and procedures also set out the employment and assessment criteria¹⁰³.

80. Although Epoka's academic staff is largely (more than 60%) trained in internationally renowned universities, which the University attracts because of its language of instruction and its aspirations for academic excellence, the University does not have a hiring policy in place to positively discriminate in favor of those that have graduated from international universities¹⁰⁴.

2.1.2 Integration policies (Standard III, IV.2)

81. Each faculty has set out a practice for the orientation and integration the new employees of the university in the academic and organization culture of Epoka University. The staff is greeted with a welcoming information package and socialized through informal meetings with other members of the faculty.

82. New employees also may consult the Staff Guide¹⁰⁵ which is provided to each new employee, information brochures and other info booklets available for students and the general public.

83. New employees are also invited to attend social activities such as welcoming lunches¹⁰⁶ that serve the purpose of introducing them to the management and their

¹⁰² See also paragraph 89.

¹⁰³ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, for instance Article 10 in EU-REG-011-EN/2007, "Employment and Performance Assessment of the Academic Staff Regulation", which lays out a scoring system for the assessment of the application:

"Article 10. The criteria for applying for job vacancies, recruitment and performance evaluation of the academic staff is as follows:

10.1 All academic works of the candidates are considered.

10.1.2. An author who has a publication along with several other authors, wins 50% of points that are given to the publication, regardless of the number of authors in the publication.

10.1.3. At least 50% of the points necessary for the appointment shall be composed of the points earned by the categories mentioned in points 3.1-3.4 of this article. [...]"

¹⁰⁴ See Annex 1: Chapter 3.4.1.

¹⁰⁵ See Staff Guide in Annex 6: Chapter 7.

¹⁰⁶ See for instance a sample of such invitation in Annex 6: Chapter 2.1.3.

new colleagues¹⁰⁷. These activities tend to create a pleasant and friendly environment at Epoka University. The departing staff is also greeted with a farewell event.

84. Each department at Epoka University has a concept plan that integrate the research strategy and the training development plan in line with the development strategy of the Faculty and that of the University¹⁰⁸.

2.1.3 Assessment and evaluation (Standard III, IV.3)

85. Epoka conducts periodic evaluation and performance assessment of its academic staff. The periodic evaluation of teaching effectiveness, professional growth and service to the university is an annual informal evaluation and foremostly gives feedback to the faculty member in order to improve his or her performance. The performance assessment on the other hand is formal and entails a series of consequences and recommendations regarding promotion and continuation of the employment contract. The assessment is set out in regulation EU-REG-011-EN/2007, "Employment and Performance Assessment of the Academic Staff Regulation". The academic staff is assessed based on his or her teaching activities, research output, research reputation and the service to the university¹⁰⁹. Teaching activity is also assessed by students¹¹⁰.

86. In its Strategic Plan 2013-2017 Epoka promotes and encourages its academic staff to participate in graduate programs abroad. In its strategic goals (2.3.2) Epoka was aiming to increase the number of faculty with PhD graduates from international universities by 25% (12 PhD. graduates)¹¹¹. According to the Interim Evaluation Report of the Strategic Plan the goal has been already achieved (16 PhD.)

¹⁰⁷ For example Dr. Islam Jusufi, Head of the Department of Political Science and International Relations, recalls that he was greeted with a welcoming dinner by the rector and other management representatives. At the department he was introduced by the Dean with the teaching and other curriculum requirements. The Dean also initiates the socialization process and acts as a contact point. According to his statement, this is a regular process for every new employee at Epoka University.

¹⁰⁸ See Department strategic Plans in Annex 7: Chapter 3.4.

¹⁰⁹ See Annex 6: Chapter 4.1.2.

¹¹⁰ For instance in the academic year of 2015-2016 students were asked to evaluate teaching effectiveness based on a questionnaire (14 items on their syllabus, class preparation and motivation); and on the first semester the majority of teachers scored relatively high, with an average of 3.4 on a scale from 1 ("do not agree" with the statement) to 4 ("totally agree"). See Annual Report 2015-16, p. 36. See also paragraph No. 203, standard I, II.3.

¹¹¹ See Annex 7: Chapter 1, Strategic Plan 2013-2017, p. 39.

87. Epoka has engaged international faculty members in all its PhD. They are present in its Review committees both at the department level (Scientific Committees) and at the faculty level (Council of Professors)¹¹².

88. Epoka University has supported the application of its staff members for academic promotion at University of Tirana and Polytechnic University of Tirana only after the candidates have fulfilled the legal requirements and the academic standards set by the bylaws¹¹³.

89. Epoka University organizes different social activities for its staff during the semester. These activities may be staff retreats, open forums with renowned guests from the public and political realm, book promotions etc.

90. The above mentioned social activities, especially the open forums, provide a safe space for social dialogue among different important actors of the Albanian political and economic class, where both researchers and policy-makers exchange opinions and ideas.

91. During 2016 Epoka University has organized 14 Open Forums¹¹⁴ events that have dealt with many issues pertaining to Albanian's most recent concerns; ranging from foreign policy¹¹⁵, to gender issues, developing social enterprises or the role of the media today¹¹⁶.

92. In compliance to the Albanian "Labor Code", all full-time and part-time employees of Epoka University have health insurance and enjoy social security benefits¹¹⁷.

2.1.4 Effective management of human resources (Standard III, II.2)

93. Epoka has in place a whole set of rules and regulations that define the functions and responsibilities for each unit and member of its staff. Because there is an ongoing learning process and improvement, these rules are also subject to continuous change¹¹⁸. At the same time, there are clear rules in place with regard to the way

¹¹² See Annex 6: Chapter 1.4, for an example of a PhD. jury.

¹¹³ See Annex 6: Chapter 1.4, for an example.

¹¹⁴ See Annex 6: Chapter 1.3, Annual Report 2015-2016, p. 42.

¹¹⁵ e.g. Odeta Barbullushi. (12 May, 2016). A Strategic Analysis of Foreign Policy of Albania. <http://epoka.edu.al/event-a-strategic-analysis-of-foreign-policy-of-albania-106-3018.html>

¹¹⁶ e.g. Armand Peza. (3 May, 2016). The Effect of Media on Business. <http://epoka.edu.al/event-the-effect-of-media-on-business-106-3005.html>

¹¹⁷ Please check with the Human Resource Office on the most recent data on Epoka's social security contribution.

¹¹⁸ See also paragraph No. 27.

offences that might be carried out by managing, academic and staff members are dealt with¹¹⁹.

2.2 Financial Management

2.2.1 Budgeting (Standard III, VI.1)

94. The budget is allocated based on the decision of the Higher Board, after receiving input and requests from all academic and administrative units for the subsequent academic year¹²⁰.

95. The budgeting process at Epoka is carried out according to the attached flow chart¹²¹. Due to the initial high level of current expenditures and investments since the establishment of the university, until the 2015-2016 academic year, the operations of Epoka have been partially subsidized by the Parent Company. This has led to the Parent Company and the Higher Board having a central role in the budgeting process.

2.2.2 Financial policies and means (Standard III, IV.2)

96. The financial policies and instruments are foreseen in the Statute. The Secretary General and Finance Office are responsible to provide and monitor the financial resources of the University under the overall coordination and monitoring of the Parent Company. They also ensure the proper implementation of the financial policies and instruments of Epoka University¹²².

97. The distribution of financial resources is transparent and it follows the guidelines and the decisions of the Higher Board.

98. The distribution and management of financial resources are monitored and accounted for in compliance with the Albanian Tax Legislation¹²³ and the Albanian Accounting Standards¹²⁴.

99. The rules and regulations of financial management are different from those of in the public Higher Education.

¹¹⁹ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, Regulation "On the Discipline of the Managing, Academic and Administrative Staff".

¹²⁰ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, Statute.

¹²¹ See Budgeting Process Flow Chart in Annex 10: Chapter 3.

¹²² See Annex 3: Chapter 2, Statute.

¹²³ Law No. 9228/2004, For Accounting and Financial Statements.

¹²⁴ SKK - National Accounting and Reporting Standard (Ministry of Finance, No. 4292/2006)

100. Turgut Ozal Education sh.a performs an annual analysis of financial indicators for the implementation of Epoka's financial policies.

2.2.3 Budgetary and financial accountability (Standard III, IV.3)

101. Every year Turgut Ozal Education sh.a., which administers Epoka University, is subject to an independent financial audit, as stipulated by the law.

102. The financial audit reports and other financial statements are made public through the QKR (National Licensing Center¹²⁵).

103. Financial activities regarding the University are reported and made public in the Annual Report¹²⁶, which is available for discussion and review for both students and faculty.

104. Revenues generated from students' fees, together with a statement on the expenses and distribution of the earnings from other resources, are presented in the Annual Reports¹²⁷.

2.3 Resource Management

2.3.1 Epoka's information system (Standard III, VII.1)

105. Epoka's information system is recently integrated into one system called Epoka Interactive System (EIS), developed by Epoka ICT staff. EIS contains and administers integrated information on students' affairs and services; teaching and learning; human resources; financial management; and infrastructure. The system integration provided by EIS has improved the delivery of services and the exchange of information among units.

¹²⁵ See for instance the Audit Report of 2015 conducted by Mr. Lavdimir Fusha in Annex 6: chapter 1.1 <http://www.qkr.gov.al/nrc/NRCCControls/DownloadFile/Download.aspx?id=15C433E0-C243-4166-A2BF-EEC90E70E30B>

¹²⁶ See for instance p. 75, Annual Report 2016 in Annex 6: Chapter 1.3.

¹²⁷ See for example the Annual Report 2016 in Annex 6: Chapter 1.3, as above.

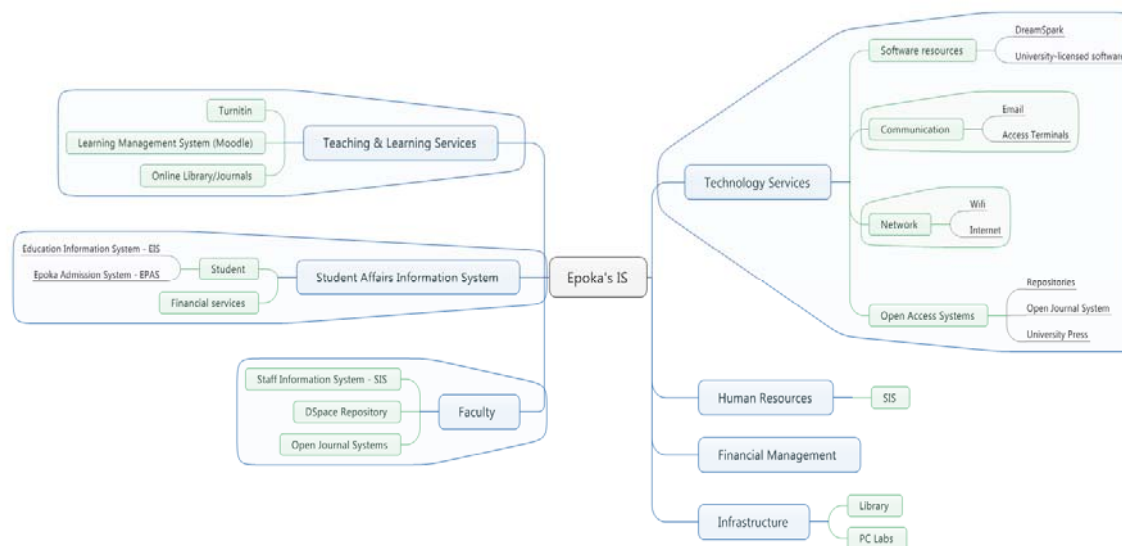


Figure 2: Epoka Integrated System of information

106. Epoka Interactive System generates automatic and real-time reports that assist the management with the decision-making, both at the policy and executive level.

107. The information generated and managed by Epoka Interactive System (e.g. the number of students for each department and program) is then prepared for publication in the web and the Annual Reports¹²⁸.

108. Epoka's webpage contains relevant information for its stakeholders and the general public, such as information about the staff¹²⁹, registration procedures for the students¹³⁰, the statute¹³¹, and regulations¹³².

2.3.2 Information Communication Technology (Standard III, VII.2)

109. Epoka has an integrated system (EIS) in place which is innovative and kept up to date in order to deliver the most agile solutions and the best service to students,

¹²⁸ See for instance the most recent Annual Report 2016, in Annex 6: Chapter 1.3.

¹²⁹ The previous system is SIS (Staff Information System), <https://sis.epoka.edu.al/>. Epoka Interactive System, established in 2016, is now taking over functions from the separated management systems such as that from SIS. According to Mr. Elion Ibrahim, Head of the Human Resource Office, EIS provides "a great design for each staff's personal data, an easier way to edit them and faster interaction. New designed features are also a better way to store and edit each staff's roles within the University. Each foreign staff may find in EIS his residence permit and download it anytime and everywhere. Staff can also edit their CV and storing staff's permissions is easier than before." (Personal Communication, 20.10.2016).

¹³⁰ SAIS (Student Affairs Information System), <https://sais.epoka.edu.al/>

¹³¹ <http://epoka.edu.al/home-about-epoka-mission-vision-1-4.html>

¹³² EIS (Education Information System), <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/>

faculty and administrative staff¹³³. Epoka uses information communication technology in the areas of teaching and learning, research, and administration and management. Students and staff are equipped with a smart card that they use to receive or deliver information and services.

110. Epoka University has 83 personal computers in its two computer laboratories. Laboratories and classrooms have internet access, printers (15 pieces), photocopy machines (15), scanners (9) and video-projectors (26¹³⁴).

111. Epoka University does not provide distance education programs. However the e-learning platform (MOODLE) and Epoka Interactive System enables faculty to provide blended learning by delivering content through digital and online media.

2.3.3 Management of properties (Standard III, VII.3)

112. Epoka's properties are administered by Turgut Ozal Education Company. There is a record of Epoka's real estate and a masterplan for the future development of Epoka's campus¹³⁵. Currently there are three main university buildings. In two of these buildings with a total of built space of 14,352 m², teaching, research and extra-curricular activities are conducted.¹³⁶

113. Policies and strategies for the development and preservation of Epoka's properties and other physical assets lies within the responsibility of Turgut Ozal Education sh.a. and also of the Higher Board of Epoka University.

