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ARSIMIN E LARTË**

**Institutional Review of Higher Education
Institutions in Albania**

**Report of the Periodic Institutional Accreditation
of EPOKA University**

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About this review

The overall aim of Institutional Review is to assess the extent to which each HEI meets the Albanian State Quality Standards which came into force in 2011. Institutional Review is a peer review process with each review team composed of a mix of international reviewers and Albanian reviewers appointed by ASCAL.

The resulting reports will serve not only for institutional accreditation based on the extent to which the HEI meets the standards, but will also inform the HEIs, Albanian government, the public and students of how each HEI meets the standards. This report also helps the HEI to identify priorities for enhancement (the process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported).

The Albanian State Quality Standards have been grouped under five headings, the Evaluation Areas: The Organisation and its Management; Resourcing; the Curriculum; Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research; and Students and their Support. This report identifies features of good practice, recommendations, affirmations of actions in progress and weaknesses for each Evaluation Area, together with a judgement as to how well the HEI meets the standards. The judgements that the reviewers may assign are: standards are fully met; standards are substantially met; standards are partly met; or standards are not met.

Finally, the reviewers conclude by recommending a summary judgement to ASCAL's Accreditation Board. This overall judgement is one of four levels:

- **State Quality Standards are met.**
- **State Quality Standards are substantially met.**
- **State Quality Standards are partly met.**
- **State Quality Standards are not met.**

The context of this review

Epoka University was founded in 2007 and is a private higher education institution located close to Tirana International Airport, north of the capital city, Tirana. It was established and is owned by the "Turgut Ozal Education SH.A.". In 2012 the Ministry of Education and Sport permitted the change of legal status from "School of Higher Learning" (*Shkollë e Lartë*) to "University".

EPOKA University offers a total of 33 study programmes across three Faculties: the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, and the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. The 33 study programmes include 11 Bachelor programmes; 8 Master of Science programs; 6 Professional Master programmes; and 2 integrated Masters programmes; and 6 PhD programmes. Subjects taught include economics, business, banking and finance, business informatics, marketing, law, political science, civil engineering, computer engineering, and architecture. All programmes are delivered in English. The University has 66 university partnerships in many countries including the USA, UK, Italy, Germany, France, Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria. It is a member of the International Association of Universities (IAU) and an associate member of the European Universities Association (EUA). The University engages in a number of international projects including Erasmus and the Horizon 2020 project.

The University has four research centres; the Center for European Studies, the Center of Research and Design in Applied Sciences, the Continuous Education Center and the Yunus Center for Social Business and Sustainability which operate under the Rector's Office. EPOKA University employs 83 full time academic staff and currently has 2,527 students studying across all programmes, 83 percent of these students are undergraduates. Provision is delivered on a custom-built campus with modern buildings housing teaching rooms, laboratories, studios, a library and social and recreational areas. The campus also has a residential block which can accommodate just over 100 students along with canteen facilities and sports areas. All buildings are modern and well maintained.

The mission of the University is "to be an innovative and influential teaching and research institution, serving 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 quality of life of society based on national and regional needs. In this context, EPOKA University aims at developing well-prepared, productive and competent individuals with a research-oriented spirit who possess professional ethics and social sensitivity and who are also open towards national and international challenges".

Summary report

The self-evaluation report was developed by a team at the University which included senior staff, academic and support staff and a student representative. During the compilation of the report the self-evaluation team had access to documentation from both academic and administrative departments and based their work on the principles of objectivity, transparency, impartiality and respect for academic autonomy. Drafts were circulated to a wider audience for comment before being finalised and approved by the Academic Senate.

The Self-Evaluation Document gives a historical background to the University, addresses the recommendations from the previous review in 2017 and then addresses each of the Evaluation Areas in turn. The judgement of the self-assessment team of each of the evaluation areas; the organisation and its management, resourcing, the curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment and research and students and their support are that they are all fully met.

The virtual visit took place over two days on 26 and 27 May 2021. The review team was made up of one senior higher education reviewer from the UK and one experienced reviewer from an Albanian University. The review team was supported by the Review Manager provided by the Albanian Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (ASCAL). The review team was provided with a self-evaluation report and 266 pieces of supporting evidence eight weeks in advance of the review visit, the team did not request any further documentary evidence. Through reading of the documentation provided, the team was able to familiarise itself with the structure, policies, management procedures and nature of teaching and research activity undertaken by the University. Evidence considered by the review team included the Statute of the University, Academic Regulations, annual reports, Admissions Policy, list of external agreements and memoranda, list of research projects, examples of programme information and evidence of deliberative meetings.

A series of meetings took place during the visit, which allowed the team to gain a clearer understanding of responsibilities, procedures and the views of staff and students. The team was able to meet with the Rector, senior managers, first, second and third cycle students, academic and administrative and support staff, as well as external partners, alumni and employers. The team also had specific meetings with the Deans and Heads of Department, the Internal Quality Assurance Unit and the Self-Assessment Team. Notes were taken at all meetings as a source of reference and evidence for the review team only. The review team was also given a tour of the campus, and viewed the library, teaching areas, laboratories, and offices. Having reviewed all evidence available, the team reached the conclusions set out below.

For evaluation area 1: The Organisation and its Management, the review team identified two features of good practice and no weaknesses, recommendations or affirmations. The features of good practice related to the comprehensive strategic planning and review process and the very effective favouring policy for mobility of academic personnel and students at an international level. The two previous affirmations relating to the heads of

the research centres and the revised Ethics Board membership have also been embedded. The review team therefore conclude that this area is fully met.

For evaluation area 2; Resourcing, the review team identified two feature of good practice relating to the development of the EPOKA Interactive System (EIS) for use in teaching and learning, research and administration and management as well as the . development of infrastructure and appropriate resources for teaching and learning to support the degree programmes. The team did not identify and weaknesses, recommendations or affirmations. The previously identified good practice relating to the programme of social activities across the University is still relevant but has been curtailed due to the covid-19 pandemic. The review team therefore conclude that this area is fully met.

For evaluation area 3; The Curriculum, the review team identified four areas of good practice and no weaknesses, recommendations or affirmations. The good practice related to the provision of double degrees with University of Applied Sciences, in Mainz, Germany, the individual support provided by student advisers at course level in monitoring and supporting student progression and achievement, the delivery of programmes through the medium of English promoting student mobility in Albania and internationally and the system of internships organised by the University that makes available a wide range of work experience opportunities, which supports the development of student employability. The previous accreditation recommendation relating to making clear the basis on which teaching remission is calculated and awarded to promote clarity across the University has addressed and the review team therefore conclude that this area is fully met.

For evaluation area 4; Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research, the review team did not identify any good practice, weaknesses, recommendations or affirmations. Epoka University meets all the criteria for evaluation area 4 and does, for example, deliver the approved study programmes with procedures in place for continuous improvement including a policy to improve teaching quality. Epoka University has clear research priorities and encourages research, particularly internationally. The review team therefore conclude that this area is fully met.

For evaluation area 5; Students and their Support, the review team identified two features of good practice but did not identify any weaknesses, recommendations or affirmations. The features of good practice related to the extensive provision of scholarships for disadvantaged students and the organisation of football and volleyball teams as well as 22 active student clubs which organize activities like forums, workshops, and training programmes, providing certificates for participants and organizers or conferring different awards in cultural and educational competitions. The previous good practices relating to the information, advice and guidance provided to students and the organisation of the Jobs Fair, despite covid-19 restrictions continues. Also, the affirmations relating to the admissions policy and procedures to include the admission of students with disabilities and the representation of students on decision-taking committees have become embedded. The review team therefore conclude that this area is fully met.

Summary of findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- the comprehensive strategic planning and review process taking into account national and international priorities **[Para. 1.9, Chapter III Standard I.5]**.
- the University has a very effective favouring policy for mobility of academic personnel and students at an international level **[Para. 1.18, Chapter III Standard III.4]**.
- the EPOKA Interactive System (EIS), developed in-house by the Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office for use in in teaching and learning, research and administration and management **[Para. 2.9, Chapter III Standard VII.2]**.
- the development of infrastructure and appropriate resources for teaching and learning to support the degree programs **[Para. 2.11, Chapter III Standard VII.4]**.
- double degrees with University of Applied Sciences, in Mainz, Germany. **[Para. 3.8, Chapter I Standard I.4]**.
- the individual support provided by student advisers at course level in monitoring and supporting student progression and achievement **[Para. 3.12, Chapter I Standard I.8]**.
- the delivery of programmes through the medium of English promotes student mobility in Albania and internationally **[Para. 3.14, Chapter I Standard I.10]**.
- the system of internships organised by the University that makes available a wide range of work experience opportunities, which supports the development of student employability **[Para. 3.14, Chapter I Standard I.12]**.
- the extensive provision of scholarships for disadvantaged students **[Para. 5.4, Chapter I Standard III.4]**.
- there are football and volleyball teams as well as 22 active student clubs which organize activities like forums, workshops, training programmes, providing certificates for participants and organisers, or conferring different awards in cultural and educational competitions. **[Para. 5.8, Chapter I Standard III.8]**.

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not identify any affirmations.

Summary of judgements for each Evaluation Area

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

Summary Judgement

The reviewers recommend to the Accreditation Board that at Epoka University the State Quality Standards are **fully met**.

Detailed Report

Evaluation Area 1: The Organisation and its Management

- 1.1 Epoka University adopted a new statute in 2016 **(13)** to comply with the current law on higher education in Albania, and it was approved **(14)** by the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2017. The Statute was approved by both the Academic Senate and the Board of Administration **(16)**. The University's organisational scheme **(42)** enables the delivery in accordance with the statute and the university is also organised and managed according to its internal regulations, directives, guidelines, codes and policies **(M6, M9, M10, M11, M12, 15)**. Therefore, the review team conclude that the University and its structures work in accordance with the statute. *[Chapter III Standard I.1].*
- 1.2 Epoka University has a mission "to be an innovative and influential education and research institution, serving the fundamental human values through the production, development and dissemination of knowledge at an international level, as well as contributing to the improvement of the society's quality of life based on the national and regional needs". The statute **(13)** states that the University "aims to prepare well-qualified individuals, productive and capable, research-oriented, with professional ethics and sensitive toward the society, opened to the national and international challenges". The regulations, directives, guidelines, codes and policies **(15)** along with the organisational scheme **(42)** enable this to be achieved. *[Chapter III Standard I.1].*
- 1.3 In accordance with the law, the University has been organised into three faculties since 2017 and it offers programmes in all three degree cycles, Bachelor, Master and Doctorate **(M3, M4, M5, 18)**. The faculties are Law and Social Sciences, Architecture and Engineering, and Economics and Administrative Sciences **(M10, 42)**. The University also has three research centres, namely the Center for European Studies, the Center for Research and Design in Applied Sciences and the Yunus Center for Social Business and Sustainability (<http://epoka.edu.al/home-about-epoka-about-epoka-1-1039.html>). *[Chapter III Standard I.1].*
- 1.4 The University is organised according to the statute **(13, 42)** and has hierarchies of decision-making structures for administrative, financial, academic and student affairs. **(M10, M12)**. The main decision-making bodies are the Academic Senate and the Board of Administration, and the managers include the Rector, Vice Rector, Administrator and the Deans of the three faculties **(M2, M10, M12)**. The Academic Senate meets up to 10 times in the academic year and is responsible for teaching, learning and scientific research and makes decisions accordingly **(19)**. The Ethics Board **(42)** ensures compliance with the University Code of Ethics (20) and comprises five members including the Vice-Dean of Students and Vice-President of the Student Council and elected members of academic staff from each faculty **(SED)**. The Rectorate is the executive body of the University, which meets at least every two weeks, whose main functions include drafting the strategic development plan **(28)**, proposals for finance and resources for approval by the Administrative Board and the

monitoring and publication of evaluation of University activity **(M12, 24, SED)**. *[Chapter III Standard I.2].*

- 1.5 Before the start of each academic year, the Rectors Office requests that each department provide their budgeted proposals for human and physical resources for the coming year **(M10, 21)**. After evaluation by the Rectorate, this is then forwarded to the Administrative Board for approval **(22)**. The Rectorate also decides on the granting of financial support to academic staff members for attending international conferences and events as well as the granting of financial support to academic staff members who publish in international peer reviewed journals **(M6, M10, 23)**. The Administrative Board guarantees fulfilment of the University's mission and the financial stability of the University **(M12, 13, 25)**. The Board comprises five members who are appointed by the Supervisory Board of the Founding Company and is chaired by the University Administrator **(SED, M12)**. *[Chapter III Standard I.2].*
- 1.6 The Rector holds the title 'Professor', is appointed for 4 years and chairs the Academic Senate and ensures their decisions are implemented **(M12, SED)**. Each faculty is managed by a Dean, who are also members of the Academic Senate **(M12, SED)**. The Heads of Department are appointed by the Faculty Deans **(M10)**. The University Administrator is appointed by the Board of Administration and is the highest authority responsible for the administrative and financial management of the University as defined in the Statute **(13)**. *[Chapter III Standard I.2].*
- 1.7 As defined in the Statute **(13)**, all University authorities and academic and administrative units have defined roles and responsibilities according to their area of authority and expertise. Meetings take place periodically and agendas **(20)** and associated papers are circulated before meetings and decisions take place within the formal meeting structure according to the regulations **(15)** and this was confirmed in meetings with University staff **(M6, M9, M10, M12)**. *[Chapter III Standard I.3].*
- 1.8 The main collegiate bodies at the University are the Academic Senate, the Rectorate, the Administrative Board, the Ethics Board, and the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance (PCQA). These ensure the legal compliance and the implementation of the rules and regulations of the University and enable the University to respect the limits of its autonomy **(SED, 13, M10, M12)**. The University also has external experts and representatives as part of its decision-making processes, for example two members of the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance are external **(SED, 148)**. The University is also organised in such a way that it has been able to benefit from funding from EU programmes, for example Horizon 2020 and Erasmus + **(M6, 155)**. *[Chapter III Standard I.4].*
- 1.9 The first University Development Strategy, drafted in accordance with its mission and purpose, was created in 2012 for the period 2013-17 and was successful as can be seen in the very comprehensive final evaluation report **(27)**. The University aspires to support the recent Albanian national development strategies and increase demand for higher education. Epoka envisages a greater role in local, national and regional development and greater engagement with the local and global community. In 2017 the University developed a Framework Strategy 2018-2022 **(M2, 28)** which is a very clear, detailed and comprehensive document covering challenges, vision, objectives, management, human and physical resources, quality assurance, community and social involvement and international networking and mobility. This strategy was

discussed in detail within the University (**M6, M9, M10, M12**) and approved by the Rectorate, Academic Senate and Board of Administration. Each Academic and administrative unit also have their own strategic plans based on the University strategy which detail their own objectives and how they will support the University strategy (**M10, 29, 30**). Progress against strategic plans are also scheduled to be reviewed regularly and updated as required (**M10, SED**). **The review team conclude that the comprehensive strategic planning and review process taking into account national and international priorities is a strength of the University and is an example of good practice. [Chapter III Standard I.5].**

- 1.10 According to the law, Epoka University submits an annual report to the Ministry of Education and Sport. This report covers the main activities of the University during that year including achievements and supporting data. It also covers the mission, achievement of objectives, finance, resources, an evaluation and recommendations (**38**). The Annual Report is approved through the University's internal committee structure (**M12**) and disseminated in printed form and through the University's website (<http://www.epoka.edu.al/home.html>). **[Chapter III Standard I.6].**
- 1.11 The University has established appropriate structures to accomplish its mission and purpose. The organisation and management structures are contained in the Statute (**13**) and the University is operating in accordance with these and in compliance with the relevant law in Albania (**14**). Also, in accordance with the Statute (**13**) the University ensures full autonomy to the Academic Senate (**M12**) and academic freedom to its academic staff (**M6**). Academic staff have freedom in the teaching and learning process and also in research consistent with the University strategy (**M6, 28**). All units at the University are autonomous within their areas of responsibility, for example the Centre for European Studies (**31**) and the Center for Research and Design in Applied Sciences (**32**). **[Chapter III Standard II.1].**
- 1.12 The University has three faculties: the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences and the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. The Center for European Studies is a basic unit under the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences and the Center of Research and Design in Applied Sciences, the Yunus Center for Social Business and Sustainability and the Center for Continuous Education are responsible to the Rector's Office as can be seen in the organisational scheme (**42**) and confirmed in staff meetings (**M6, M10, M12**). These faculties offer first, second and third cycle programmes in professional studies, social sciences and humanities (**18, 33**). In compliance with the Statute and the Regulations, each faculty has three departments, each with at least seven full-time staff (**M10, 115**). **[Chapter III Standard II.1].**
- 1.13 Epoka University has a comprehensive website (<http://www.epoka.edu.al/>) which gives details, for example, on the structure of the University, the mission and objectives, quality assurance, admissions information, academic staff, research, timetables, student support and the programmes offered. **[Chapter III Standard II.1].**
- 1.14 The University structure described above and shown in the organisational chart (**42**) enable decision making to take place in an inclusive manner by the appropriate people of committees/boards. Full consultation occurs before a final decision is made at the appropriate place as written in the Statute (**M6, M9, 13**). Evidence of this

can also be seen in a proposal by the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance **(34)** and a decision of the rectorate meeting **(35)**. Also, in accordance with the Statute **(13)**, staff members, for example in the departments, are involved in decision-making in the department and full-time academic staff from each faculty are members of the General Assemble of Academic Staff **(M6, M10)**. It is worthy of note that the University has implemented an effective Covid-19 strategic plan (184) in consultation with staff and with their full support **(M6, M10, M12)**. *[Chapter III Standard II.3].*