114. Epoka University does have a master plan for the development of its real estate as stated shortly in the Strategic Plan 2013-2017¹³⁷. The campus, according to the Strategic Plan was projected to accommodate at about 3500 students, which entails further investments and development of the actual infrastructure¹³⁸.

2.3.4 Development and preservation of heritage (Standard III, VII.4)

115. Epoka has a policy of preserving and developing the heritage of its academic, cultural and scientific property. The procedures are regulated through regulation EU-

¹³³ See Annex 10: Chapter 1, for a detailed list and information on the ICT resources available to students and staff.

¹³⁴ See Annex 10: Chapter 2.2, for a detail list of resources.

¹³⁵ See Annex 10: Chapter 2.1.

¹³⁶ See Annex 10: Chapter 2.1.

¹³⁷ See also paragraph 9.

¹³⁸ See Annex 10: Chapter 2.1, Epoka's Masterplan. The Rector's Office may provide the external reviewers with a copy of Epoka's most recent and detailed Masterplan.

DIR-010-EN, Directive on Purchases, whose purpose is to “define the powers, responsibilities and procedures in connection with the supply of all types of goods and services within or outside the country, renting and construction in facilities which are management or are property of the University.”¹³⁹ At the same time, Epoka University is a registered Trademark at the General Directorate of Patents and Trademarks of the Republic of Albania as per the Article 154 of the Law No. 9947, dated 07.07.2008 “On Industrial Property”, as amended.

116. As in the previous statute (2009-2016), it is the rectorate, and the faculties who are responsible to ensure the adequacy and the development of the facilities¹⁴⁰. Their decision are based on the immediate needs of the university and its Strategic Plan.

117. The University has a policy of developing and maintaining its academic, cultural and scientific property¹⁴¹. The cultural values of Epoka are stored in the laboratories, the library and the public digital repository¹⁴² which preserves the academic and scientific property of Epoka University. Epoka University is the only higher education institution in Albania to possess a digital repository.

2.3.5 Asset management and administration (Standard III, VII.5 & Standard III, VII.6)

118. Research, teaching and service are provided in adequate facilities¹⁴³ and in compliance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Sport¹⁴⁴, the Ministry of Health¹⁴⁵, Ministry of Internal Affairs¹⁴⁶ etc. Epoka’s capacities are in compliance with this standard and the regulation of the Ministry of Education and Sports (No. 11/2011, Annex 3, paragraph 4¹⁴⁷), which states that there should be a minimum space of 3.8-4 square meter per student, and maximum 7.5-8 m². The facilities also

¹³⁹ See Annex 3: Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁰ See Annex 3: Chapter 2.

¹⁴¹ See for instance the Directive “On the Library”, in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

¹⁴² See <http://dspace.epoka.edu.al>

¹⁴³ See Annex 8: Chapter 1.4, Chapter 2.2.3 and Chapter 2.5.1 for the list of laws and by-laws Epoka has to comply with in terms of its facilities.

¹⁴⁴ See for instance the licensing procedures of higher education institutions in Order No. 11/2011, Annex 2: Chapter 1.

¹⁴⁵ See Law No. 10138, dated 11.05.2009 “On the Public Health” in Annex 8: Chapter 2.2.3. See also paragraph 121.

¹⁴⁶ See Law No. 152/2015, dated 21.12.2015 “On the Service of Fire Safety and Rescue” in Annex 8: Chapter 2.2.3.

¹⁴⁷ See also an expert report concerning the fulfillment of the legal requirement (No. 11/2011) to operate as a higher education institution in Albania, Annex 10: Chapter 2.2; See also paragraph 121.

provide adequate space for the staff: parking places, offices, cafeteria, recreational park¹⁴⁸ etc.

119. The teaching facilities such as classrooms, laboratories and the library meet the standards stipulated in the order of MoES 11/2011. They are evaluated and certified by an expert¹⁴⁹.

120. The services to students are constantly evaluated and reported to the interested parties and the administration (**Standard III, VII.6**). Epoka conducts surveys to measure the satisfaction of its staff and students in order to improve the service and adapt it to the needs of its constituency. The most recent survey express a more than an average satisfaction level with the services¹⁵⁰.

121. Services such as catering, transportation and lodging are provided according to the needs of the students and evaluated based on their expectations.

2.5 Record-keeping of Institution's Activities

2.5.1 Documentation (Standard III, V.2)

122. The Rector's Office is responsible to maintain and curate documentation in hardcopy and digitalize it for archival purposes. The most important documents kept in the Rector's Office are: decisions and meeting minutes of the Higher Board, the Academic Senate, the University Administrative Board as well as incoming and sent external and internal correspondence. The Faculty Coordinators keep copies of decisions of decisions of decision-making bodies at the Faculty-level as well as incoming and sent external and internal correspondence from the said Faculty¹⁵¹. The Registrar's Office keeps hard copies and other important students' documents¹⁵². At the end of each calendar year, all said correspondence is submitted to the Archive of

¹⁴⁸ See Annex 10: Chapter 2, for a list of the facilities and resources.

¹⁴⁹ See Annex 10: Chapter 2.2. See also paragraph 118.

¹⁵⁰ See Annex 10: Chapter 2.1.1: Resources for a more elaborated list and surveys conducted on this matter.

¹⁵¹ Documents are available to the external reviewers upon request.

¹⁵² These documents are kept and archived according to the Albanian legal framework, namely the Law No. 9154, dated 06.11.2003 "On archives". For a more detailed picture on the legal framework regulating the administration and preservation of the documents see Annex 8: Chapter 1.1.

the institution where it is stored and managed in compliance with the legislation in force.

123. Epoka has an information management system (Epoka Interactive System) that preserves digital footprints and copies of every digital document issued through the system¹⁵³. Every administrative and academic unit has access to the system according to their responsibilities (see also Standard III, VII.2).

124. As part of the AEQI Board there is a unit on data processing and analysis: Data Collection and Analysis Unit¹⁵⁴. The unit collects and processes aggregated data at institutional level.

125. Epoka has a database of all the necessary data on student enrollment. All information is used, kept and retrieved in compliance with the law and bylaws of the Albanian government¹⁵⁵. Personal data are also protected and managed accordingly¹⁵⁶.

126. Epoka publishes and updates regularly information on its programs of study, form and syllabus, accompanied by both US and ECTS credits¹⁵⁷.

127. Epoka's information management system, Epoka Interactive System, has a student-based registry managed through EIS and administered by the Registrar Office¹⁵⁸.

128. The Registrar's Office keeps records, both in digital and hard copy, of all students' data, achievement and degrees and diplomas issued.

2.6 Conclusion and Judgments

129. Based on the overall assessment for this area the Self-Evaluation Group concludes that Epoka's best practices in the management of human resources show that standards of transparency, integration policies, assessment and effectiveness are

¹⁵³ See paragraph No. 109-111 for further details on Epoka Interactive System.

¹⁵⁴ Data Collection and Analysis Unit was approved by the AEQI Board on 17.05.2016, (Decision No. 2/2016).

¹⁵⁵ See for instance on matriculation and coding (MoES Order No. 45/2011 & No. 150/2008); on the registration of degrees (Moes Order No. 12/2009), on statistics (Law No. 9180/2004 "On official statistics"); Law No. 10325/2010 "On Government Databases" etc.

¹⁵⁶ See Order No. 7/2010 of the Commissioner on Information and Data Protection.

¹⁵⁷ See online: Curriculum, <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/?1031.1576>

¹⁵⁸ See online: <http://eisapp.epoka.edu.al/studentdata/>. Reviewers are required to observe the system from within Epoka's local network.

fully met. However, the Self-Evaluation Group recommends that the induction procedure for new staff members should become more formalized, because it fits with the organizational culture of Epoka.

130. The Self-Evaluation Group is confident that Epoka fully meets the standards concerning financial management, like the budgeting schedule and distribution, the financial policies and means, or the budgetary and financial accountability measures in place, which are fit for purpose. Considering the particularity of Epoka as a private for-profit higher education institution and the previous financial situation of the university when it was being subsidized by the Parent Company, the Self-Evaluation Group recommends the budgeting process to be more transparent and inclusive to the low-level administration units.

131. Concerning the management of its resources, Epoka University demonstrates to have efficient policies in place that regulates the use and preservation of all its assets, and a management process that is sustained by its ever developing information system. The University fully meets the national standards and those of the ESG (e.g. 1.6 on learning resources) aiming first and foremost to provide appropriate funds and accessible learning resources for the students.

132. The Self-Evaluation Group confirms that record keeping policies and processes are in compliance with the national standards of accreditation and those of the ESG (e.g. 1.7, on information management). Hence, Epoka fully meets these standards. The University has to, however, appropriately address the challenge of judicial uncertainty such as frequent amendments of legal requirements at the national level concerning documentation and inspection.

3. Evaluation Area: The Curriculum

3.1 Strategic Alignment of the Curriculum

3.1.1 Alignment with the mission and capacities of the institution (Standard I, I.1)

133. The institution provides opportunities for the public to be informed. Information is published on the website¹⁵⁹ and promotion leaflets¹⁶⁰. Epoka participates in the educational fairs where universities present their programs¹⁶¹. All the information is sent to secondary education institutions and the programs are presented in the high schools. At the same time, groups of students from secondary education institutions accompanied by school counsellors visit the premises of Epoka University according to a detailed schedule where they receive detailed information about study programs and enter a computer-based examination through which they test their English proficiency level. Each department also posts information on its respective website updating it promptly in case of structural or content changes.

134. Epoka maintains formal relationships with the majority of secondary education institutions where its students come from, especially with the Turgut Ozal schools¹⁶².

135. Epoka's priorities lie in all study programs. Therefore, maximum efforts are put in all study programs to fulfill their objectives and realize University's mission. Although Epoka's public image in the higher education landscape is that of an excellent engineering and business school, the academic community invests considerably to turn Epoka into a research hub for social sciences as well.

136. Epoka pursues a clearly defined policy for student's admission¹⁶³ in accordance with study programs in engineering, business and political science for both native and foreign students¹⁶⁴. The admission policies and procedures are set in the Statute, the

¹⁵⁹ <http://epoka.edu.al>.

¹⁶⁰ Available upon request.

¹⁶¹ A short description of such yearly activities is presented in the annual reports since 2010.

¹⁶² See also paragraph 251, Standard I, III.1.

¹⁶³ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, Regulation EU-REG-004-EN/2007 "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations."; See also paragraph 267-269, Standard I, III.3, on assisting students through advising.

¹⁶⁴ See also paragraph 67, Standard III, II.4, on the integration of foreign students.

Basic regulations¹⁶⁵ and the program descriptions, which are made transparent to the interesting parties through Epoka's website¹⁶⁶.

137. Study programs are harmonized in their goals and curriculum components¹⁶⁷, as confirmed by both internal and external reviewers of quality assurance during the accreditation process.

138. Requirements used for assessing student's skills and knowledge are provided in the syllabus and they are reviewed and classified by the collegial bodies within the respective departments at the moment of approval by the Epoka's management and the Public Accreditation Agency¹⁶⁸. Professors are free to choose the best assessment method to measure learning outcomes of the course in alignment with the learning outcomes of the program. The grading system is based on Epoka's evaluation system¹⁶⁹, and the submission of the thesis at undergraduate and graduate level are subject to an institutional wide regulation¹⁷⁰. The assessment is in compliance with Standard 1.3 of the ESG¹⁷¹ as grading criteria and examination methods are published in advance in the syllabus. There is a formal appeal in place¹⁷². In compliance with the ESG, assessments are carried out by more than one assessor in the final comprehensive exam or the review of the final thesis. External evaluators have expressed confidence in Epoka's assessment process¹⁷³.

¹⁶⁵ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, EU-REG-004-EN/2007 "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations"; EU-REG-001-EN/2007 Basic Regulation; EU-DIR-17-EN/2013 "On Student Transfer" etc.

¹⁶⁶ See Epoka online in the respective departments. For example: Department of Political Science and International Relations, <http://pir.epoka.edu.al/home-admissions-for-native-students-361-362.html>.

¹⁶⁷ This has been confirmed by various external and internal evaluators of the study programs. All study programs of Epoka University have been accredited. For instance in their Final Report on Accreditation of the Bachelor Program of "Electronic Engineering and Digital Communication", April 2015, the external reviewer, Prof. Dr. Thoma Korini states that program is organized properly and its objectives are well-integrated in the curriculum, (Korini, 2015, p. 34).

¹⁶⁸ See also paragraph 189, Standard I, II.2.

¹⁶⁹ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, Article 16, EU-REG-004-EN/2007 "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations".

¹⁷⁰ E.g. Annex 3: Chapter 2, EU-DIR-012-EN/2010 "Directive on Graduation Works of Undergraduate Programs".

¹⁷¹ See ESG, Standard 1.3, page 12.

¹⁷² See Annex 3: Chapter 2, Article 23 of EU-REG-004-EN/2007 "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations".

¹⁷³ For instance in its evaluation report, external institutional reviewers (Korini et al., 2011) in their SWOT analysis concluded that Epoka University has an integrated system of indicators to measure students' knowledge (p. 86).

3.1.2 Alignment with professional development (Standard I, I.2)

139. Epoka offers remedial¹⁷⁴ and short-term courses for students through its Continuing Education Center¹⁷⁵.

140. At Epoka there are no part-times studies. However, the organization of study programs at graduate level is adapted to the needs and requirements of graduate students in the second and third cycle. Previously some of the courses were also organized in the vicinity of center of Tirana to accommodate graduate students who were working till late in the day.

141. Professional experience may be counted toward earning a degree only in the framework of an internship under supervision and formalized by an agreement and a training program¹⁷⁶.