- 1.15 Epoka University conducts and examines market research to inform the development of programmes **(M10)**. Some important programmes highlighted in the Framework Strategy **(28)**, such as architecture, civil engineering, information technology and business are important areas for the development of the Albanian economy **(M2, M12)**. The Albanian government emphasises vocational subjects and these are the areas offering the most employment opportunities **(SED)**. Departments conduct a market study to justify new programme developments, for example in Software Engineering **(37)** and these proposals are taken via the faculty for approval at the Academic Senate **(M10, M11, M12)**. *[Chapter III Standard III.1].*
- 1.16 The Career Planning and Alumni Office tracks all graduate employment using phone, email, mail and social media **(M9)**. This data is published in the University Annual Reports **(38)** and shows, for example, in 2018-19 the graduate employment rate was 87.4% with 42.9% working in the private sector, 18.9% working in State Administration and 16.4% progressing to a Masters programme. Epoka University complies with legal framework of the Republic of Albania concerning competition in the education market. This commitment has also been incorporated into the Statute of the University **(13)**. *[Chapter III Standard III.1].*
- 1.17 Epoka University is committed to cooperation and partnerships as written into the Framework Strategy Plan 2018-2022 **(28)** and also internationalisation as confirmed in the Strategic Plan for Internationalisation 2018-2022 **(30)**. This plan has objectives in relation to university branding, mobility, research collaboration and curriculum and campus development. The University has been active in promoting staff and student exchanges through Erasmus +, although the Covid-19 pandemic has curtailed mobility for the last year. The University has an impressive list of cooperation agreements with both Higher Education Institutions and non-educational institutions which includes 95 providers of higher education, most of which are outside Albania **(135)**. The University encourages the mobility of both staff and students nationally and internationally and supports them logistically and financially **(M6, M10)**. Also, the University welcomes international staff and students to Tirana and has appropriate policies and procedures in place **(39, 40, 41)**. Of particular note is the agreement with Mainz University, in Germany, to offer a double degree programme in International Business where Epoka students spend two semesters at Mainz and two professors also participate in an exchange **(M7)**. *[Chapter III Standard III.2 Standard III.3].*
- 1.18 The International Relations Office at the University organizes orientation sessions for all incoming students and staff members participating in mobility programs and the Human Resources Office assists all foreign staff members with procedures related to, for example the obtaining of work permits, residence permits and health

certificates. This facilitates a smoother integration of new staff and students into the University community as shown in the example orientation programme (172). **The review team conclude that the University has a very effective favouring policy for mobility of academic personnel and students at an international level and consider it to be good practice. [Chapter III Standard III.4)**

Findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- the comprehensive strategic planning and review process taking into account national and international priorities **[Para. 1.9, Chapter III Standard I.5].**
- the University has a very effective favouring policy for mobility of academic personnel and students at an international level **[Para. 1.18, Chapter III Standard III.4].**

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not identify and affirmations.

Judgement

The standards for the Organisation and its Management are **fully met**.

Evaluation Area 2: Resourcing

- 2.1 Epoka University makes its organisation chart **(42)** public on the University website, in the Statute **(13)** and in the Annual Reports of the University **(38)**. The University also has a large pool of part time staff who are employed academically or professionally in their subject area which can be called on as required **(182)**. The recruitment process for full and part time staff is in accordance with the Regulation, “On Staff Recruitment” **(43)**. The criteria for each vacancy are published on the University website (<http://www.epoka.edu.al/>) along with the job description **(M6, M10, 42)**. Positions are also advertised in national and international publications **(45)**. Information on the criteria and procedures for personnel recruitment are written clearly in the relevant directives of the University **(46, 47)** and these are understood and acted on by staff **(M6, M10)**. Recruitment procedures, including employment and assessment criteria are set out in the internal regulations **(43)** and are in compliance with the Statute **(13)**. Recruitment procedures are transparent, understood by staff **(M6, M9)**, and successful candidates, whether academic **(M6)** or support staff **(M9)**, are given a contract of employment **(48)**. In accordance with their internationalisation strategy, Epoka University are keen to employ qualified staff from international universities and in fact 60% of academic staff at the University have been trained internationally **(182)**. The language of teaching at Epoka is English and all academic **(M6)** and support staff **(M9)** and students **(M3, M4, M5)** met by the team could speak English very well so this also attracts international applications for positions at the University. The review team conclude that Epoka University pursues an open policy of human resources employment and recruitment. *[Chapter III Standard IV.1].*
- 2.2 New staff at Epoka University participate in orientation events **(172)** organised by the Human Resources and the Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office. They are also given a Staff Guide **(49)**, which is a comprehensive guide to working at Epoka, as well as being able to access a great deal of information on the University website (<http://www.epoka.edu.al/>). Epoka is a welcoming environment for new staff **(Tour)** and they are involved in many University activities, for example in the organisation of information days for prospective students. An example of this is the annual Education Fair, where Epoka has a stand and provides information **(50)** for high school students about the study programmes and scholarship opportunities. To help new staff to settle into the University, they are also invited to social events including welcome lunches and informal gatherings to help them get to know managers and colleagues and to promote broader integration. From discussion with staff, it is clear that Epoka pursues a favourable policy for integration of its staff in its social life **(M6, M9, M10)**. *[Chapter III Standard IV.2].*
- 2.3 Epoka provides training and development for academic and administrative staff in accordance with the Framework Strategy and Action Plan **(28)**. Each department has a training plan which is specific to staff needs and the development strategy of the faculty **(52)**. The plan includes, for example, research training, course design, digital education, internationalisation, project design and Microsoft Teams **(52)**. The University participates in several Erasmus + Programs **(53)** and staff have also participated in training relevant to teaching and learning and sharing good practice **(54)**. Staff are also encouraged to participate in a range of social and professional

activities, for example, staff retreats, open forums and book promotions **(SED)**. Staff are financially and logistically supported to attend conferences and further their academic qualifications through the Research and Projects Office and the International Relations Office **(M6, 55, 56)**. Staff workload is regulated to take into account teaching and research according to the appropriate directives **(M6, 41, 57)**. The review team conclude that Epoka pursues a periodic assessment of staff skills and puts training in place as needed for both the individual and the University. **[Chapter III Standard IV.3].**

- 2.4 Epoka University provides a range of social activities for both staff and students to promote social dialogue **(M4, M6)**. Staff and students at Epoka also have access to a doctor on site **(Tour)** should they have any health problems, and the University pursues a policy of life and health insurance for its staff. The University also implements clear rules to determine responsibilities according to the respective functions of its staff according to the Regulation “On the Discipline of the Managing, Academic and Administrative Staff” **(62)**. The review team therefore conclude that the University provides effective management of human resources. **[Chapter III Standard IV.4, Standard II.2].**
- 2.5 Prior to the start of the academic year, the Rectors office requests that the departments, faculties, and support and administrative areas submit their human and physical resource needs in accordance with the strategy and the department plans **(M10, M12)**. The Rectorate scrutinises this, makes relevant decisions and compiles a composite plan for discussion at the Academic Senate and approval by the Board of Administration **(M10, M12, 63)**. At the same time the Rectorate asks the units for their plans for events and activities for the following academic year for approval **(64)**. These activities are used by the Administrator to compile the University budget for the next academic year for approval at the Board of Administration **(M10, M12)**. The review team conclude that the University drafts its budget in accordance with defined procedures. **[Chapter III Standard VI.1].**
- 2.6 After the approval of the budget, the Finance Office under the supervision of the Administrator, distributes and implements the budget through the individual units **(M10)**. The management of financial resources are monitored in compliance with the relevant laws in Albania **(65)** and Albanian Accounting Standards **(66)**. Copies of the budget and its implementation are available in the Office of the Administrator and in the Finance Office **(M9, 182)** and summarised in the Annual Report **(38)**. Epoka University is part of Turgut Ozal Education sh.a. and they conduct an annual external audit, using Deloitte, and the audit reports are available in the University Finance Office **(SED)**. The review team therefore conclude the University provides the necessary means to implement the financial policy. **[Chapter III Standard VI.2].**
- 2.7 As stated above Turgut Ozal Education sh.a. conducts an annual external audit of the financial situation by an international auditing company, Deloitte, and the detailed report can be found at the main offices of Turgut Ozal Education sh.a. as well as at the University. Also, an internal audit of the University is conducted by Turgut Ozal Education **(SED)**. The annual report of the external audit is also published on the website of the National Business Center of Albania (<https://gkb.gov.al/home/>). Financial reports are made public in the Annual Report **(38)** and are available for discussion by staff and students. The audit reports indicate that the University is improving in efficiency and income generated from students' fees, together with a

statement on expenses and distribution of earnings from other resources are also presented in Annual Reports (38). The University therefore pursues a policy of budgetary and financial control. **[Chapter III Standard VI.3].**

- 2.8 The University has developed an integrated information management system called the Epoka Interactive System (EIS) which was developed in-house by the Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office **(SED)**. This system contains information on student affairs and services, teaching and learning, human resources, financial management and infrastructure **(M9, SED)**. Guidelines for its use by staff **(67)** and students **(68)** have been published and both groups find it very effective at giving them the information they need **(M3, M4, M6)**. Staff and students have to log on with a password and get bespoke information relevant to their needs, for example students can access their grades **(M3, M4)** and teaching staff can access courses and student lists **(M6)**. Information is also accessible for management purposes in decision making and for publication on the website (<http://www.epoka.edu.al/>) and in Annual Reports **(38)**. The Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office coordinates EIS and makes information available to all those who need it **(69)**. Information, including statistical data on the number of students by programme, the academic offer, the University organisation and the Statute and Regulations are freely available in the Annual Report (38) and on the University's web site (<http://www.epoka.edu.al/>). **[Chapter III Standard VII.1].**
- 2.9 **The EPOKA Interactive System (EIS), developed in-house by the Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office is very innovative and the review team consider it to be good practice. The University uses information technology in teaching and learning, research and administration and management.** The Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office have a very clear and detailed strategic plan for 2018-2022 **(70)** which encompasses the developments that they envisage. The University has a total of 360 computers with 172 computers being located in its three computer laboratories. Laboratories and classrooms are equipped with internet access, 16 printers, 16 photocopy machines, 16 scanners and 30 video-projectors **(SED, 69, Tour)**. The resources provided by the University enable blended learning but of course in the current Covid-19 pandemic, all learning has taken place online according to the University policy on maintaining quality **(M12, 184)**. All staff offices are equipped with computers with internet access and Wi-Fi is available in all the buildings. All classrooms are equipped with computers and video projectors and/or smart boards. The computer laboratories are equipped with high-quality computers to meet the demands of different study programmes for superior computer resources, such as Computer Engineering, Architecture and Civil Engineering and have appropriate licences **(71, SED, Tour)**. **[Chapter III Standard VII.2].**
- 2.10 The University properties are administered by Turgut Ozal Education sh.a **(72)** and policies for the development and preservation lie with them. There are three buildings, two of which are used for teaching, research and extra-curricular activities and have a total area of 14,352m² **(SED, Tour)**. The University has a Master Plan for the development of its estate which is part of the University Framework Strategy 2018-2022 **(32)**. The University was projected to accommodate 3,500 students which would need further investment and development of the infrastructure as outlined in the Master Plan of Epoka University **(73)**. **[Chapter III Standard VII.3].**

- 2.11 The University has a policy of preserving and developing the heritage of its academic, cultural and scientific property and this is regulated through the Directive “On Purchases! (74). Which defines the powers, responsibilities, and procedures in connection with the supply of all types of goods and services, renting and construction of facilities which are managed or are property of the University. **The University has excellent facilities for teaching and learning (75, Tour) and the review team conclude that the development of infrastructure and appropriate resources for teaching and learning to support the degree programmes to be a feature of good practice.** The Epoka Interactive System’s proprietary information is deposited (76) and registered (77) at the Directorate of Patents and Trademarks of the Republic of Albania. The University maintains its academic, cultural and scientific property as demonstrated in the library directive (78) and the cultural values of the University are stored in laboratories, the library, and the public digital repository which preserves the academic and scientific property of the University (SED). *[Chapter III Standard VII.4].*
- 2.12 Epoka University has a good infrastructure to conduct its teaching, learning and other activities (75) which are in compliance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (79) and the Ministry of the Interior (80). Facilities are also compliant with standards related to providing adequate space for the staff, including parking places, offices, cafeteria and recreational areas (81, 82). The buildings used have a modern outlook and means of controlling temperature (Tour). They are equipped with all the facilities necessary in a modern teaching and learning environment (Tour) meeting Ministry of Education and Sport standards (83, 88) for the number of staff and students who use them, including elevators to access the upper floors (75, Tour). The University conducts regular satisfaction surveys of staff and students aimed at making improvements where necessary (84). *[Chapter III Standard VII.5, VII.6].*
- 2.13 The University is located in a green area outside of Tirana with a campus area of 67,000m² (SED). It offers high quality and appropriate facilities and infrastructure for academic and scientific activity for its staff, students and stakeholders including, for example, classrooms, computer laboratories, an electronic laboratory, a civil engineering laboratory, libraries and recreational and sport facilities (Tour, 85). The premises are cleaned and maintained continuously, and a team of technicians maintain all the facilities including the electrical system, heating and air conditioning system (Tour, SED). The classrooms have appropriate equipment for teaching and learning such as video projectors, sound systems, wireless connections, smart boards and appropriate software (69, Tour). The library has recently been enriched with a further 15,000 titles (86). *[Chapter III Standard V.1].*
- 2.14 The buildings used for teaching and learning have emergency stairs (88, Tour) and have a system of fire protection (89). The University also has an annual fire safety inspection (90), and fire safety training takes place twice per year by external specialists (91). The University also has emergency power generators and a central water storage facility (SED). *[Chapter III Standard V.1].*
- 2.15 The Rectors Office keeps all the hardcopy and digital documentation of all academic activity, including decisions and meeting minutes of the Rectorate, the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board. The Faculty Administrators keep all documentation related to the Faculty and the Registrar’s Office keeps all the

documentation related to students **(M9)**. At the end of each academic year the documents are transferred to the archive as appropriate **(Tour)**. The Epoka Interactive System has transformed the ability to easily keep digital records including registration of students in accordance with legal requirements **(69)**. Student personal information is kept in secure databases along with registers of attendance and grades. General information on study programmes, syllabus and credits are available on the relevant department website (<http://www.epoka.edu.al/>). **[Chapter III Standard V.2].**

Findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- the EPOKA Interactive System (EIS), developed in-house by the Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office for use in teaching and learning, research and administration and management (Para 2.9). **[Chapter III Standard VII.2].**
- the development of infrastructure and appropriate resources for teaching and learning to support the degree programmes (Para 2.11). **[Chapter III Standard VII.4].**

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not identify any affirmations.

Judgement

The standards for Resourcing are **fully met**.

Evaluation Area 3: The Curriculum

- 3.1 The University offers 11 Bachelor, 8 Master of Science, 6 Professional Master, 2 Integrated Second Cycle and 6 PhD study programmes **(18)** that are in line with the strategy, mission and market requirement. Details about admission criteria, the curriculum and syllabi are available on the website (<http://www.epoka.edu.al/>). The University provides public information about study programmes through the website, institutional social media accounts and promotional brochures and leaflets **(50; 93)**. The students, whom the review team met, confirmed that they have access to all the necessary information about the programmes that they need **(M3, M4)**. **[Chapter I, Standard I.1].**
- 3.2 The University maintains constant contact with secondary education institutions and organize "orientation week", visits and work fairs to give to the high school students information about study programmes, curricula, academic staff and infrastructure, **(M3; 95, 96, 97, 98, 99)**. Most of the courses are taught in English, therefore the competences in English are specified clearly **(94, 102)**. The profile of the University is engineering, computer engineering, business, social sciences and humanities. The Faculty of Law and Social Sciences offers study programmes in "Law" and "Political Sciences and International Relations" **(101).** **[Chapter I, Standard I.1].**
- 3.3 The university has defined quotas, admission criteria and procedures for Albanian students, Albanians from the region, transfer and foreign students **(M9, 101)**, in accordance with the legal framework, Institution regulations **(102, 103, 104, 105)** and Institution framework strategy **(28)**. Study programmes offered by the University are organized so as to harmonize all their components. All study programmes have obtained national accreditation and one study programme has also obtained accreditation by a foreign accreditation agency, which is a full member of ENQA **(106)**. **[Chapter I, Standard I.1].**
- 3.4 Within the Framework Strategy **(28)** the University offers short-term training courses through the Continuous Education Centre (CEC) to the students, staff and third parties as part of lifelong learning, and provides them with a certificate upon completion of the training course **(109)**. Study programmes of the second and third cycle are organized and adapted to meet the needs of different categories of the students, for example Master programmes are held from Monday to Friday from 6.00pm - 8.45pm **(SER, p40)**. **[Chapter I, Standard I.2].**
- 3.5 The University has its own policy "On continuous improvement of study programmes" **(106)** which states that *Epoka University systematically evaluates and improves the quality of study programmes, processes and services to achieve a high level of efficiency, effectiveness as well as student and stakeholder satisfaction*. The University reviews the performance of study programmes annually. Students take an active part in study programme evaluation through discussion of syllabi with the teacher and student advisor, by the use of approved surveys, or by giving a grade to the course at the end of semester **(M4)**. To evaluate gained experiences, the University has included the professional practice as a compulsory module in the curricula of all study programmes, and it is carried out according to regulations and guidelines **(113, 114)** **[Chapter I, Standard I.2].**