3.1.3 Strategic alignment with organization's strategy (Standard I, I.3)

142. Study programs offered at Epoka University are aligned with the development goals of the University and those of the departments. The objectives of the study programs are in alignment with the educational strategic objectives envisioned in the strategy, such as the internationalization¹⁷⁷ or cooperation with the industry¹⁷⁸.

143. The requirements for student's qualification also are described in the objectives of Epoka's development strategy, especially concerning inbound and outbound and student's English language skills, which is a pre-requisite to enter all bachelor programs offered in English¹⁷⁹.

¹⁷⁴ See Annex 6: Samples, Chapter 5.2.2.

¹⁷⁵ See for instance an announcement on some training courses on 27th April 2012: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-training-announcement-228.html>

¹⁷⁶ See for instance Annex 3: Chapter 2, EU-DIR-016-EN/2013, "Internships during Undergraduate Studies".

¹⁷⁷ Annex 7: Chapter 1, Strategic Plan 2013-2017, EG. 2.1-3, p. 34. For instance the aim of the BSc. in Business Administration (<http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-bsc-in-business-administration-261-272.html>) prepares students "to meet the challenges of today's global environment." This goal is in alignment with the EG. 2.4 in Strategic Plan 2013-2017, p. 33-34.

¹⁷⁸ In the fulfillment of strategic goal EG. 3.2 "Develop cooperation with industry" (Strategic Plan 2013-2017, p. 35) Epoka help students to find internships in their relevant sectors during their study program. Departments also engage professionals in teaching their courses. For example, in the first cycle program of Banking and Finance there are six experts from the industry who teach in this course. These professional are full-time employed in the Ministry of Finance, the National Commerce Bank, and the National Bureau of Statistics etc. For more detail see the Internal Evaluation Report of the Bachelor Program Banking and Finance in Albanian, 2017.

¹⁷⁹ See page 7, paragraph 3, Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Annex 7: Chapter 1.

144. Each course description contains information on “placement opportunities”, as set out in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)¹⁸⁰. By the end of their program students are provided with a Diploma Supplement in line with the requirements of the above standard¹⁸¹.

3.1.4 Alignment with national trends (Standard I, I.4)

145. Epoka’s study programs are designed and updated based on the most recent trends and development in the labor market.

146. A considerable factor for the design of the study program are also the national policies and sectorial strategies that aim to meet the challenges of globalization. There are several government strategies which have impacted the design of the study programs and have an effect on the internationalization agenda of Epoka University. Such are the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2014-2020, National Strategy for Education 2008-2013, National Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020 etc.¹⁸²

147. Epoka offers joint degrees with the University of Applied Sciences in Mainz¹⁸³ and the EADA Business School¹⁸⁴. The diploma formats and the diploma supplements issued by the University¹⁸⁵ are approved by the Ministry of Education and Sports as the ENIC/NARIC center of Albania, and in accordance with its regulatory framework¹⁸⁶, and the ESG standards (1.4) for diploma recognition.

¹⁸⁰ Number 1.2 “Design and Approval of Programmes.”; See for instance the description of the program Master in Business Administration: “The mission of the Business Administration Department is to prepare and graduate students for careers in business, government and non-profit organizations by providing a broad professional education.” Retrieved from <http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-msc-in-business-administration-271-274.html>.

¹⁸¹ It is stated that: “The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.”

¹⁸² For a list of strategies and policy papers see Annex 7: Strategic Plan, Chapter 4.

¹⁸³ See <http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-joint-msc-with-university-of-applied-sciences-mainz-271-275.html>

¹⁸⁴ See <http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-joint-mba-with-eada-business-school-271-1786.html>

¹⁸⁵ See sample of a diploma, Annex 6: Samples, Chapter 3.1.1.

¹⁸⁶ Ministerial Orders No. 150.2008 & No. 12, 18.03.2009.

3.1.5 Alignment with institutional capacities (Standard I, I.5)

148. The teaching load of lecturers at Epoka University is assigned in accordance with the criteria set in Epoka's regulatory framework and Epoka's human resource capacities.

149. The teaching load of academic staff is organized effectively and balanced to allow time for research and administrative duties. According to EU-DIR-011-EN/2009 "Directive on Teaching Load"¹⁸⁷ instructors have the highest load of teaching hours to ensure their highest commitment in teaching for the study program. Faculty undertaking administrative duties have a reduced amount of contact hours permitting a better management of the study programs.

3.2 Content

3.2.1 Study programs and objectives (Standard I, I.6)

150. The content of study programs, curricula, syllabi and other relevant materials are made available to students and may be accessed through Epoka's Website and the online resource of Epoka's Education System¹⁸⁸.

151. The study programs have clear objectives¹⁸⁹ as evaluated by both internal and external evaluation of the programs during the accreditation process of the institutional (2011) and programs review¹⁹⁰.

152. Admission criteria are clearly defined and transparent to the interesting parties¹⁹¹. Induction programs as recommended by ESG, Standard 1.4, are provided and are very effective¹⁹².

3.2.2 First cycle and objectives (Standard I, I.7)

153. The primary goal of the first cycle, defined in 180 ECTS, is to offer students a degree that will enable them to easily integrate in the labor market. Priority is given to the transmission of professional skills in the discipline and soft-skills that ensure

¹⁸⁷ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, EU-DIR-011-EN/2009 "Directive on Teaching Load".

¹⁸⁸ See <https://eisapp.epoka.edu.al> ; See also paragraph 133.

¹⁸⁹ See for instance Bachelor in Economics which contains the mission, the vision and the objectives: <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/?1030,1,1558>. Or see Annex 6: Sample, Chapter 3.3.1.

¹⁹⁰ See for instance an external review by Prof. Dr. K. Sevrani (2015) on the Bachelor Program of Business and Informatics. According to Prof. Sevrani (2015) Epoka has a very high quality of curriculum (p. 48) and the programs contain information about their objectives (p. 28).

¹⁹¹ Check for each department or see an example on Bachelor in Banking and Finance: <http://baf.epoka.edu.al/home-undergraduate-in-banking-and-finance-1761-537.html>.

¹⁹² For more detail see paragraphs 250-256, Standard I, III.1.

gainful employment. Second cycle programs at Epoka then build on the knowledge gained from the undergraduate level which allows for a smooth transition through the cycles. Second cycle programs contains both advanced theoretical and applied knowledge.

154. In compliance with the Albanian Quality Framework¹⁹³, level 6, which is adopted from the European Qualifications Framework, level 6, first cycle programs at Epoka University provide advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, by involving a critical understanding of theories and principles; and advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work or study.

155. Epoka encourages students' mobility and has set out a transparent process¹⁹⁴ for the recognition of the credits during the transfer. Each course has a defined set of ECTS and learning outcomes that enables students to transfer their credits within a program at Epoka or outside. The regulation is in compliance with ESG standard 1.4 for the institutional practice of recognition being in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

156. As stated in paragraph 153 and 154, study programs in the first cycle provide the knowledge and skills necessary for a successful integration in the labor market.

157. Program objectives refer to the skills and the placement opportunities. There is also a high rate of employment among Epoka first cycle graduates in comparison to national statistics, with the Business Informatics (89%) and Civic Engineering (87%) being the most successful in 2015-2016¹⁹⁵.

3.2.3 First cycle and student acclimatization (Standard I, I.8)

158. Students are guided and supported throughout the year and across all program cycles by contacting directly their personal academic advisors, the Registrar's Office and referring to the Student Guide.

¹⁹³ See National Agency of Vocational Education Training and Qualifications (NAVETQ): <http://www.akafp.gov.al/kualifikimet-profesionale/kuadri-kombetar-i-kualifikimeve/>

¹⁹⁴ See also paragraph 268, Standard I, III.3, for more details. See also Annex 3: Chapter 2, Regulation EU-DIR-0017-EN/2013 "On Student Transfer" explains and regulates the process of credit transfer.

¹⁹⁵ See paragraph 293, Standard I, III.8, for more details.

159. The continuing support has impacted Epoka's graduation rates, which are higher (more than 50% within the three-year period, or 60% within the fourth years) than those at the national level (varying between 30% and 35%¹⁹⁶).

160. Faculty is encouraged to apply alternative teaching methods and professors do make use of different teaching and assessment methods. Programs regulation encourage for the use of both frontal style, e.g. lectures, or student-centered teaching methods such as projects, homework, tutoring and seminars¹⁹⁷. Especially in design sciences the dominant approach is *learning-by-doing*, hence lecturers in courses such as programming courses and electrical circuits would use considerable amount of hours in the laboratories.

161. Epoka targets and attracts staff with high record of scientific publications and project participation¹⁹⁸. Publication rate at Epoka in the last five years, since academic year 2011-12, has been at about 1.3 article equivalents per year.

162. For the first cycle programs Epoka engages mainly full-time staff¹⁹⁹.

3.2.4 Second cycle and program alignments (Standard I, I.9)

163. The academic staff at Epoka University engaged for the second cycle of studies have PhD. or higher academic degree²⁰⁰.

164. Courses at master level are taught by lectures involved in research²⁰¹.

¹⁹⁶ See Annex 1: Chapter 2.2.1.

¹⁹⁷ See for instance Annex 3: Chapter 2, EU-REG-020-EN/2008 "Regulation on Second Cycle Study Program in Architecture," Article 9.

¹⁹⁸ For more details on the research performance of Epoka's academic staff see Annex 5: Chapter 1.2. See also paragraph 211, Standard II, I.2.

¹⁹⁹ As evidenced in the most recent internal evaluation report for the accreditation of several bachelor programs at the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, more than 70% of the teaching load is covered by full-time faculty. While the bachelor programs of Economics and Business Administration in 2016 had a high ratio, greater than 70%, the bachelor program in Banking and Finance have a smaller portion of teaching hours covered by full-time faculty. Both programs, in English (67%) and Albanian (34%), are tailored exclusively for the Albanian market, so the faculty has been drawn mainly from the industry to maintain a productive link with the market. See Annex 1: Statistics for more details. In engineering programs, e.g. Computer Engineering, the rate of contact hours covered by full-time faculty is at about 80% (see Korini, 2015, External Review for the accreditation of Bachelor in Computer Engineering, p. 36).

²⁰⁰ See course appointment of 2016-2017 spring semester for Master's programs in Annex 6: Chapter 3.1.3 and 3.1.4.

²⁰¹ See list of publications of staff in Annex 5: Attachment 2.

165. Study programs at master level are drafted based on the research policy²⁰² and strategic goals of Epoka University²⁰³. They also reflect research areas and the goals of the development strategies at departmental level²⁰⁴. Program regulations for instance in Political Science²⁰⁵ or Architecture²⁰⁶ do emphasize the research component of the program.

166. Departments at Epoka University try to ensure that professional practice and draft thesis of students, especially in master of professional studies, are completed in cooperation with the industry²⁰⁷.

167. Data on employment are collected regularly by Epoka when possible²⁰⁸. Epoka University has a tracing program to trace student employment which is managed by the Career Planning and Alumni Office²⁰⁹. The data is published in Epoka's Annual Reports²¹⁰.

168. The majority of adjunct faculty members who teach at master level programs are full-time employees in their respective industries. Especially in business-related programs there is a higher presence of professionals, for instance in Banking and Finance²¹¹.

169. The full-time faculty comprises the majority of the teaching hours in the second cycle programs.

²⁰² Set out in the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 Annex 7: Chapter 1, EG. 1: Scientific Strategic Objectives; and respective regulations.

²⁰³ Some of the core values of the Epoka University presented in the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 (pp. 31), such as contemporariness and contribution to the Albanian society, are integrated into the curriculum of master programs of Architecture, Civil Engineering, Computer Engineering etc. Professional masters offered in the same design sciences or business incorporate some of the basic principles of Epoka University (*ibid.*) on research ethics Annex 7: Chapter 1.

²⁰⁴ See for instance Theme No. 5: Provide a high quality environment for research at the Strategic Plan of 2017-22 for the Department of Business Administration (<http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-strategic-plan-1894-1796.html>) also in Annex 7: Chapter 3.2. See also paragraph 222, Standard II, I.4.

²⁰⁵ See for instance EU-REG-023-EN/2008 "Regulation on Second Cycle Study Program in Political Sciences and International Relations", Article 3 in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

²⁰⁶ See for instance EU-REG-020-En/2008 "Regulation on Second Cycle Study Program in Architecture", Article 3 in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

²⁰⁷ Epoka's master programs have all been accredited based on these standards in 2012. For instance Prof. Dr. P. Kabo (2012), an external reviewer of the program "Master of Science in Political Science and International Relations" strongly emphasized the role of the Center for European Studies through which students are involved in research.

²⁰⁸ See also paragraph 56, Standard III, III.1; and paragraph 293, Standard I, III.9.

²⁰⁹ See also paragraph 56, Standard III, III.1.

²¹⁰ See for instance Annual Report 2015-2016 (p. 31).

²¹¹ See Annex 1: Chapter 3.2.

3.2.5 Study programs and mobility (Standard I, I.10)

170. All study programs are offered in line with the standards set out by the Bologna Process, as also required by the Albanian law on higher education (2007 & 2015).

Table 1: Study Programs and Cycles, 2016.

	1 st Cycle	2 nd Cycle		3 ^d Cycle	
	Bachelor	MSC	PM	PHD	Total
Architecture & Civil Engineering	1	3	2	2	8
ICT	3	2	1	1	7
Economic & Finance	5	3	3	2	13
Political Science	1	2	1	1	5
Total	10	10	7	6	33

171. As verified during its accreditation process the curriculum is organized in a way to provide the necessary information for any interested observer. The programs descriptions are written in English and are made public²¹².

172. The diploma formats and the diploma supplements issued by the University²¹³ are approved by the Ministry of Education and Sports as the ENIC/NARIC center of Albania, and in accordance with its regulatory framework²¹⁴, and the ESG standards (1.4) for diploma recognition.

173. Study programs are all designed to facilitate student's mobility. Study programs are organized in ECTS, the syllabi have learning outcomes and competences, and the workload for the respective course²¹⁵.