- 3.6 The University offers study programmes in three cycles that are in accordance with all the components of the institution development strategy **(28)** and the departments' strategies. Programmes have clearly specified programme outcomes. The University has adopted the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) alongside the American credit hour system. Diplomas are issued to the graduated students, with relevant documents such as the diploma supplement **(116, 117)** *[Chapter I, Standard I.3].*
- 3.7 The study programmes offered by the university are in compliance with the required level of the Albanian Qualification Framework **(118)** and with transparency for employers and student transfer **(119)**. The University pursues a clear policy to ensure coherence in study programmes. The programmes are reviewed continuously starting with departments, considering the students results and the alumni survey **(120, 121)** The final decision is taken by the Academic Senate **(106)**. There is a high employment rate among graduates **(38)** and the employers met by the review team were very happy with the quality and communication skills of students educated in EPOKA University **(M7)**.
- 3.8 The University has prepared its own internationalization agenda by encouraging cooperation and strategic partnerships with Western Universities, like University of Salerno, Italy **(M7)** the public sector and business organizations. **(28)**. The instruction language for almost all study programmes is English, but the University promotes the learning of foreign languages like French, German, Turkish and Italian as elective courses in the Bachelor programmes. Foreign academic staff teach on some different courses. **Epoka University offers joint degrees with the University of Applied Sciences, in Mainz, Germany (M7).** *[Chapter I, Standard I.4].*
- 3.9 The teaching load of lecturers is assigned in accordance with criteria set in bylaws in force, the University regulation **(57)** and in compliance with human resources capacities **(122)**. Any additional teaching load is financed from the University's own resources **(124)**. The academic staff confirmed the financial support from the University for extra teaching hours **(M6)**. The working load of academic staff is balanced to allow them to carry out research and administrative duties, for example by reducing the amount of teaching hours, **therefore addressing the recommendation from the previous review (46), [Chapter I Standard I.5].**
- 3.10 The University has established an interactive system where the students can log in and check all the information that they need **(M3)**. It was learnt during the visit that departments organize annual meetings with previous students, MSc students, alumni, teachers and deans that give an overview to the newly enrolled students, regarding the learning and assessment system, grading system etc. The students stated that it was a very helpful meeting for them **(M3)**. Students whom the review team met confirmed that the admissions criteria, programme content and learning objectives were clear to them **(M3, M4)**. At the beginning of each academic year, during Orientation sessions the newly enrolled students are given a clear orientation to their programmes **(125).** *[Chapter I Standard I.6].*
- 3.11 Programmes of the first cycle are full time, in line with Bologna process **(13)** and are designed to provide students with the basic knowledge, scientific principles and professional skills and competencies, allowing a progressive transition from the 1st to

the 2nd cycle. Study programmes include compulsory and elective modules and provide professional training allowing graduates to be integrated in the labour market. First cycle students are informed, especially by a personal student advisor, during and at the end of their studies about employment opportunities relevant to their diploma (M3). Study programmes ensure successful completion of first cycle and admission to second cycle (117). Students are informed and guided about the possibility of transfer of study programmes or credits received during their studies (127). *[Chapter I Standard I.7].*

- 3.12 The University supports the students starting with orientation week (125) and then throughout their studies by personal student advisors (102, M3, M4), Dean of Students Office, the Registrar's office, Department Coordinators, IT office and Library Staff, and by providing the Smart Student guide (107). Alternative teaching methods, different teaching and assessment methods are used, including traditional and student-centered teaching methods (102, 103) and are supported by several laboratories (Tour). Students that the review team met, were satisfied with the e-learning facilities, especially during the pandemic situation (M3, M4). **The individual support provided by student advisers at course level in monitoring and supporting student progression and achievement is an example of good practice.** The University recruits with priority academic staff with a high number of scientific publications and project participation (129). Academic staff employed full-time cover more than 87% of teaching load of the study programmes (182). *[Chapter I Standard I.8].*
- 3.13 The academic staff that teach second cycle study programmes hold at least PhD degree (103) and are also actively engaged in research activities (129). They make an annual report to the Department about their progress (M6, M10). Academic staff participate in study programme drafting, designing, reviewing, curricula updating and implementation, according to a well-defined procedure (112). Master of science thesis and professional practice are developed in cooperation with private sector and state companies and are carried out under the supervision and mentoring of academic staff, who also make the final evaluation (113, 114, 134). The University regularly collects statistical data on the employment of its graduates, according to a tracking programme and the data are published in annual reports (38). In teaching and research programmes of Professional Master' studies, the University also involves representatives or employers from business or industry (182, 136). More than 90% of the teaching load in the second cycle study programmes is covered by academic staff employed full-time (182). *[Chapter I Standard I.9].*
- 3.14 Study programmes are offered in line with Bologna Process in successive cycles under the system: Bachelor, Master, Doctorate (13, 185). All study programmes are offered full time and are organized in credit-bearing modules, according to the ECTS. All necessary information regarding curriculum, syllabi and programme is also available in English on the University and Departments website. Diplomas are issued at the completion of study programmes of first cycle, second cycle or integrated (116) and are associated with a diploma supplement/appendix (117) in English and Albanian language in a format that has to be approved by the leading bodies of the University and the government, according to the legal framework. **Almost all study programmes are offered in the English language and are designed to facilitate students' mobility within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and beyond.** Therefore English proficiency is an additional admission criterion for all

study programmes (102, 103). Students either have to provide an internationally recognized certificate of English for all levels of study programmes or they have to undergo an exam on the English language organized by the University, using internationally known tests (102, 104). Learning foreign languages is in line with the University's internationalization policy. Credits awarded in a partner foreign Higher Education Institution in the framework of a mutual agreement are recognized based on final approval by Decanate of the Faculty (13, 105). Students spoke of opportunities for mobility, but at the moment with limitations due to the pandemic situation. The University has a grading system (38.102), which also helps in facilitating students and credit transfer. *[Chapter I Standard 1.10].*

- 3.15 Study programmes include practical work enabling the acquisition of practical skills. Professional practice is a compulsory module in all study programmes, and it is successful due to collaboration between the University and businesses and companies (M3. M4. M7). All curricula are organised in ECTS, and modules are assessed in ECTS, with 60 ECTS for one academic year (13).
- 3.16 In all study programmes students undertake the preparation and presentation of scientific research projects, assignment, essays and presentations, which are stated in the module syllabi, also including the respective percentages of each assessment component. In collaboration with the Student Council, Student Clubs and Activities Office cultural and educational activities such as sporting events, open forums events, spring fest and student clubs are organized. (42. 12). *(Chapter I Standard I.11)*
- 3.17 Study programmes integrate theoretical and practical skills (143). Study programmes include professional practices, internships under the guidance of mentors which help students to gain practical skills. The students met by the review team provided examples of placements that are carried out in companies (M3, M4, 135). The University has a lot of agreements with private sector companies, such as Intesa Sanpaolo Bank, Deloitte and Vodafone. The representatives of some of these companies, whom the review team met (M7) were satisfied with the professional competences of the students. They provided examples of students who graduated at Epoka University and are employed by the companies that they represent. The University also employs some of its own students as teaching assistants, who are helping the professors during the practice hours (M6). **The review team consider that the system of internships organised by the University that makes available a wide range of work experience opportunities, which supports the development of student employability to be good practice.** *[Chapter I Standard I.12].*

Findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- double degrees with University of Applied Sciences, in Mainz, Germany. *[Para. 3.8, Chapter I Standard I.4].*
- the individual support provided by student advisers at course level in monitoring and supporting student progression and achievement *[Para. 3.12, Chapter I Standard I.8].*

- the delivery of programmes through the medium of English promotes student mobility in Albania and internationally **[Para. 3.14, Chapter I Standard I.10]**.
- the system of internships organised by the University that makes available a wide range of work experience opportunities, which supports the development of student employability **[Para. 3.14, Chapter I Standard I.12]**.

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify and weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not identify and affirmations.

Judgement

The standards for the Curriculum are **fully met**.