174. At Epoka the language of instruction is English, as provided by the law on higher education (2015, Article 88/2), so students either have to provide an internationally

²¹² See Annex 2: Chapter 2. Also check the online presentation of the Bachelor programs: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-academics-bachelor-programs-2-77.html>; and Master programs: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-academics-master-programs-2-1000.html>.

²¹³ See sample of a diploma, Annex 6: Chapter 3.1.1.

²¹⁴ See Directive of the Minister of Education and Science No. 05, dated 18.02.2009, as amended, and Directive of the Minister of Education and Science No. 07, dated 18.02.2009, in Annex 8: Chapter 2.3.3.

²¹⁵ This is in compliance with the Albanian legal framework (e.g. No. 14 & 15/2008) and the ECTS Users' Guide (2015) http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/publications/2015/ects-users-guide_en.pdf

recognized certificate of English for Bachelor, Master and PhD level programs²¹⁶, or they have to demonstrate fluency in the English proficiency exam²¹⁷.

175. Credits transferred from a partner higher education institution in the framework of a formal agreement are recognized based on the proposal of the Scientific Committee of the respective Department and the approval of the Administrative Board of Faculty. Otherwise Epoka's transfer policies allow for the transfer of studies from all accredited programs and institutions through a review process at department level²¹⁸. EU-REG-017-EN/2008 "Regulation on Second Cycle Study Program".

3.3 Learning Objectives and Employability

3.3.1 Practical knowledge (Standard I, I.11)

176. Besides theoretical knowledge, Bachelor and Master level programs transmit and train practical skills which are set out in the learning outcomes of each syllabus. Those skills are learned and practiced in the labs, assignments and projects which make out a considerable education component of engineering and business courses²¹⁹.

177. The European Credit Transfer System has been effectively applied since the University began its academic activities during the 2007-2008 academic year. The curriculum is organized according to the ECTS. Grading is fair and averages for each of the study programs are made public in the Annual Reports²²⁰. Each semester the University provides transcripts with the GPA (Grade Point Average)²²¹, because this is set as a criterion for graduation or academic advancement depending on the study

²¹⁶ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, EU-REG-017-EN/2008 "Regulation on Second Cycle Study Program" which is in compliance with the law on higher education (2015, Article 76/4) and the Ministerial Order for this purpose, Order No. 52/2015, which sets the level B1 to C1 according to the CEFRL (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). The minimum level of requested English proficiency is set by a Decision of the Academic Senate with regard to bachelor, integrated second cycle and master study programs, see for instance Decisions of the Academic Senate No. 04, dated 10.02.2016; No. 05, dated 10.02.2016; No. 01, dated 13.01.2016; in Annex 6: Samples, Chapter 3.2.1.

²¹⁷ This is according to EU-REG-004-EN/2007 "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations", Article 5; EU-REG-001-EN/2007 "Basic Regulation", Article 32-33; EU-REG-017-EN/2008 "Regulation on Second Cycle Study Program" and Article 8/c; EU-REG-034-EN/2010 "Regulation on PhD Study programs" in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

²¹⁸ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, EU-DIR-017-EN/2013 "On Student Transfer".

²¹⁹ See for instance a course syllabus in the Bachelor in Computer Engineering study program in Annex 6: Chapter 9.

²²⁰ See for instance Annual Report 2015-2016 in Annex 6: Chapter 1.3.

²²¹ A student's Semester Grade Point Average (GPA) is computed by multiplying the numerical grade received in each course by the number of credits offered for each course, then dividing by the total number of credit hours studied during the term. The Semester and Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) is rounded to two decimal places. For more information, see the sample of a Student Transcript in Annex 6: Chapter 3.1.6.

program. This is then reported in their transcripts and in Epoka's Letter of Performance which is part of the contract²²². A grading table for Epoka and the Albanian higher education system is presented in the Basic Regulation²²³ to also facilitate conversion for transfer students.

178. Until 2016 all study programs, both at the Bachelor and Master level, required the submission of a research paper in form of a final thesis²²⁴. Since 2016, Bachelor students below the CGPA level determined by the Academic Senate have to enter the final comprehensive exam²²⁵.

179. As stated in the previous paragraphs²²⁶, Epoka's policies encourage students to lead a socially active life²²⁷. During 2016 Epoka University has organized sports events or open Forums events that have dealt with many issues pertaining to Albanian's most recent concerns; ranging from foreign policy to gender issues. There are also 18 active student clubs representing the interests of students in different areas (sports club²²⁸, art and culture etc.²²⁹)

3.3.2 Preparation for employment (Standard I, I.12)

180. The study programs, especially in business and engineering programs, offer special education components that are exclusively vocational in their character²³⁰.

181. As stated in Epoka's regulation²³¹ and program objectives, study programs contain knowledge about entrepreneurship, professional practices, internships etc.

182. At Epoka study programs in technical sciences, e.g. civic engineering and computer science, include sufficient modules and time for practical lessons (laboratory

²²² In compliance with the Ordinance No. 11/2011. See Annex 6: Chapter 5.1.2.

²²³ EU-REG-001-EN/2007, Article 45. Available in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

²²⁴ This is was a legal requirement by the law on higher education (2007).

²²⁵ See Decision of the Academic Senate No. 01, dated 16.11.2016 in Annex 4: Chapter 2.1.7.

²²⁶ See paragraphs 89-91, Standard II, IV.3, and paragraph 289, Standard I, III.8.

²²⁷ See EU-DIR-005-EN/2009, "Directive on Student Clubs", Annex 3: Chapter 2.

²²⁸ Sports Club organizes different tournaments, like mini football tournament, Chess Tournament, Volleyball and Basketball tournament.

²²⁹ See also paragraph 291, Standard I, III.8.

²³⁰ See for instance a course syllabus in the Bachelor in Computer Engineering study program in Annex 6: Chapter 9.

²³¹ EU-REG-17-EN/2008 "Regulation on Second Cycle Study Program" Annex 3: Chapter 2.

work, internships etc.)²³². AEQI-Board reviews all changes made to the programs based on the guidelines determined by the Accreditation Agency²³³.

3.4 Conclusion and Judgments

183. Epoka's study programs and curriculum are fully aligned with the mission of the institution, its Strategic Plan and the demands of the Albanian economy as operationalized in the different sectorial strategies of the Albanian Government. The University fully meets the national accreditation standards in the area of curriculum and those of the ESG (e.g. 1.2 on the design and approval of programs).

In terms of the content and employability, the programs are designed and approved based on the national regulatory framework and Epoka's policies by involving students and other internal and external stakeholders. Qualifications issued by the University meet program objectives and the learning outcomes, and they enable mobility and employment by referring to the correct level of national qualification framework.

²³² The Albanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education has evaluated each program before being approved by the Ministry of Education and Sports based on these standards concerning the design of the program.

²³³ See for instance Directive of the Minister of Education and Science No. 14, dated 03.04.2008, in Annex 8: Chapter 2.4.2, and Directive of the Minister of Education and Science No. 15, dated 04.04.2008, in Annex 8: Chapter 2.4.1, where there are different categories (A to F) describing each theoretical or practical module of the study programs.

4. Evaluation Area: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research

4.1 Organization of the Study Programs

4.1.1 Implementation of the study programs (Standard I, II.1)

184. Epoka has a set of rules and procedures to ensure the efficient organization and documentation of its study programs. For instance “Regulation on Undergraduate Studies and Examinations”, “Regulation “On Second Cycle Study Programs” and “Regulation On PhD Study Programs”²³⁴, regulates the Institution`s efficient organization and documentation of study programs.

185. To ensure that the coherence of the content delivered in the courses the work of academic staff is coordinated by regulations and directives published in the institution`s website and distributed through official channels of communications²³⁵.

186. Epoka provides sufficient capacity for the realization of practical professional molding of students such as laboratories combining both practical and theoretical aspects²³⁶.

187. Thesis and internships are supervised by Faculty Board. The Board monitors the process of thesis submission, students` projects, seminar work, practices, research etc. Students graduating from Epoka University demonstrate they have completed the educational cycle and are trained professionally as published in the University`s website under the regulation on "Undergraduate Studies and Examinations," article 15²³⁷.

²³⁴ See Annex 3: Chapter 2. Regulations and Directives EU-REG-004-EN, “On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations”; EU-DIR-012-EN, “Graduation Works of Undergraduate Programs”, EU-REG-017-EN, “Regulation “On Second Cycle Study Programs”; EU-REG-034-EN “On PhD Study Programs”.

²³⁵ See: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-doc-publications-6-404.html>

²³⁶ For instance there are two computer labs (42 PCs & 41 PCs); one electronic lab: 8 PC; MCM20EV – Analog Communications I (tuned circuit, MCM5/EV – Voltage and Power Amplifier Circuits); MCM8/EV – Seq. & Comb. Logic; MCM24PMP/EV Remote Control 2, Mod.T601/EV - RF Wireless Transmitter and Receiver; One civil engineering lab: Compressive Strength Machine; Tensile Strength Machine; 50-Tonne Hydraulic Jack; Viccat Apparatus; Los Angeles Machine, Abrasion Resistance Test. See Annex 10: Chapter 2.1.1.

²³⁷ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, respective directives. Directive EU-DIR-016-EN “Internships During Undergraduate Studies” <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/12.pdf> ; and <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/04-undergraduate-studies-and-examinations.pdf>

188. The necessary supporting literature for relevant study program is provided through the Epoka's library. The library has abundant resources for research and study in relevant disciplines. The library has a total of 10,000 printed books (digitally catalogued) and various online research resources²³⁸, and it is relatively frequented by students²³⁹.

4.1.2 Transparent regulatory framework (Standard I, II.2)

189. Examination rules and requirements are under the Regulation on EU-REG-004-EN "Undergraduate Studies and Examinations", articles 16-23, EU-REG-017-EN "Second Cycle Study Programs", articles 26-29 and "PhD Study Programs", articles 42-44²⁴⁰. All regulations and directives are published on the Epoka's website²⁴¹. The regulatory framework is in full compliance with the ESG, Standard 1.3²⁴².

190. Graduation criteria and procedures are published on the University's website under the regulation on "Undergraduate Studies and Examinations", articles 25-27, "Second Cycle Study Programs", article 42, and "PhD Study Programs", article 47.

191. Student's personal information is normally not anonymized in exams and quizzes. Lecturers are encouraged to use different direct and indirect approaches to gauge student learning outcomes and learning behavior, which is in compliance with Standard 1.3 of the ESG on using a variety of pedagogical methods in delivering and assessment. Because quizzes and tests are not the only available assessment tools, Regulation EU-REG-004-EN "On Undergraduate Studies and Examination", Article 22, and Regulation EU-REG-017-EN "On Second Cycle Study Programs", Article 26, allows other forms of exams such as oral exam, depending mainly on the nature of discipline or on the course requirements²⁴³. Hence, generally, anonymity may not be desirable.

²³⁸ See *Library Webpage*: <http://lib.epoka.edu.al/>; *Catalogue*: <http://library.epoka.edu.al/cat-research-resources-482.html>; For more details see: Annex 10: Chapter 2.1.3.

²³⁹ See Annex 10: Chapter 2.1.3.

²⁴⁰ See also paragraph 138, Standard I, I.1.

²⁴¹ See: <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/04-undergraduate-studies-and-examinations.pdf>

²⁴² Assessors undergo training, grading criteria are transparent, assessment is based on learning outcomes and is consistent, and there is a formal appeal procedure. See also paragraph 138, Standard I, I.3.

²⁴³ See "Article 22: Examinations are generally in written form. However, the instructor of the course may decide to conduct the exam in the form of an oral exam, project or assignment on condition that s/he states it on the course information form (syllabus) within two weeks after the semester begins." Retrieved from: <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/04-undergraduate-studies-and-examinations.pdf>

192. Moreover there are safeguards in place that ensure the objectivity of assessment, such as complaining procedures provisioned respectively in Articles 23 and 29 of the aforementioned regulations.

193. When enrolled at Epoka students are provided with a personal student account by which they register all the study courses and from which are informed about their study success of each course. Students have access in their personal account and the information is kept confidential²⁴⁴.

4.1.3 Improving and ensuring quality (Standard I, II.3)

194. Faculties use evaluation procedures both from peers and students to ensure the delivery of teaching and research at the highest quality²⁴⁵.

195. As previously elaborated (in paragraph No. 85, standard III, IV.3), Epoka conducts semestrial student evaluation and publishes the results of student evaluation in its annual reports²⁴⁶.

196. Outcomes of entrance examinations, competitions, activities and all achievements of the institution are published both in the Epoka`s website and in its the annual reports²⁴⁷.

197. Staff and students' evaluation outcomes are among other inputs that consistently inform and justify curricular changes in order to improve and increase the coherence of the study programs. One of the most recent curricula improvement initiated based

See "Article 26: The educational process consists of lectures, projects and studio work, laboratory and parlor work, practice, terrain work, seminars and other similar works as predicted by the educational planning." Retrieved from: <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-second-cycle-study-programs.pdf>

²⁴⁴ See Epoka's Interactive System and specifically the Education Information System. Website: www.eisapp.epoka.edu.al; More details on Annex 10: Chapter 1.1.

²⁴⁵ See for instance the evaluation sheet from the Faculty of Economy and Administration, Annex 6: Chapter 4.1.1.

²⁴⁶ For instance in the academic year of 2015-2016 students were asked to evaluate teaching effectiveness based on a questionnaire (14 items on their syllabus, class preparation and motivation); and on the first semester the majority of teachers scored relatively high, with an average of 3.4 on a scale from 1 ("do not agree" with the statement) to 4 ("totally agree"). See Annual Report 2015-16, p. 36 in Annex 6: Chapter 1.3.

²⁴⁷ See for instance on (1) sport activities: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-universiada-tirana-2016-epoka-football-team-won-the-second-place-3252.html>; (2) Competitions: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-discover-the-architect-in-you-epoka-university-third-international-design-competition-for-senior-high-school-students-410.html>; (3) Admission exam: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-many-thanks-and-successes-to-all-the-participants-of-the-admission-exam-771.html>; etc.

on the said evaluation outcomes was approved for the program of Business Informatics²⁴⁸.