Evaluation Area 4: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research

- 4.1 The study programmes are based on the legal framework and the responsibilities for their organization are stated in the programme regulations **(102, 103, 104)**. The curricula of study programmes, and syllabi of modules are published on the University website and are archived in all responsible units **(143)**. The departments review the study programmes annually and propose changes which are then finally approved by the Academic Senate. Teaching plans are approved by each Faculty **(57, 182)**. The University has sufficient capacity for practice in the laboratories of the University **(75)**, or for internship in the private and public sector through the partnership networks **(182)**. Students are guided and supervised during practices, internships and research works by a lecturer in line with specific procedures. The University has a library with a total of 25,000 printed books and online resources **(87)**. *[Chapter I Standard II.1].*
- 4.2 Examination rules and requirements are stated in the regulations of each study programme **(3)**, which are public. Students are informed via email, or find the information on the website, where are also published the graduation criteria and procedures. Anonymity is respected during the marking of examinations through a dedicated system, **(SER p56, 146, 147)**. Complaints about examinations' scores and procedure are specified in the examinations' regulation and in the Student Guide **(107)**. Students are provided with a personal account which facilitates them in registration to all study courses and also to have access to their personal exam grades, by observing the confidentiality principle. ICTC Coordination office has developed an automated system called the EPOKA Interactive System **(EIS)**. *[Chapter I Standard II.2].*
- 4.3 The study programmes and lecturers are assessed annually through the University structures. The University gets feedback from academic staff and students to ensure that the teaching and learning are of a high quality **(120)**. Academic staff and study programmes are evaluated by the students through the use of a survey. The review team was informed by the students that they complete a survey at the end of semester covering course content, teacher performance and the services offered by the University **(M3, M4)**. Students can freely express their opinions and even can give grades to teachers or teaching methods. An alumni survey and a Company Satisfaction Survey **(121)** are organized by the Career Planning and Alumni Office to get feedback about the competences gained from study programme. Student performance such as pass rate and teaching data are annually assessed. All these results mentioned above are published in Annual Reports **(38)**. Study programmes are reviewed annually, curricula updates are undertaken by the basic units and are submitted for approval to the Academic Senate **(106)** *[Chapter I Standard II.3].*
- 4.4 The departments and internal quality assurance unit are responsible for monitoring and improvement of the quality of respective study programmes **(13)**. The Internal Quality Assurance Unit of the University comprises several subunits **(182)**, which operate according to the regulations **(148)**. The University has laboratories supporting teaching and has organized continuous training activities **(52)** to improve teaching. The academic staff are financially supported for participation in conferences, publication in international journals and the engagement in research projects **(149, M6, M10)**. Academic staff are involved in mobility for teaching and training through the Erasmus + programme **(54)**. The University is responsible for teaching quality. The University uses the students survey **(84)** and the academic staff survey to evaluate learning resources. Necessary infrastructure is available for the learning process, for example the library **(87)**, electronic laboratories and computer facilities **(69)**. The university uses e-learning methods and on-line resources, which

are very effective, especially during the pandemic year and the students are very satisfied with the application of these methods (**M3, M4**). The University ensures that the recruited academic staff are of high quality in scientific research (**182, M10**), and organizes different training activities, workshops for the academic and administrative staff.. [**Chapter I Standard II.4**].

- 4.5 Departments are the basic teaching and research unit, which include homogenous research groups that are organized into specific research areas (**186**). Departments evaluate the research and reports are prepared annually by each member of academic staff regarding the research activity, that are evaluated on a point basis by Rector's office. The Rectorate decides every year the amount of remuneration for the academic staff, based on the points collected (**41**). Academic staff, especially the newly employed staff and PhD students, are financially supported for the participation in conferences and scientific activities. (**41, M6, M10**). The University organizes and co-organizes international conferences and scientific activities and supports financially research projects for academic staff. [**Chapter II Standard I.1**].
- 4.6 The Research and Project office of the University support scientific research and staff training according to the regulations (**28, 55, 41, 154**). The University has established three functional research centers as described in detail (**SER p64**). The University ensures cooperation of research structures within and between institutions and has signed bilateral agreements with other universities and is participating in several international programmes like COST action, Erasmus + and Horizon 2020 (**156**). The University has cooperation with the public and private sectors for conducting scientific research, projects and student internships (**M7**).. [**Chapter II Standard I.2**].
- 4.7 The University is active in national and international conference organization and participation, as part of its strategic plans and policies (**28**). They have different laboratories used for the teaching process (**Tour**). The University has 52 partnership agreements with other higher education institution from different countries and is a participant in international projects (**156, 187**). Staff of the University have published about 158 research papers in international journals since 2017 (**129**), and the list is published on the website of the University. Ceremonial meetings about achievements in the research field and meetings where the academic staff present their research and PhD defenses are organized. [**Chapter II Standard I.3**].
- 4.8 Departments have established research areas in accordance with legislation, regulations, national and institutional strategies (**152, 153, 28**). The University takes care to protect copyright ownership, as stated in the "Staff guide" booklet (**49**). They organise open lectures, open forums and ceremonial meetings that encourage scientific debate in priority areas of scientific research. [**Chapter II Standard I.4**].
- 4.9 The University monitors the teaching and scientific research process and the reports of internal and external reports for the study programmes, which are published on the website. Staff recruitment is oriented toward experienced researchers based on their research skills as stated in the regulation (**43**) through an open and transparent process realised according to a specific procedure (**SER, p 67, M10**). The University implements priority policies developed in research fields and has prepared a framework strategy (**28**). [**Chapter II Standard I.5**].
- 4.10 Engineering, design, business, law and social sciences are some of priority areas at the University. The academic staff are financially and administratively supported to apply for national and international research projects through agencies like NACRI, Western Balkans Fund, Visegrad and the European Commission. Doctorate students are integrated in scientific research groups, where they carry out their research

according to the research areas and capacities of Department. Young researchers and PhD students are involved in research projects which are financially supported according to specific guidelines **(154)**. The University is involved in designing and implementing regional and national science policies. There are examples of staff members that are individually involved in developing national strategies **(SER)**. In the University 29% of academic and research staff are foreign, coming from different countries like the USA, UK, Russia, France, Italy, Germany, France, North Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Indonesia and Pakistan. Since 2017 there are 47 foreign academic staff that are invited as guest lecturers or researchers **(28)**. The University encourages the mobility of academic staff engaged in scientific research by supporting their participation in international activities like seminars and conferences in consistency with the Institutional strategy and regulations. **(28, 55, 159, 41)**. **[Chapter II Standard I.6]**.

- 4.11 The three research centers of the University **(CES, CORDA and YCSBS)** have organized international seminars and scientific symposia, as displayed on the website (<http://conf.epoka.edu.al>; [http://eco.epoka.edu.al/news-4th-international-virtual-conference-on-economics-and-development-a-iced-2020-5423 .html](http://eco.epoka.edu.al/news-4th-international-virtual-conference-on-economics-and-development-a-iced-2020-5423.html)). The University supports financially the academic staff and especially the newly employed to participate in national and international scientific activities. The University has a regulatory framework on publication activities; EU-DIR-004-EN/2009 "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications" and EU-REG-013-EN/2007 "Regulation on Publications" and host a digital repository where are uploaded research outcomes. All publications of academic staff are evaluated annually by a special Jury as described in the regulation "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications" **(M6)**. The University publishes two academic journals, the Journal of European Social Research and the International Journal of Applied Statistics and Economics in collaboration with the Economic Society of Albania. Based on data from SCOPUS database, the University is listed as the university with the highest scientific research output among non-public universities, and among the five best universities in Albania for research output **(173)**. **[Chapter II Standard I.7]**.
- 4.12 The Research and Project office coordinates the effective use of university resources. The scientific work of academic staff is evaluated on annually by an *ad hoc* commission near the Rector's office according to the regulation **(41)**. The University encourages the protection of intellectual property. All the documents prepared by the students and academic staff are subject to plagiarism testing that is carried out by appropriate software. All Master and PhD defended theses are published on the University website. The University encourages paper publications, by academic staff **(188)**, especially in the peer reviewed journals indexed in Clarivate's Web of Science, Elsevier' Scopus **(189)**. **[Chapter II Standard 1.8]**.

Findings

Good practice

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

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken.

The review team did not identify any affirmations.

Judgement

The standards for Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research are **fully met**.

Evaluation Area 5: Students and Their Support

- 5.1 Students' admission is in line with the University policies (28, 93). The University has established connection with Regional Education Directorates and Education Offices and organizes school visits to provide the high school students with information regarding study programmes (94). Admission is coordinated by the Admission Office (174) supported by academic staff (97, 98). The University annually participates in the Work and Study Fair that is organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tirana where future students are informed about the study programmes. Information for students and other details like admission criteria and scholarship opportunities are on the website (50). The University applies a scheme of merit-based scholarships for the students of study programmes of all levels. Students are provided with an annual Student Guide (107). They organise a welcome programme and an Orientation Day, which helps a smooth integration of the students. The Staff:student ratios meet legal requirements (190). Master of Science students are hired as teaching assistants, thus belonging to the category of "part time assisting academic staff", and they are in support of the teachers (175, M10). *[Chapter I Standard III.1].*
- 5.2 The Career Planning and Alumni Office is responsible for informing and counseling students. All staff and students have an internal email address (140) used for internal communication. They also use external communication means like radio, television, newspaper, news and interviews (162, 163). The University holds personal files for each student, in compliance with legislation (140). The Registrar's Office and the students' academic advisor hold personal information of the students like the physical address, email address and phone number of each student. *[Chapter I Standard III.2].*
- 5.3 A personal student advisor is assigned to each student. (M3, M4). The International Relations Office, Career Planning and Alumni Office and the Dean of Students office provide the students with different kind of information like exchange programmes, employment opportunities, open forums (165), and career fairs. During the review team visit, students were very positive about the support provided by their advisors and by information provided by related offices (M3, M4). The Student Guide, brochures and leaflets are comprehensive and helpful. Detailed information for study programmes of all levels is provided on the website. The regulation and procedures for student transfers are documented in the directive "On Student Transfer" (105). *[Chapter I Standard III.3].*
- 5.4 The University is committed to provide a suitable physical environment for the students with physical disability (166) and scholarship opportunities for Roma or Balkan Egyptian students (177). Scholarship are provided for different categories of students like those engaging in sports activities at high levels; orphan children of officers of the State Police killed in the line of duty, orphan students coming from low-income families (SER, p.79), students with high GPA scores and high-achieving students graduated from the high schools of the Municipality of Vora, which is the local government unit where the campus of the University is located (161). **The review team consider the extensive provision of scholarships for disadvantaged students to be a feature of good practice.** Second level study programme are scheduled in an appropriate way to support students who are employed full time. *[Chapter I Standard III.4].*
- 5.5 The University library has a collection of about 25,000 printed books. Students and staff have access to JSTOR online library and to academic journal papers. The

University makes provision in the annual budget for the library, for the purchase of books according to the needs of the departments (179, 86). The library offers multidisciplinary literature and opening times are on the website. All enrolled students are provided with a student ID card and are registered in the library database to access the literature (180). *[Chapter I Standard III.5].*

- 5.6 Mentoring and tutoring for students is provided throughout the academic year by academic advisors, the Dean of Students Office and also by academic staff. (181). Students are provided with support by the librarian (78) and by the teachers, on academic writing and research methods. Mentorship Programs are organized to help students in difficulty. *[Chapter I Standard III.6].*
- 5.7 Students are represented on the main governing bodies of the University, including the Senate, Faculty Councils, the Ethics Board, the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance Unit, the Permanent Commission on Student Relations (13) and they are encouraged to engage in decision making (M3, M4). The Student Council comprises elected representatives from all programmes. The Student Council expresses opinions and proposals for all problems of general interest such as educational plans, research programs and study regulations. The Student Council is supported financially and has the necessary infrastructure for their activities. Students are also supported in extracurricular activities (58). *[Chapter I Standard III.7].*
- 5.8 The University encourages sporting activity (142) and also provides financial support for sporting and cultural activities. **There are 22 active student clubs (60)** which in collaboration with the Dean of Students Office organize activities (12) like forums, workshops, training programmes, **providing certificates for participants and organizers (168) or conferring different awards in cultural and educational competitions.** Students' clubs invite distinguished experts from different fields to give open lectures providing an active social and educational life to the students (61). The students are encouraged to participate in cultural activities. **The review team consider the provision of student clubs and sporting activities to be a feature of good practice.** The University has a **men's football team and women's volleyball team** which compete in their respective championships, and talented students have represented Albania in some of the most important international sports competitions (SER, p 83). Medical care is provided for students and full time employed academic staff (SER, p 83). *[Chapter I Standard III.8].*
- 5.9 The Career Planning and Alumni Office is responsible for tracking graduate employment, and this is realized by a tracking system (38, SER, p 83). This office has kept records since 2010 - 2011, on employment data for each study programme, like job position, company, city and country of residence. The statistics on employment data are published on the University website (170). The University has signed agreements with about 45 private and public companies and cooperates with many other companies offering many employment possibilities. Open Forums, Information Sessions, Company Visits and the Careers Fair is organized by the Career Planning and Alumni Office. They also provide information about employment opportunities for students and graduates of all the study programmes. External partners and alumni whom the review team met (M7) were very satisfied with the professional competencies that the students develop and with their foreign language development. Academic, teaching and scientific, and administrative staff are committed to support the students to find employment, helping them with internship and teaching them skills for a successful career (SER, p 85). *[Chapter I Standard III.9].*

Findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- the extensive provision of scholarships for disadvantaged students [*Para. 5.4, Chapter I Standard III.4*].
- there are football and volleyball teams as well as 22 active student clubs which organize activities like forums, workshops, training programmes, providing certificates for participants and organisers, or conferring different awards in cultural and educational competitions. [*Para. 5.8, Chapter I Standard III.8*].

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not identify any affirmations.

Judgment

The standards for Students and their Support are **fully met**.

Evidence List

M2	Meeting with the Rector.
M3	Meeting with first cycle students.
M4	Meeting with second cycle students.
M5	Meeting with third cycle students.
M6	Meeting with teaching staff.
M7	Meeting with external partners and alumni.
M9	Meeting with support staff.
M10	Meeting with Faculty Deans and Heads of Department.
M11	Meeting with the Internal Quality Assurance Unit.
M12	Meeting with senior managers.
M13	Meeting with the self-evaluation team.
Tour	Tour of Resources.
SED	Self-Evaluation Document
I	Correspondence and EPOKA University Institutional Review Action Plan.
2	Directive "On the Functioning of the Exam Board".
3	Guideline "On Examinations".
4	Exam Assessment Form.
5	Examination Period Assessment Form.
6	Weekly Report on the Conduct of Remote teaching in the Context of Covid-19 Crisis.
7	Follow-up to the Review of the COVID-19 Surveys completed by students, academic staff and administrative staff.
8	How to Set-up the Distance Learning Platforms.
9	Guideline on the conduct of teaching and other activities during the 2020-2021 fall semester
IO	Action Plan "On the organizational and administrative measures for the resuming of on the-campus teaching and other educational activities".
11	Guideline "On the modalities concerning the conduct of the Final Exams and Resit Exams of the 2020-2021 fall semester".
12	Dean of Students Annual Activity Report 2019-2020 Academic Year.
13	Statute of EPOKA University.
14	Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Sports No. 146, dated 31.03.2017.
15	List of internal legal acts in force.
16	Decision No. 02, dated 14.12.2016 of the Academic Senate.
17	Decision No. 11, dated 11.01.2017 of the Higher Board of EPOKA University.
18	List of study programs offered by EPOKA University.
19	Sample -Decisions of the Academic Senate Meeting No. 02, dated 06.05.2020.
20	Code of Ethics.
21	Table for HR and Infrastructure needs_2017 01 30.
22	Decision of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences No. 2 dated 06.07.2020 "Proposal the Human Resources and Infrastructure Needs for the 2020-2021 academic year.
23	Sample -Decision of the Rectorate No.1 dated 19.02.2021 on Approval of the list of publications of academic and assisting academic staff members for the 2019-2020 academic year pursuant to the provisions of the Directive of EPOKA University "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications".
24	Sample Decision of the Rectorate No. 5 dated 04.02.2020.
25	Sample -Decisions of the Administrative Board Meeting No. 06, dated 11.11.2020.

- 26 Sample Agenda of the Meeting of Rectorate No.20 dated 16.06.2020.
- 27 Final Evaluation Report of the Strategic Plan 2013-2017.
- 28 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University 2018-2022.
- 29 Sample Academic Unit -Economics Department -Strategic Plan 2018-2022.
- 30 Sample Administrative Unit International Relations Office -Strategic Plan for Internationalization 2018-2022.
- 31 Regulation on the Center for European Studies.
- 32 Regulation on Center of Research and Design in Architecture.
- 33 Academic Offer according to ISCED.
- 34 Proposal by the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance on additional points to be added to Department Reports of Course Instructor Evaluation Surveys dated July 2, 2020.
- 35 Decision of the Rectorate Meeting No.5 dated 21.07.2020 on approval of additional points to be added to Department Reports on Results of Course Instructor Evaluation Surveys.
- 36 INST AT Student ne arsimin e larte sipas fushave te studimit.
- 37 Sample -Report on the market study for the opening of the Bachelor Program in Software Engineering.
- 38 Annual Report 2019-2020.
- 39 Policy on participation of academic and assisting academic staff members in activities outside the University and in activities representing the University dated 19.11.2019.
- 40 Regulation "On Student Exchange".
- 41 Directive "Promotion of Scientific Publications".
- 42 Organizational Scheme of EPOKA University EN & Sq.
- 43 Regulation of EPOKA University "On Staff Recruitment".
- 44 Sample of Job vacancy Description.
- 45 Emails sent to be Jobs.ac.uk, AKADEUS and Duapune.
- 46 Directive "On Academic and Administrative Assessment and Quality Improvement".
- 47 Regulation "On the Organization and Functioning of the Permanent Commission on the Conferring of the PhD Scientific Degree.
- 48 Sample of the individual employment contract for "Academic Staff", "Administrative Staff", "Adjunct Academic Staff", "Laboratory Assistants" and "Teaching Assistant".
- 49 Staff Guide.
- 50 Promotional Brochures and Leaflets.
- 51 Plan of Career Planning program for High School Students.
- 52 List of Training Activities for Staff.
- 53 List of Institutional Cooperation.
- 54 List of staff members who have participated in exchange programs.
- 55 Regulation "On Scientific Research".
- 56 Sample Decision on the approval of requesting financial support.
- 57 Directive "On Teaching Load".
- 58 Student Activities Request for Approval Form.
- 59 Student Request Form.
- 60 List of Students Clubs.
- 61 List of activities organized by students' clubs.
- 62 Regulation "On the Discipline of the Managing, Academic and Administrative Staff".
- 63 Decision for the Approval of the HR and Infrastructure needs 2020-2021.
- 64 Decision for the approval of the Event and Activities Calendar for the 2020-2021