198. Programs objectives and curricula are also reviewed based on employment statistics of students which are regularly reported to the departments and published in the Annual Report²⁴⁹. Employment and employability of students are determining factors especially for the development of curricula in masters' programs. For instance, in 2011 the curricula of the master program in Education Management was tailored to the country's need for certified school principals, and more specifically with the collaboration of Turgut Ozal school system²⁵⁰.

4.1.4 Teaching improving policies (Standard I, II.4)

199. Epoka has a set instruments and structures to ensure the delivery of teaching at the highest standard. The Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Board²⁵¹ monitors the implementation of programs regulations and the overall quality of teaching at institutional level. At faculty and departmental level there are ad-hoc evaluation commissions that conduct peer-reviews, receiving additional input from student evaluations.

200. According to the statute and the Law on Higher Education (2015) the academic staff enjoys academic freedom in planning and performing their duties. Lecturers are free to experiment with their teaching and use several assessment methods. The Basic Regulation of Epoka University (EU-REG-001-EN/2007) allows the use of different teaching philosophies and approaches as long as the objective of the program and syllabus are met. However, faculties have yet to include the assessment of teaching effectiveness in their process of staff evaluation. As stated in the Staff Guide booklet of Epoka teaching effectiveness should be the primary factor of evaluation²⁵².

²⁴⁸ See for example: Decision of the Academic Senate No. 6, dated 13.07.2016 in Annex 6: Chapter 3.1.5.

²⁴⁹ See for instance Annual Report 2015-16, p. 31 in Annex 6: Chapter 1.3.

²⁵⁰ Ervin Sulika (21 December, 2016). Personal Communication. Faculty Coordinator. Further details can be obtained by looking at the program objectives, available upon request.

²⁵¹ For further information see the website of AEQI-Board: <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/home.html>.

²⁵² "In evaluating faculty performance, the Head of Departments, together with the Deans, in consultation with their senior faculties, examine a number of factors. Primary among them is evidence of intellectual vitality in scholarship and a high degree of effectiveness in teaching."

201. Epoka supports further qualification and training of its staff in research as stipulated in the directive "On the Promotion of Scientific Publication"²⁵³ and its Strategic Plan 2013-2017²⁵⁴. Financial support has been provided on a regular basis to enable the participation of staff in conferences, publications and workshops²⁵⁵.

202. In additions to research Epoka continuously supports the qualification and training of academic staff as necessary by the departments²⁵⁶. The process is regulated under regulation EU-REG-038-EN/2014, "Regulation on Scientific Research" and stated in Epoka's development strategy 2017²⁵⁷.

203. At Epoka University the quality of teaching is a priority. This indicates that Epoka takes the responsibility of delivering high quality teaching very seriously. As mentioned previously in paragraphs 207 to 210, ensuring high academic standards, especially in teaching, constitutes a significant part of the mission of the University and an important aspect of staff evaluation. Epoka University has quality assurance units both at departmental level, where peer-review plays a central role, and at the institutional level monitored by AEQI-Board.

204. To provide the highest quality in teaching and implement its study programs Epoka retains the necessary infrastructure which is updated in accordance with the program requirements²⁵⁸. Learning resources such as the library and the computer facilities are also evaluated by students.²⁵⁹

²⁵³ See in Annex 3: Chapter 2, Directive EU-DIR-004-EN, 16.02.2009 "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications", <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/03.pdf>, Article 1: "The objective of this directive is to define the methods and principles on the encouragement of the academic staff of Epoka University to carry out publications and participate in scientific activities."

²⁵⁴ See Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Strategic Goals 1.1.1 to 1.4.1 on Research in Annex 7: Chapter 1.

²⁵⁵ For example during 2013-2016 Epoka supported financially 71 participants in 31 conferences only at the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences. For a list of academic staff members who have profited from Epoka's financial support see Annex 1: Chapter 3.5.2.

²⁵⁶ See also paragraph 139, Standard I, I.2. For instance since 2013 Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences has organized 13 training sessions. For a sample of training activities at Faculty of Economics and Administrative Science see Annex 6: Chapter 3.5.2. For a more comprehensive picture see table 59 in Annex 1: Chapter 3.5.2.

²⁵⁷ See regulation: <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-scientific-research.pdf>; and Chapter 2.1B- Research and Publication, where it is stated that "Epoka University is placing high importance to the improvement and promotion of the academic staff, to the publications in international peer reviewed journals, the indexation and international projects. The scientific research and participation in project of the academic staff is strongly encouraged and rewarded" (p. 9).

²⁵⁸ See paragraph 118, Standard III, VII.5 for further elaboration. Also see Annex 10: Chapter 2.

²⁵⁹ In the most recent survey students show high satisfaction levels with the service provided in library and computer labs (see for instance Student Satisfaction Questionnaire 2015-16, in Annex 10: Chapter 2.1.1.2).

205. As demonstrated by the relatively high satisfaction levels of the annual evaluations students, Epoka's staff (faculty, research assistants and administrative personnel) show commitment in enhancing the education experience and improving the implementation of the study programs²⁶⁰.

4.2 Research Output, Dissemination and Assessment

4.2.1 Department (Standard II, I.2)

206. Scientific research and planning are conducted at departmental level. The Department is the basic academic unit of Epoka University as stated in the Statute and the Law on Higher Education²⁶¹. Departments include homogenous research field and groups in relation to the academic discipline they cover. Below there is an organigram of the faculties and a map of the disciplines they cover based on the Classification of Instructional Programs developed by U.S. Department of Education²⁶².

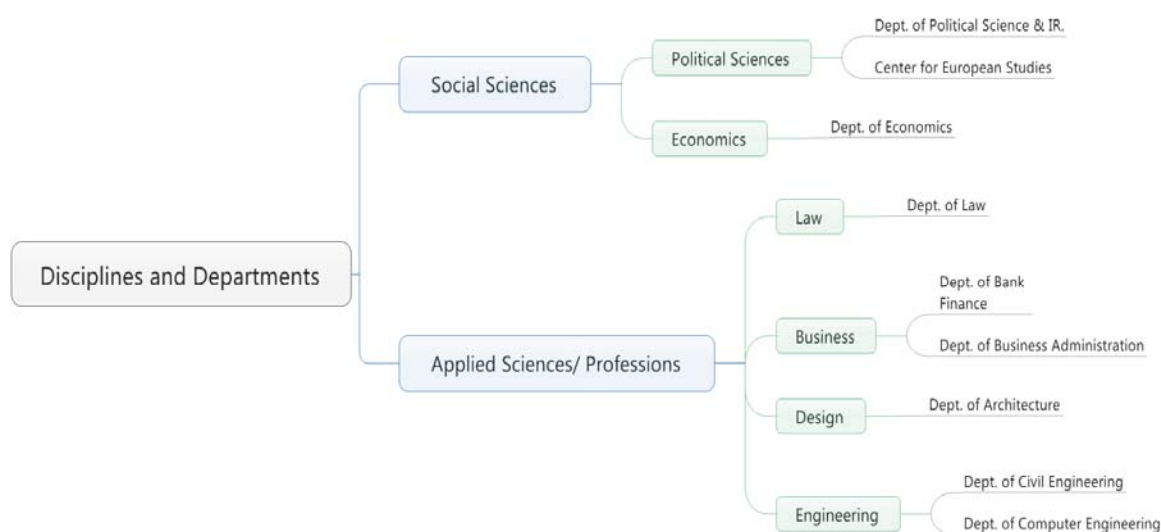


Figure 3: Organization of academic disciplines at Epoka University.

²⁶⁰ Student satisfactions level are high especially for the faculty. In 2015 the average score was more than 3.4 out of 4 (Annual Report 2015-16, p. 31). In the most recent survey students show high satisfaction levels with the service provided in library and computer labs (see for instance Student Satisfaction Questionnaire 2015-16, details available upon request).

²⁶¹ See Article 12 of Epoka Statute, subtitled "The Department" in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

²⁶² See National Center for Education Statistics (2016). Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP). Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode>.

207. Within and across departments there are research groups engaged in several research projects. Research groups are organized into specific research areas²⁶³. Research groups and areas are posted on the website of the respective departments. For instance, at the Department of Political Science and International Relations the focus lies on political activism and civic engagement²⁶⁴. At the Department of Business Administration some of the research is focused on social enterprises²⁶⁵. However, it is recommended that research groups should focus on a smaller number of research areas to achieve the critical mass of researchers for particular projects.

Table 2: Research areas/groups at departmental level, 2016.

Departments	Count of Areas/Groups	Website
Banking and Finance	19	http://baf.epoka.edu.al/home-research-areas-236-1767.html
Business Administration	26	http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-research-areas-280-1697.html
Economics	3	http://eco.epoka.edu.al/home-research-areas-1110-1885.html
Political Science and International Relations	5	http://pir.epoka.edu.al/home-research-areas-344-1803.html
Computer Engineering	1	http://cen.epoka.edu.al/home-biometrics-image-a-161-1953.html
Civil Engineering	2	http://ce.epoka.edu.al/home-research-groups-624-2000.html
Architecture	6	http://arch.epoka.edu.al/home-research-on-urbanism-2003-2004.html
Grand Total	62	

²⁶³ In total there are 56 areas of research identified across departments. The Department of Business & Administration has the largest of them (26), followed by the Department of Banking and Finance (19).

²⁶⁴ There is an ongoing project on "Political Perceptions and Participation of University Students in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia For further details contact project coordinator Prof. Salih Ozcan, Epoka University.

²⁶⁵ See Epoka Cluster on Social Business and Sustainable Systems. Retrieved from: <http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-epoka-cluster-on-social-business-and-sustainable-systems-280-1788.html>.

208. Department promotes, coordinates and manages teaching activities. Course appointments and timetables are set and proposed by the departments by respecting academic freedom. Academic staff uses the available materials based on the approval of the respective departments (syllabus, learning outcomes, books, course evaluation etc.). Members of the academic staff are expected to use their financial support to develop their scientific expertise and for publications²⁶⁶.

209. Because Epoka is a private higher education institution, departments may issue their financial request to the Administrative Board only through the Academic Senate and the Dean of the respective Faculty. The financial responsibility lies within the Faculty and the Administrative Board²⁶⁷.

210. Research is evaluated at departmental level. However, there are no data on research areas or groups that have been terminated. At the end of the academic year, academic staff prepares and submits a report (hard and soft copy) to the faculty on the yearly research performed. The report includes the list of publications as well as publication itself. The Publication Promotion and Scientific Activities Support Commission evaluates the publications on points and a monetary reward is granted to the staff. Research activities have been subject to external evaluation during the process of accreditation for the bachelor, master and Ph.D. study programs. The majority of external reviewers have concluded that research activities at Epoka University constitute one of the strong aspect of the institution²⁶⁸.

211. Epoka supports financially (see paragraph 201 for more details) and administratively the establishment of research groups and the implementation of their projects. Due to the institutional support there has been an increase in research output

²⁶⁶ This policy has been stipulated both in the old statute, Article 27, and in the new Statute, Article 12 available in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

²⁶⁷ See Statute, Article 39 for the role of the Administrative Board, and Article 16/x. on the Academic Senate, available in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

²⁶⁸ For instance, Prof. Dr. Th. Korini (2015) states in his SWOT analysis that one of Epoka's strength and positive trends is the "continuing organization of international conferences, seminars and other research activities" (p. 44). [Korini, Th. (2015) Final Report of the External Review Group at Epoka University: For the Bachelor Program in "Electronic Engineering and Digital Communication." APAAL: Tirana]

such as conferences, publications and in staff mobility²⁶⁹. The average number of publication since 2011 has been about 84 publications per year. The percentage of funds for research and development at Epoka University has been in an average of 10% every year since 2011. The average research output since 2011 has been 1.36 per full-time academic staff.

212. Epoka has encouraged and supported the establishment of new research groups and the development of new research areas and staff expertise, as indicated by the relatively high number of research areas and diversity in research topics, mentioned in paragraph 215.

213. Epoka also encourages collaboration among in-house researchers and other institutions. There is an increase throughout the period of 2012-2016 in the number of bilateral agreements with foreign universities and application for research funds²⁷⁰. However, although Epoka has stimulated networking, cooperation among researchers should be more productive. For instance in 2012 the average number of authors for publication was 2.2 at the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, in 2015 it decreased to 1.3.

214. As mentioned in paragraphs 219-221 Epoka encourages and stimulates cooperation within its research structures and outside of the institution. This can be evidenced in the number of cooperation agreements with foreign universities (40 universities from 20 countries)²⁷¹, the number of international project Epoka has applied for²⁷² and the number of in- and outbound mobility (41 exchanges).

4.2.2 Internationalization of research (Standard II, 1.3)

215. According to its Strategic Plan, Epoka University is committed to internationalization of research by collecting and disseminating information to the research units, laboratories and the library²⁷³. Epoka has a special budget and

²⁶⁹ Faculty of Economic and Administrative Science makes the largest contribution of about 53 publications annually. See Annex 1: Chapter 3.5.1. Staff mobility also increased considerably since 2013, from 9 to 15 in 2015. See Annex 1: Chapter 3.4.2.

²⁷⁰ See also paragraph 34.

²⁷¹ See Annex 9: Chapter 1.1. See also Partner Universities: <http://iro.epoka.edu.al/cat-partner-universities-1061.html> & <http://iro.epoka.edu.al/home-erasmus-programme-1151-1638.html>

²⁷² See Annex 5: Chapter 2.1.

²⁷³ This is stated in Chapter 2.1B- Research and Publication "Epoka University is placing high importance to the improvement and promotion of the academic staff, to the publications in international peer reviewed journals, the indexation and international projects. The scientific research and participation in project of the academic staff is strongly encouraged and rewarded." (p. 9). Increase of

regulation to encourage dissemination of research through publication and participation in conferences²⁷⁴.

216. Epoka has also shown strong commitment to participate in EU funded research projects²⁷⁵ and other international projects. Epoka has increased the number of participation by several times, from one in 2013 to eight in 2016 and seven in 2017²⁷⁶. The University also has a high approval rate of its projects.