	Academic Year.
65	Law No. 9228/2004, For Accounting and Financial Statements.
66	SKK -National Accounting and Reporting Standard.
67	EIS Guideline Role for lecturers.
68	EIS Guideline Role for students.
69	Information and Communication Technology Services.
70	ICTCO Strategic Plan 2018-2022.
71	List of licenses of software programs.
72	Certificate of Property.
73	Master Plan of EPOKA University.
74	Directive of EPOKA University "On Purchases".
75	Infrastructure in Function of Study Programs.
76	Depositing of the Trademark EIS.
77	Certificate of Trademark for the Registration of EIS.
78	Directive "On the Library".
79	Law No. 10138, dated 11.05.2009 "On the Public Health".
80	Law No. 152/2015, dated 21.12.2015 "On the Service of Fire Safety and Rescue".
81	Parking area.
82	Recreation spaces.
83	Report of the MoESY on the Verification of the Capacities 2020-2021.
84	Template of the Student Satisfaction Survey.
85	Photos of recreational spaces.
86	Titles of the Books added in recent four years.
87	Library Services.
88	Structural Project of EPOKA University.
89	Project on fire protection system and Safety at workplace of EPOKA University.
90	Act on Fire Protection and Safety of EPOKA University.
91	Contract with TRAJF shpk.
92	Training of Staff on Fire Protection & Evacuation, Photos.
93	Marketing policy of study programs.
94	Template of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors.
95	Plan of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2018-2019 academic Year.
96	Report by the Admission Office on the Number of Participating High Schools and Students in the Career Planning Program for the 2018-2019 academic year.
97	Plan of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2019-2020 academic Year.
98	Report by the Admission Office on the Number of Participating High Schools and Students in the Career Planning Program for the 2019-2020 academic year.
99	Plan of the Online Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2020-
2021	academic year.
100	Decision of the Academic Senate and Administrative Board on the establishment of the
	Faculty of Law and Social Sciences.
101	Decisions of the Academic Senate and Administrative Board on the adoption of the admission quotas for all study programs for the 2020-2021 academic year.
102	Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations".
103	Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs".
104	Regulation "On PhD Study Programs".
105	Directive "On Student Transfer".

- 106 Policy on the Continuous Improvement of Study Programs.
- 107 2020-2021 Student Guide.
- 108 Annual Report of the Department of Economics for the 2019-2020 academic year.
- 109 Certificates of training programs.
- 110 Curriculum Change Proposal Form
- 111 Track Record of the Curriculum Change Proposal Form.
- 112 Example of the conduct and approval of curricula changes in a study program.
- 113 Guideline "On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Bachelor and Integrated
Second
Cycle Study Programs".
- 114 Guideline "On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Professional Master Study
Programs".
- 115 List of Academic Staff during 2017-2021.
- 116 Diploma Template.
- 117 Diploma Supplement of the Bachelor study program in Civil Engineering, Bachelor
study program in Banking and Finance, and Bachelor study program in Political
Science and International Relations.
- 118 Table of the Albanian Qualifications Framework.
- 119 Student Transcript.
- 120 Quality Assurance Handbook.
- 121 Company Satisfaction Survey.
- 122 Academic capacities of EPOKA University.
- 123 Form on the Request for the Payment of Extra Hours to Lecturers.
- 124 Additional teaching load payment from the budget of EPOKA University for the
20172021 Period.
- 125 Program of the Orientation Session for the 2020-2021 academic year.
- 126 Decisions of the Senate_ Organization of the Graduation Project and Final
Comprehensive Exam (FCE).
- 127 Examples of the decision-making process concerning the recognition of credits in the
framework of transfers at various study programs offered by the three Faculties.
- 128 The Graduate Outcomes in the Labour Market: Ten Years of Achievements.
- 129 List of Publications of Academic Staff Members during the 2016-2020 period.
- 130 Course Appointment Documents of the 2019-2020 academic year.
- 131 Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Program in Political Sciences and International
Relations".
- 132 Regulation "On Master of Science Study Program in Architecture".
- 133 Regulation "On the Master of Science Study Program in Civil Engineering".
- 134 Information on the conduct of professional practice at the Department of Computer
Engineering.
- 135 List of cooperation agreements between EPOKA University and third parties.
- 136 List of experts/professionals engaged in teaching at Master programs.
- 137 Course syllabus template.
- 138 Decisions of the Senate No. 04, dated 10.02.2016, No. 05, dated 10.02.2016 and No.
01, dated 13.01.2016, on the determination of the minimum English proficiency level
as an admission criterion for the Bachelor, integrated second cycle as well as second
cycle study programs.
- 139 Template of EPOKA's Letter of Performance.
- 140 Template of the Study Contract.
- 141 Participation by students in exchange programs.
- 142 Directive "On Student Clubs".

- 143 Curricula of study programs pertaining to three cycles of studies at the three Faculties.
- 144 Directive "On the Graduation Work of Undergraduate Programs".
- 145 Decision of the Rectorate of EPOKA University No. 01, dated 02.07.2019.
- 146 Decision of the Rectorate of EPOKA University No. 04, dated 05.11.2019.
- 147 Exam Anonymity Process.
- 148 Annex Regulation "On the Organization and the Functioning of the PCQA".
- 149 List of Sponsored Conference Participations 2016-2020.
- 150 Example of Documents on Training Activities.
- 151 Template of Academic Staff Satisfaction Survey Form.
- 152 Law 80/2015 "On higher education and scientific research in higher education institutions in the Republic of Albania".
- 153 National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation.
- 154 Guideline for Research Projects.
- 155 List of Student and Staff Mobilities 2017-2020.
- 156 List of Research Projects.
- 157 Internal Evaluation Report for Study Program, PhD in Economics.
- 158 Priority Areas of Scientific Research, Technology and Innovation.
- 159 Regulation on Publications.
- 160 Regulation for "Ethics on Research and Publishing Activities, MoES.
- 161 Vora Municipality Scholarships.
- 162 Media and Public Relations Office Procedures.
- 163 External Communication Policy.
- 164 Regulation on Student Discipline.
- 165 Examples of announcements of students on the open forums.
- 166 Policy on Students with Disabilities.
- 167 Statute of the Student Council.
- 168 Sample of Certificate.
- 169 Annex Alumni Form.
- 170 Update Alumni Record 2018-2019 Academic Year.
- 171 Level 6 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework.
- 172 Sample -Orientation Program for the New Full Time and Part Academic Staff dated 12/10/2020.
- 173 Scopus Albania Affiliation.
- 174 Work procedures of the Admission Office.
- 175 Job Description of Teaching Assistants.
- 176 Staff Confidentiality Declaration.
- 177 Decision of the Higher Board No.7 dated 11.01.2017.
- 178 Work procedures of the Registrar's Office.
- 179 Sample on the purchase of books by the library based on the request by a department.
- 180 Sample of the EPOKA Student ID Card.
- 181 Work procedures of the Dean of Students Office.
- 182 Summary Tables.
- 183 EPOKA University Action Plan to Fulfil ASCAL Recommendations.
- 184 EPOKA University's Response to the Covid-19 Crisis: Continuing Quality Assurance.
- 185 Table: Study Programs and Cycles offered by EPOKA University, 2021.
- 186 Table: Research areas/groups at the departmental level, 2021.
- 187 Table: Successful Projects during 2017-2020.
- 188 Table: Number of Total Publications during the 2016-17 -2019-20 academic years.
- 189 Table: List of High-impact publications during the 2016/17 -2019/20 academic years.

190 Table: Lecturer-to-Student Ratio at University Level during the 2017/18-2019/20 academic years.