Table 3: Application in International Projects during 2014-17.

Program	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
AKTI	2	2	2		6
Erasmus	15		2	6	23
Horizon 2020	1	4	2		7
IPA			1		1
Jean Monnet		1	1	1	3
Other	1				1
Grand Total	19	7	8	7	41

217. Epoka has organized regularly international conferences and workshops at its premises, which are published on Epoka's website²⁷⁷. Since 2011 Epoka has organized 16 international conferences.

218. Epoka's staff members have also participated in a large number of research activities²⁷⁸. Participation in such events has been an important strategic goal and development policy of Epoka²⁷⁹. The average number of participations is about 10 to 15 events per year.

the number of projects and staff mobility have been important goals of the strategy (see Goal 1.2.1 and 1.2.2).

²⁷⁴ See paragraph 201 for more details.

²⁷⁵ See Strategic Goals 1.1.1 to 1.1.3 in the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 available in Annex 7: Chapter 1.

²⁷⁶ See the Interim Evaluation Report of Epoka's Strategic Plan 2013-2017. Annex 7: Chapter 2.

²⁷⁷ See website: <http://conf.epoka.edu.al/>

²⁷⁸ See paragraph 65 (Chapter 1.3.4) and paragraph 201. The average number is about 10 to 15 events per year.

²⁷⁹ See Interim Evaluation Report of the Epoka University's Strategic Plan 2013-2017 in Annex 7: Chapter 2; and the annual reports for the successive years; See also regulation No. EU-REG-038-EN, <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-scientific-research.pdf>

219. Epoka has consistently broaden her partnership network. Until 2016 Epoka has arranged 40 partnership agreements with other higher education institutions from 20 countries²⁸⁰. There have been 37 Bilateral Agreement and three in the framework of Erasmus+.

220. To further increase the visibility and outreach of research findings, Epoka has organized several ceremonial meetings when faculty members are able to publish their research²⁸¹. Although the participation of Epoka's academic staff in research events is reported regularly, the arrangement of ceremonial meetings to promote the findings does not seem to be a formal practice. Hence, it is recommended that such events should be arranged more often and part of the publication fund should be earmarked for this very purpose.

221. Epoka's staff members have a good record of publications in international journals²⁸². The list of publications is on the website of the faculty and the department²⁸³. Since 2011 Epoka's staff have published about 11 books and 423 research papers (conference proceedings and journal articles).

222. Research areas and research priorities are determined by faculty members at departmental and faculty level. The research areas are published on the department's website (see paragraph 207 for further elaboration) and consider the interests of both individual researchers and of the department.

223. Epoka has a policy in place to support innovations and inventions, stipulated in the Directive "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications", Article 4 and 5. Epoka has also issued a formal statement through the "Staff Guide" booklet addressing the issue of copyright ownership²⁸⁴.

²⁸⁰ See paragraphs 60 to 63 (Standard III, II.2). For a list of agreements see Annex 9: Chapter 1.1.

²⁸¹ For instance Prof. Dr. Bekir Cinar (<http://eis.epoka.edu.al/?1033,10122>) has organized such events to promote and discuss his research findings. Events are regularly published on the Epoka's website. See for instance: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-assist-prof-dr-bekir-c-305-nar-participates-at-second-international-scientific-conference-528.html>.

²⁸² In 2015 at the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering published 18 articles in international journals, out of 21 publications in total. In 2014 the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences had published in 17 international journals, out of 89 publications. Available in Annex 1: Chapter 3.5.1.

²⁸³ FEAS: <http://feas.epoka.edu.al/home-journal-articles-442-558.html>; FAE: <http://fae.epoka.edu.al/cat-research-647.html>.

²⁸⁴ See Annex 6: Chapter 7, Staff Guide, p. 43: University Policy on Copyrights.

224. Epoka also encourages scientific debate in the research areas of its faculty members by organizing open lectures with renowned researchers²⁸⁵, open forums with Albanian public figures²⁸⁶, ceremonial meetings which promote book publications and other events of this nature.

225. Epoka provides financial support for publications and to cover travel expenses in international and national conferences²⁸⁷. The annual budget for Research and Development has comprised an average of 11% of the total expenditures during 2011-2015²⁸⁸.

226. Recruitment of international staff is an important part of the strategic plan of Epoka University²⁸⁹. The recruitment of qualified academic is based on their research skills as assessed by regulation EU-REG-011-EN, "Employment and Performance Assessment of Academic Staff", articles 6-10²⁹⁰. Out of 11 evaluation rubrics, stipulated in article 10, seven rubrics evaluate indicators that are based on research output (publications, presentations, editing, references, completed research projects and awards in research.)

227. Epoka has set its priority research fields in applied sciences. Priority areas are in engineering (IT, electronics, civil engineering), design (architecture), business (management, banking, finance), law and social sciences (political sciences and international relations)²⁹¹.

228. The scientific research priorities are also part of the mission of Epoka University and the research strategy (see for instance Statute, Article 3, paragraph 3).

²⁸⁵ See for instance an open lecture by Dr. A. Zielonka from University of Applied Sciences of Mainz, Germany, on "International Controlling" (November 30, 2016). Retrieved from: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-dr-alexander-zielonka-professor-at-the-university-of-applied-sciences-in-mainz-germany-visits-epoka-university-3282.html>; Or Prof. Alexander Brodsky open lecture on "Art and Architecture" (November 7, 2016), <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-open-lecture-alexander-brodsky-between-art-and-architecture-3204.html>.

²⁸⁶ See for instance an open forum on American elections with Dr. Ernest Nasto (November 1, 2016). Retrieved from: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-open-forum-on-american-elections-system-3201.html>.

²⁸⁷ This policy has been stipulated both in the previous statute, Article 27, and in the new statute, Article 12. In Annex 3: Chapter 2.

²⁸⁸ See Annex 1: Chapter 5, table 65 for more details.

²⁸⁹ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, Statute, Article 3, Paragraph 5 (p. 3).

²⁹⁰ Retrieval from: <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/employment-and-performance-assessment-of-academic-staff.pdf>

²⁹¹ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, Statute, Article 3, the Mission of Epoka University, Paragraph 2 (p. 3).

229. The strategic research objectives in the Strategic Plan of 2013-2017 (Chapter 5, Goals 1.1-1.4), which explicitly set out measurable indicators have been developed considering Epoka's financial and human resources capacities (see Chapter 7 for cost predictions²⁹²).

230. Epoka's strategic goals are to increase the cooperation with all the national research organizations. The Strategic Plan 2013-2017 intends to increase the number of applications in national research project which are initiated by the National Agency for Research, Technology and Innovation (ARTI). Epoka's staff members have cooperated with ARTI²⁹³ and have applied in several calls for application²⁹⁴.

231. PhD. candidates choose their topics of research by taking into consideration the research areas of the department and the capacities of Epoka Universities. The topic of their research are hence integrated into the research groups of the department and this allows PhD. students to publish together with their supervisors²⁹⁵.

232. In relation to the above mentioned good practice, Epoka also encourages young researchers, master and PhD. students (see Paragraph 230 above) to get involved in research projects. Throughout 2013-2015 Epoka has engaged nine research assistants. In 2014 there were five research assistants, and in 2015 there were three.

233. Epoka has been involved in the development of national research policies and national higher education policy both at institutional and individual level through its academics. It has regularly provided feedback to the Ministry of Education and Sports when developing its policies and it has been involved at individual level in many drafting processes for the development of sectorial strategies²⁹⁶. Epoka's research strategy presented in its Strategic Plan 2013-2017 has included some of the priorities

²⁹² pp. 41.

²⁹³ See a meeting with AKTI at Epoka (March 24, 2015). Retrievable from: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/lajm-akti-zhvillon-nje-sesion-trajnimi-ne-universitetin-epoka-2426.html>

²⁹⁴ See Call for Projects, TUBITAK, ARTI (March 1, 2015). <http://projects.epoka.edu.al/news-open-call-akti-tubitak-2236.html>

²⁹⁵ See Annex 7: chapter 2, for instance the Internal Evaluation Report for the Accreditation of PhD. in Architecture (2015). In Table 13 (p. 62) students apply for projects and publish articles with faculty members. Retrievable under:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/0B0mnzrXaGg0OWXJ2WTBJQIFTRFk>. This is a practice implemented also in other departments. See Chapter 10 (p.64) of the internal evaluation report for the accreditation of PhD. in Economics. <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/0B0mnzrXaGg0OWXJ2WTBJQIFTRFk>

²⁹⁶ See Annex 6: Chapter 2.1.1.

set out in the National Strategy on Science, Technology and Innovation 2009-2015²⁹⁷. Four out of the seven National Development Programs for Research and Development include research fields in which Epoka's faculty has been engaged with and applied for (IT, water and energy sector, and materials science)²⁹⁸.

234. One of Epoka's strategy goals is to increase the number of foreign researchers²⁹⁹ and hence their integration and adaptation with Epoka's institutional culture is of foremost importance for staff retention. As a result the number of academic staff has steadily increased since 2011 (83) to 2015 (113) and employee turnover is very low.

235. Foreign academic staff are invited every semester as guest lectures or researchers to promote quality in research and internationalization of study programs. The number of academic staff invited at Epoka for research or teaching has been 34 since 2013, out of which 6 have been research oriented (2015), 9 related to master studies and 16 for bachelor studies³⁰⁰.

236. Epoka also provides financial and logistic support for the organization of international seminars and scientific symposia³⁰¹, which are consistent with Epoka's research policy envisioned in the Strategic Plan 2013-2017³⁰² and its regulation "On the Promotion of Scientific Publication"³⁰³.

4.2.3 Publication of research outcome (Standard II, I.7)

237. Epoka's supports the publication of research outcome by having a regulatory framework on publication activities (EU-DIR-004-EN/2009 "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications"³⁰⁴ and EU-REG-013-EN/2007 "Regulation on Publications"³⁰⁵) and hosting a digital repository³⁰⁶. Research outcomes are presented in the department's website and uploaded at Epoka's digital repository.

²⁹⁷ http://akti.gov.al/dokumenta/strategjia_2009_2015.pdf

²⁹⁸ http://akti.gov.al/pkkzh_fushat.html

²⁹⁹ See also paragraph 66-69 (Standard III, II.4).

³⁰⁰ See Annex 1: Chapter 3.4.2.

³⁰¹ See paragraph 217 and 218 detailing of some of the good practices implemented at Epoka University.

³⁰² See Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Strategic Goals 1.1.1 to 1.4.1 on Research. In Annex 7: Chapter 1.

³⁰³ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, Directive EU-DIR-004-EN "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications", <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/03.pdf>, Article 1: "The objective of this directive is to define the methods and principles on the encouragement of the academic staff of Epoka University to carry out publications and participate in scientific activities."

³⁰⁴ See <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-publications.pdf>

³⁰⁵ See <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-scientific-research.pdf>

³⁰⁶ <http://dspace.epoka.edu.al>

238. In regard to international best practices Epoka has a policy to support innovations and inventions, stipulated in the Directive “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications”, Article 4 and 5, the University has also issued a formal statement through the “Staff Guide” addressing the issue of intellectual property³⁰⁷. Concerning ethical issues in research Epoka follows on the guidelines set out by the scientific community in Albania and Ministry of Education and Sports³⁰⁸. Based on the provisions of the new Statute, Epoka University will adopt an Ethics Code comprising both academic and administrative staff members as well as students.

239. Epoka is committed to support its staff in the application of research projects with regional or national outreach³⁰⁹. Because of such policy Epoka University is involved in several regional and national research projects.

4.2.4 Evaluation of research activities (Standard II, I.8)

240. The progress of scientific research outcome is monitored at departmental level, by Faculties and by the Research and Project Office, which also ensure the coordination and the effective use of resources. The research activities are also evaluated based on the strategic goals set out in the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 by AEQI-Board³¹⁰.

241. To publish outcomes of the scientific research Epoka has provided in a repository database³¹¹.

242. Academic staff of the University is encouraged to make scientific and research work in accordance with their professional skills and duties arising from the strategy of the University³¹². Epoka University strictly complies with the provisions of the Regulation “On ethics in research and publishing activities” adopted through the Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Science No. 105, dated 23.03.2012. Based

³⁰⁷ See also paragraph 223. See also Annex 6: Chapter 7, Staff Guide, p. 43: University Policy on Copyrights.

³⁰⁸ See Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Science No. 105, dated 23.03.2012 “On the approval of the Regulation “On ethics at research and publication activities”, in Annex 8: Chapter 2.7.

³⁰⁹ See also Annex 7: Chapter 1, Strategic Plan 2013-17: “Epoka University is aiming to develop its research infrastructure. The main objective is to ensure the inclusiveness and continuity of the research and to assist the researchers. For ensuring the inclusiveness and continuity of the research in specific field University management thinks to spend research budget to concentrate on small research projects.” (p.10).

³¹⁰ See a recent Interim Evaluation Report of the Strategy. Annex 7: Chapter 2.

³¹¹ <http://dspace.epoka.edu.al>. See also paragraph 237-239.

³¹² See Regulation “On Scientific Research”, Article 3, in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

on the provisions of Section 5.4 of the abovementioned Regulation, all term papers, articles, Master of Science theses, Professional Master micro-theses as well as PhD dissertations prepared by students are subject to plagiarism testing prior to the granting of approval by the respective lecturer/supervisor. Plagiarism testing is carried out through a specialized software program (i.e. Turnitin) to which Epoka University is subscribed.

At the same time, in compliance with the provisions of Section 4.3.3 of the abovementioned Regulation, Epoka University publishes on its official website the full text of the PhD dissertations that have been defended by PhD candidates in front of the jury established by the Council of Professors. At the same time, Epoka University has explicitly envisaged in the Regulation “On PhD study programs” that the PhD degree is revocable at any time and under any circumstances where a case of plagiarism or data falsification is identified in the work carried out by the PhD candidate. Concerning ethical issues in research Epoka follows on the guidelines set out by the scientific community in Albania and Ministry of Education and Sports³¹³. The University has also issued a formal statement in its “Staff Guide” addressing the issue of intellectual property³¹⁴.

243. Epoka encourages and financially supports young researchers to undertake personal initiatives in scientific research fields³¹⁵.

244. Epoka collaborates with local and foreign enterprises (in 2016 there were 42 partners)³¹⁶. The collaboration with the industry is part of the Strategic Plan³¹⁷. The

³¹³ See Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Science No. 105, dated 23.03.2012 “On the approval of the Regulation “On ethics at research and publication activities”, in Annex 8: Chapter 2.7.

³¹⁴ See also paragraph 223. See also Annex 6: Chapter 7, Staff Guide, p. 43: University Policy on Copyrights.

³¹⁵ See for example calls for the internal research projects: <http://projects.epoka.edu.al/home-internal-projects-calls-1169-1535.html>. For a list of the completed research projects see http://epoka.edu.al/mat/research_and_projects/completed_projects/epoka_university_list_of_projects_2008-2014_final_en.pdf. For a list of the ongoing research projects <http://projects.epoka.edu.al/home-ongoing-research-projects-1169-1534.html>. And a list of projects where graduate students are involved see: <http://projects.epoka.edu.al/home-research-projects-of-phd-students-1169-1744.html>. See also Annex 5: Research Activities.

³¹⁶ See also paragraph No. 60-64.

³¹⁷ As stipulated in the 2013-2017 Strategic Plan of Epoka University (see section 2.1.c, pp. 10 of the 2013-2017 Strategic Plan), Epoka University maintains close relationship with national, regional and industrial entities through its professional human resources and the offering of services from its modern infrastructure. In its Strategy it also aims to increase “the support for professional associations, civil society organization, and local governments for joint projects carried out.” (Goal 3.4.2, Strategic Plan). In Annex 7: Chapter 1.

industry has been recognized as an important stakeholder for the University and the “Institutional Collaboration”, EG.3.2 is one of the main objectives of the Strategic Plan 2013-2017³¹⁸. In order to initiate and support international projects Epoka supports the relations between its Departments and the industrial sector. Teams are composed of members from different institutions, focusing on projects from different disciplines. The main interest of Epoka University in this context is to create the necessary conditions for technology transfer and constitute a useful resource to bring ahead projects that can develop the industrial sector in the country.

245. Based on its policies of supporting publication of research outcome (see paragraph 238, Standard II, I.7), Epoka’s staff shows a laudable record of publications³¹⁹.

Table 4: List of publications at FEAS and FAE during 2012-2016 from full-time faculty staff.

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Total
FAE	36	46	40	13	35	154
FEAS	43	55	89	45	21	269
Total	79	101	129	58	56	423

246. As evidenced in the above paragraph Epoka maintains a publication record for its full-time staff members. This practice is required by the University management in accordance with its staff evaluation and human resources policies³²⁰ of Epoka as mentioned in paragraphs 236-244.

4.3 Conclusion and Judgment

247. In this area the Self-Evaluation Group concludes that Epoka fully meets the national accreditation standards and those of the ESG (e.g. 1.3 on student-centered learning, teaching and assessment). The organization of study programs is in

³¹⁸ See also paragraph 58. An analysis and evaluation of this policy is in the Interim Evaluation Report of the Epoka University’s Strategic Plan 2013-2017, Annex 7: Chapter 2.

³¹⁹ See Annex 5: Chapter 1.

³²⁰ See Annex 3: Chapter 2, Regulation “On Publications” and Directive “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications”.

conformity with the national regulatory framework and the standards of the Bologna Process, enabling students to become responsible autonomous learners.

In alignment with the prescribed national quality standards the teaching process in Epoka is consistently evaluated and adjusted accordingly.

248. Standards concerning research and publication policies are also fully met. However, as previously mentioned, it is recommended that Epoka increases the quality of its research. In order to accomplish this, it has to create research groups that work effectively in a much more limited number of research areas.

249. The Self-Evaluation Group has evidenced that assessment criteria at Epoka are made transparent, students complaining procedures are appropriate and feedback is given to students in order to increase their learning experience.

5. Evaluation Area: Student Support

5.1 Student Admission and Retention Policies

5.1.1 Admission policies (Standard I, III.1)

250. Epoka's short- and long-term admission strategies are set out in the Strategic Plan 2013-2017³²¹, the annual marketing plan which focuses heavily on activities related to student admission with its appropriate budget and the development strategies of the departments. The implementation is regulated through the rules laid out in the University's Statute³²² and its regulatory framework. There is an Admission Office³²³, whose development strategy is aligned with the marketing and financial strategies of the University³²⁴. The strategies aim to promote the image of Epoka by catering for the needs of prospective, enrolling and graduated students. Services offered through the Career Planning and Alumni Office as well as the Alumni Association are tailored to graduated students.

251. Prospective students from all high schools of Albania are informed through a Career Planning Program³²⁵ at Epoka and education fairs. The aim of Career Planning Program is to inform candidates about the education opportunities offered by Epoka University as well as additional benefits such as exchange programs like Erasmus+, Summer Internships, conferences etc. Epoka participates in the educational fairs where universities present their programs. All the information is send to secondary education institutions and the programs are presented in the high schools. Each department posts and updates information about its provided programs and curriculum on Epoka's website.

³²¹ The Strategic Plan has envisioned these goals: A- For enrolled students (1) to increase by 50% the participation of students in extra activities (Goal 4.1.1); (2) To create and develop career office and employment office (Goal 4.2.2). B- For alumni: (1) The creation of an Alumni Association (Goal 3.3.1); (2) Establishing feedback mechanisms for graduated students (Goal 3.3.2); Annex 7: Chapter 1.

³²² See Annex 3: Chapter 2, previous statute EU-STA-EN/2007; Chapter V; and the new statute, chapter XV.

³²³ Web presentation of Admission Office: <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/cat-general-information-493.html>.

³²⁴ See detailed work procedures of the Admission Office: Annex 6: Chapter 6.2.

³²⁵ Besides advising and an English language test, the Career Planning Program also includes transportation, meal and a campus tour. See Annex 6: Chapter 5.1.1, for a tentative agenda of the Career Planning Program.

252. Epoka's policies allow for a smooth integration of new students according to ESG, Standard 1.4. The policies are laid out in the annual Student Guide³²⁶. Every year new students participate in Epoka's welcoming program, Orientation Day. In this day students obtain information that is needed for their student life in institution from academic and administrative staff³²⁷. Academic advisors also help students for their integration into the university life.

253. For the realization of Career Planning program, Epoka collaborates with the Regional Education Directorates³²⁸. Every start of new academic year, a monthly calendar of the program is submitted for approval to the representatives of Regional Education Directorates.

254. Epoka's campus is small and it has only two units which process the requests of prospective students when they arrive: the reception at the gate, and the Admission Office which also provides information to both prospective and enrolling students.

255. Epoka realizes a Career Planning Program also in Kosovo and Macedonia. The programs consist in informing students about study opportunities at Epoka. Through its website and the Admission Office, the University also assists foreign students to find accommodation, register with the national authorities and obtain proper documentation for the enrollment³²⁹.

256. Information about admission deadline, the Career Planning Program and schedule, admission criteria and scholarship opportunities are published at Epoka's website. Printed brochures and other info leaflets are distributed every year. The Admission Office has published its contact details on the website and can be contacted year around³³⁰.

257. Epoka has one of the lowest student-faculty ratios among Albanian higher education institutions and meets the standard set by the Accreditation Agency of 20 to one. At Epoka the average student to faculty ratio in terms of Full-Time Equivalent

³²⁶ See for instance Student Guide 2016-2017. http://epoka.edu.al/mat/Student_Guide_2016-2017.pdf

³²⁷ For the Orientation Days for freshman students during the 2016-2017 academic year, see: <http://epoka.edu.al/event-orientation-days-for-freshmen-students-oct-20-21-1000-3171.html>

³²⁸ "Drejtori Arsimore Rajonale" for large districts, or "Zyra Arsimore Rajonale" for smaller districts.

³²⁹ See web application for the applying at Epoka University and the information provided in the website: http://easapp.epoka.edu.al/apply#tab_6_4.

³³⁰ See Visit & Connect: <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/cat-visit-connect-1568.html>.

staff (FTE) has been annually 14:1 since 2011 and 17:1 for 2015³³¹, while in Albania in 2014 the national student to faculty ratio was 22:1 and at public universities 27:1³³². Epoka meets the standard set by the Accreditation Agency of 20:1. The standard for the number of research or teaching assistant per 60 students is also fulfilled. Epoka's ratio of students per research and teaching assistants has been 29 for 2015-2016 and average annual ratio of 34:1 since 2011³³³.

5.1.2 Communication policies (Standard I, III.3)

258. Epoka provides different advising and counseling opportunities for students. There are walk-in visiting hours and email³³⁴ contacts for administrative affairs at the respective units of the University, and there is an academic advisor for each student. Available are also student self-help groups and clubs who may use Epoka facilities for their discussions and gatherings every time. Students can also be informed through the website, university prospects and the annual Student Guide³³⁵.

259. The official external communication of Epoka University is carried out in compliance with the Media Relations Procedure which can be found in the attached document ³³⁶. Newspapers, radio and television serve as important sources communicators of University's news, interviews, activities, conferences, forums etc.

260. Epoka University possesses both written and electronic internal communication means through which staff members and students are regularly informed on decisions of managing bodies and authorities of the University as well as various notifications and announcements. Written correspondence and e-mail communication ensure the dissemination of the decisions of managing bodies and authorities of the University as well as various notifications and announcements.

³³¹ See Annex 1, Chapter 3.1.2, table 38.

³³² See Commission for Higher Education and Research (2014) *Final Report for the Reformation of Albanian Higher Education and Science*. (Ed.) A. Gjonca. Ministry of Education and Science: Tirana.

³³³ See Annex 1, Chapter 3.1.2, table 39.

³³⁴ Contact: dos@epoka.edu.al

³³⁵ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/Student_Guide_2016-2017.pdf

³³⁶ See Media Relations Procedure in Annex 6: Chapter 6.1.

261. Each staff member, full or adjunct, is provided with an official email address with Epoka's domain (*epoka.edu.al*). The e-mail addresses are used for internal communications within Epoka and serve as official contact addresses for outsiders.

262. Epoka holds personal files for each student in full compliance with the legal framework set out in government bylaws and recommendations for the protection of personal data³³⁷. The file is composed of the study contract and all application documents such as English Proficiency exam, Diploma of State Matura, Transcripts and copy of ID's³³⁸. After graduation students withdraw the original documents, but a copy of all of each remains within the institution. Besides the enrollment documents, file includes also transcripts and diploma/diploma supplement of Bachelor/Master/PhD studies conducted at Epoka University.

263. Epoka's provides students an e-mail address in Epoka's registered domain. Epoka also keeps records of the addresses, both physical and personal e-mail addresses, and their phone number. Contacts data are requested once students enroll at Epoka. Besides the Registrar's Office, this information is also provided to students' academic advisors³³⁹.

5.1.3 Retention policies (Standard I, III.3)

264. Prior to the beginning of the respective academic year for freshman students, faculties at Epoka University organize annual "Informing Sessions" to inform and advise students. Students participating in these sessions are welcomed by the responsible administrative units of Epoka. Informing sessions are also organized at departmental level. A *Student Guide* is provided, delivered to each student and published on the institution home page³⁴⁰. Students are also provided with detailed information about the rules they have to abide with during their studies³⁴¹. Students and faculty organize periodically *Open Forums* providing information regarding

³³⁷ See Directive of the Minister of Education and Science No. 45, dated 19.12.2011 "On the generation and provision of matriculation numbers", as amended, in Annex 8: chapter 2.3.2 and concerning legal acts on personal data protection see Annex 8: Chapter 2.8.2.1.

³³⁸ See sample of Study Contract at Annex 6: Chapter 5.1.2.

³³⁹ See an anonymized of student's contract requesting contacts details in Annex 6: Chapter 5.1.2. Student File Sample.

³⁴⁰ See http://epoka.edu.al/mat/Student_Guide_2016-2017.pdf

³⁴¹ See Regulation "On Student Discipline" in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

Student Exchange programs, Study Abroad Opportunities and the organization of higher education system according to the Bologna Standards.

265. As stated in paragraph 264 informing sessions are organized throughout the year and especially during the first week for freshmen. For each class there is an academic advisor that also helps students in the progress of their student life.

266. Study programs enable the progressive adaptation of students in the discipline and the institution. The first year in all study programs consist of introductory classes in the discipline³⁴². Student advisors also assist students to organize their educational plan according to their skills and interests, especially when choosing compulsory and non-compulsory electives.

267. At Epoka students are consistently informed about their academic achievements and events per e-mail, through brochures (*Student Guide*), self-service terminals and large display screens present in the most frequented part of the buildings. As stated in paragraph 264, students are informed through the *Student Guide*, and the Registrar's Office at Epoka University sends regularly information to students, including rectorate decisions, response to student's requests on different subjects and other relevant announcements. At the same time, students are informed about the

268. Students at Epoka are guided and advised throughout their academic career. In the admission phase academic advisors provide students career counselling and guide them to the best programs according to their personal skills. However, if students wish to experiment or change their study programs they may easily switch to another program. Directive EU-DIR-0017-EN/2013 "On Student Transfer" explains and regulates the process of credit transfer³⁴³.

269. Students are guided and advised throughout the year and across all program cycles by contacting directly their personal advisors, the Registrar's Office and referring to the Student Guide.

³⁴² See for instance the curriculum of the Bachelor in Political Science and International Relations (<http://eis.epoka.edu.al/?1031.1574>). The first year has 55 credits in introductory courses out of 65 ETCS.

³⁴³ See Article 4, 4.1 Directive "On Student Transfer". Available in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

5.2 Support, Resources and Representation

5.2.1 For students with special needs (Standard I, III.4)

270. Currently Epoka University does not pursue any specific formal policy on support of students with disabilities. The number of students with disabilities at the national level is very small. This category of students prefer to enroll in public universities because of their affirmative actions such as the provision of student quotas³⁴⁴. However, Epoka University does provide special services for students and employees with special needs. Epoka's buildings are constructed in full compliance with the legal requirements set out for this particular group³⁴⁵. Students may also contact their advisors to require special accommodation.

271. With regard to Roma and Balkan Egyptians, Epoka University has regularly offered scholarship opportunities for students belonging to these communities based on the requests channeled through the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth³⁴⁶. However, the Higher Board of Epoka University has decided to expand as of 2017-2018 its scholarship program to also include students from these communities as a regular policy of the University³⁴⁷.

272. Students with other merits besides academic achievement who benefit from scholarships or support programs at Epoka University belong to these categories: sportsmen with very high results in the respective sports category, orphan children of officers of the State Police killed in the line of duty, orphan students coming from low-income families and high-achieving students graduated from the high schools in the Municipality of Vora which is the local government unit where the campus of Epoka University is located³⁴⁸.

³⁴⁴ In 2014-2015 the total number of students at public universities was 42 undergraduates and 12 graduate students. See Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (2016) Action Plan of the National Strategy for People with Disabilities 2016-2020. (p. 22). Retrieved from: www.sociale.gov.al/files/userfiles/Plani_i_PAK_-_varianti_final_1_prill_2016.doc

³⁴⁵ It has an elevator and ramp in accordance with the Law No.199/1995 "Per lehtësime qe u krijohe ne ndertimet publike." [For facilities that are created for people with disabilities in public buildings.]

³⁴⁶ See the report mentioned above of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (2016). See Decision of the Administrative Board of University No. 03, dated 21.09.2012 in Annex 4: Chapter 2.1.6.

³⁴⁷ See Decision of the Higher Board No. 07, dated 11.01.2017 in Annex 4: Chapter 2.1.6.

³⁴⁸ See Decisions of the Higher Board No. 08, dated 11.01.2017; No. 09, dated 11.01.2017; No. 09, dated 23.03.2017; No. 10, dated 23.03.2017 in Annex 4: Chapter 2.1.6.

273. Programs at graduate level are scheduled according to the availability of students who are full-time employed. Otherwise, there are no part-time programs offered by Epoka both at undergraduate and graduate level.

5.2.2 Resources (Standard I, III.5)

274. Epoka has a student-based registry with data of their own at the Registrar's Office, the responsible unit for student's records. Epoka possesses all documents related with academic activity of the student, both in soft and hard copies. All exams/projects and other assessment reports are submitted to the respective departments, and by the end of each academic year are sent to Registrar's Office to be stored for one a year and later sent to Epoka's institutional archive³⁴⁹.

275. The necessary supporting literature for relevant study programs is provided in the University's library which is rich in resources of all the study fields³⁵⁰. Lecturers make sure that the required literature is also found at the library or is made available to students in a digital format.

276. The library at Epoka has a collection of about 10 000 printed books (digitally catalogued) and 16 online research resources; for instance Cambridge Journals Online, JSTOR, IOPscience, New England Journal of Medicine, OECD-iLibrary, Taylor & Francis Library, Scopus, ScienceDirect, etc.³⁵¹

277. Epoka's library has increased its inventory every year, because every semester professors may fill out a request form for the books they need for their teaching course, which are then made available by the library (see Table 5 below).

Table 5: Number of items and textbooks purchased for the library during 2014-2016.

Year	Number of books
September 2016	101
September 2015	80
January 2015	17
November 2015	27
November 2014	19
September 2014	22

³⁴⁹ See also paragraph 128, Standard III, V.2; and paragraph 262, Standard I, III.2.

³⁵⁰ See <http://library.epoka.edu.al/cat-research-resources-482.html>

³⁵¹ See also paragraph 188.

278. Epoka allocates an appropriate budget for book purchases which is set according to the estimated needs of each department³⁵².

279. The library at Epoka University offers multidisciplinary literature to its students³⁵³. Students may find books for each course offered at Epoka from all relevant disciplines. In the library of the institution, students may also find fiction and non-fiction literature in several languages.

280. Library working time of Epoka is posted on the website and the library, and is on weekdays from 8:30 to 17:30 and Saturdays from 09:00 to 13:00 hours.

281. Epoka provides students "Student ID Card". With enrollment each student is automatically registered into library's database. Students use their student ID cards to access the literature provided by the institution³⁵⁴. The personal login information provided by the librarian may be used in the online library catalogue to access literature and borrow from the library³⁵⁵.

282. Epoka's library offers 16 online research resources, such as Cambridge Journals Online, JSTOR, IOPscience, New England Journal of Medicine, OECD-iLibrary, Taylor & Francis Library, Scopus, ScienceDirect, etc.³⁵⁶

5.2.3 Academic support (Standard I, III.6)

283. Epoka University provides tutorship for students assisting them to register the courses during pre-registration, registration and add and drop weeks, which are approved by their academic advisors at the beginning of each semester. Students are informed through different sources (website, brochures and meetings) about required and elective courses of the undergraduate and graduate level programs, the rules and regulations about examinations and also about other rules pertaining to their respective departments. Tutorship also provides information regarding Student Exchange programs, Study Abroad Opportunities and European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Further, students are notified about remedial courses offered by the

³⁵² See Annex 4: Chapter 2.1.3.

³⁵³ In the digital catalogue the books are categorized into topics and disciplines (e.g. political science, architecture, electronics etc.) See <http://lib.epoka.edu.al/>.

³⁵⁴ See a sample of ID-Card in Annex 6: Chapter 5.2.1.

³⁵⁵ See <http://lib.epoka.edu.al/cgi-bin/koha/opac-main.pl>

³⁵⁶ See also paragraph 188.

Dean of Students Office in cooperation with their respective departments. In addition to career counseling, advisors provide counselling on accommodation, financial opportunities and deal with health issues.

284. Epoka library is a self-service system and students are taught to familiarize with the literature research in courses on academic writing and empirical research methods. Students are assisted from the librarian on how to find relevant materials for their courses or leisure.

285. The Dean of Students Office at Epoka University organizes Mentorship Programs for students facing difficulties with the course requirements and provides students or research assistants as tutors³⁵⁷. Students may also organize learning activities through their associations³⁵⁸.

5.3 Student Affairs

5.3.1 Student representation (Standard I, III.7)

286. Students are represented in the governing bodies of Epoka University through their Student Council³⁵⁹. Currently the Dean and Vice-Dean of Students are also members of the Academic Senate and University Administrative Board. Aiming at increasing the direct representation of students in the decision-making bodies of the University, based on the new Statute, as of 2017-2018, the President and Vice-President of the Student Council will be members of the Academic Senate whereas the Vice-President of the Student Council will be a member of the Ethics Council³⁶⁰. The Student Council as a self-governing body promotes, coordinates and represents students' ideas and efforts in all areas of governance (research, teaching and services).

287. The Student Council of Epoka University operates in compliance with the provisions of the Student Council Statute³⁶¹. It expresses opinions and proposals for

³⁵⁷ See Annex 6: Chapter 5.2.2.

³⁵⁸ See in Annex 3: Chapter 2, EU-DIR-005-EN/2009 Directive on Student Clubs.

³⁵⁹ See in Annex 3: Chapter 2, Article 118, in the new Statute, 2016. See in Annex 3: Chapter 2, Article 21, in current Statute, and Article 10 of the Directive "On academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement" on the constitution of the AEQI Board which shall include a student from the Student Council. See also Annex 3: Chapter 2.

³⁶⁰ See new Statute, Article 15.4 and 29, Annex 3: Chapter 2.

³⁶¹ See Student Council Statute in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

all problems of general interest of the University as educational plans and research programs, study regulations and service structures.

288. Epoka also supports students by funding and providing the necessary infrastructure for their activities. In order to arrange for Epoka's support students have to submit a formal request to the Dean of Students Office.

5.3.2 Quality of student life (Standard I, III.8)

289. Epoka's policies encourage students to lead a socially active life³⁶².

290. There are currently 18 active student clubs representing the interests of students in different areas³⁶³.

291. Students are also encouraged to participate in sport activities. Epoka also has its own football team that last year organized the Epoka League Tournament³⁶⁴.

292. Epoka provides direct and indirect medical care services through a general practitioner for both students and staff members who is employed full-time and is present at the premises of the University throughout the day.

5.3.3 Students' career (Standard I, III.9)

293. Epoka University has a tracing program to trace student employment which is managed by the Career Planning and Alumni Office³⁶⁵. The data is published in Epoka's Annual Reports³⁶⁶. In comparison to national statistics there is a very high employment rate among Epoka graduates. In 2015-16 it was an average of 75%³⁶⁷. At the national level the unemployment rate in 2015 was about 19% among tertiary education graduates, while youth unemployment rate was 33.2% in 2015³⁶⁸.

294. The Career Planning and Alumni Office, in collaboration with companies, every year organizes career seminars and training programs for last-year students. Besides

³⁶² See EU-DIR-005-EN/2009 Directive "On Student Clubs" in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

³⁶³ For a full list of Student Clubs and their activities see: <http://clubs.epoka.edu.al/>

³⁶⁴ <http://epoka.edu.al/event-epoka-league-tournament-the-international-football-championship-for-high-schools-112-2347.html> (February 10, 2015).

³⁶⁵ See also paragraph 56, Standard III, III.1.

³⁶⁶ See Annual Report 2015-2016 (p. 31). Annex 6: Chapter 1.3.

³⁶⁷ Every year Career Planning and Alumni Office, update alumni list with the information of our graduates. They contact all graduates via email, social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, or by visiting them personally in their workplace. There is also a database with contacts and their work addresses.

³⁶⁸ INSTAT (2016) Labour Market, 2015. p.9. Retrieved from: http://instat.gov.al/media/328212/tregun_i_punes_2015_.pdf

encouraging students to participate in job fairs, this Office also organizes an annual Career Fair in the premises of the university, where more than 50 companies come to the campus to conduct job interviews. Information about vacancies and internships are also forwarded to all students.

295. As stated previously³⁶⁹ Epoka's staff is committed to help students to find gainful employment. Departments continue to update the curriculum³⁷⁰ in order to enhance employability and meet the labor market requirements. They assist students with internship programs and teach soft-skills and other relevant skills for a successful career. Epoka has strengthened its ties and the collaboration with the industry³⁷¹. Throughout the years the University has sought to attract professionals in its teaching staff.

296. Epoka's enhancing employability policies are formalized in a set of regulation and procedures such the directive on internship³⁷², the collaboration agreements with the industry³⁷³ and the mission and objectives of the study programs at bachelor and master level³⁷⁴.

5.4 Conclusion and Judgments

297. The Self-Evaluation Group concludes that Epoka fully meets the national accreditation standards and the guidelines set out in the ESG (e.g. 1.4) concerning this area of evaluation.

298. The Self-Evaluation Group has evidenced that Epoka's policies and procedures on program access, admission, progression, recognition and certification have been in full compliance with the national standards, and they have been implemented in a consistent and transparent manner.

299. Also in compliance with the national standards and those of the ESG (e.g. 1.6 on learning resources and student support) Epoka shows that it does consider the special needs of international students or students with disabilities. In this context, the Self-

³⁶⁹ See paragraph 56, 293, 294.

³⁷⁰ See paragraph 157.

³⁷¹ See paragraph 58, Standard III, III.1.

³⁷² EU-DIR-016-EN/2013 "Internships during undergraduate studies" in Annex 3: Chapter 2.

³⁷³ See Annex 9: Chapter 2.

³⁷⁴ See paragraph 180-182, Standard I, I.2.

Evaluation Group recommends that despite difficulties stemming from persisting cultural attitudes towards persons with disabilities, Epoka adopts a formal policy on students who belong to this category.

Furthermore, Epoka maintains databases and processes information on student progression and success that is then fed into the decision-making process for the improvement of study programs.

6. Summary (Overall) Conclusion and Judgment

300. Finally, the Self-Evaluation Group concludes that Epoka fully meets all national standards and legal requirements for the institutional accreditation concerning all five areas of evaluation: institutional organization and management, resource management, the curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment and research as well as student support. While maintaining financial viability, Epoka University has been successful in creating and retaining an institutional image and reputation that indicates delivery of high quality education. Since the beginning of its academic activities in 2007-2008 the University has constantly improved its internal quality assurance policies that are an integral part of its strategic management. The University has continuously worked towards achieving its mission goals based on its organizational principles of transparency, preservation of academic freedom and accountability. A state-of-the-art information management system (Epoka's Interactive System) that comprises all aspects of the University administration allows for an effective management and use of resources, while relevant information for the public is published through its highly-visited website.

Epoka's policies and practices of recruitment and staff development have enabled the University to attract competent lecturers. Students are supported by a highly committed academic and administrative staff. They have learning resources at their disposal that are in comparative quality as those of other Western universities. Enrollment at Epoka is increasing because its study programs are designed and approved based on the national and regional development of the labor market. As demonstrated in the report, students are actively involved in all internal processes of program design and delivery. Admission, progression and recognition processes are regulated and transparent, while programs undergo periodical review both from the accreditation body and the internal quality assurance unit (AEQI Board).

During the internal evaluation process Epoka University had the chance to review some of its policies, make improvements and adjust them to the latest legal requirements. Such was the case with the staff induction policy, the budgeting process model and the development of the departmental strategies which make the ground for the new strategic plan of 2018-2022. Additionally, both the administrative and academic staff, who were constantly involved in the internal review process, had the opportunity to critically reflect on the findings of the Self-Evaluation Group.

D. List of the HEI's Supporting Evidence

Annexes

Annex 1	Statistics
Annex 2	Decisions of the Council of Ministers and Ordinances
Annex 3	Regulatory Framework of Epoka
Annex 4	Decision making process at Epoka
Annex 5	List of Research Activities
Annex 6	Samples
Annex 7	Strategic Plans and Evaluation
Annex 8	National Legal Framework
Annex 9	List of Partners
Annex 10	Resources