



SELF-EVALUATION REPORT FOR PERIODICAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

SELF EVALUATION GROUP

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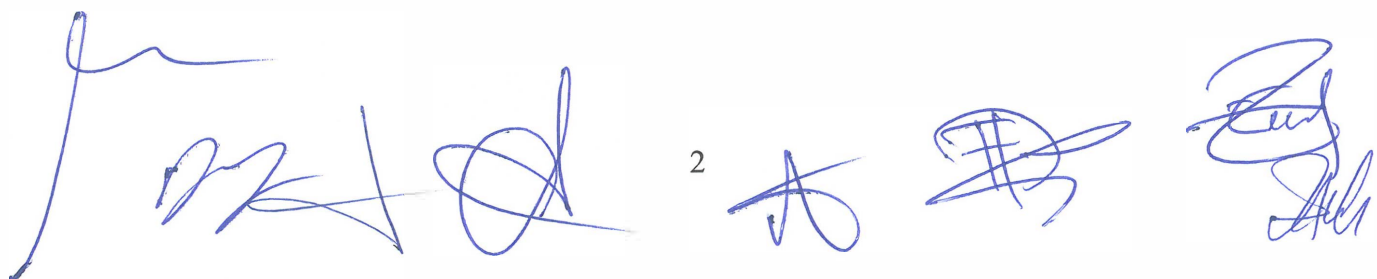
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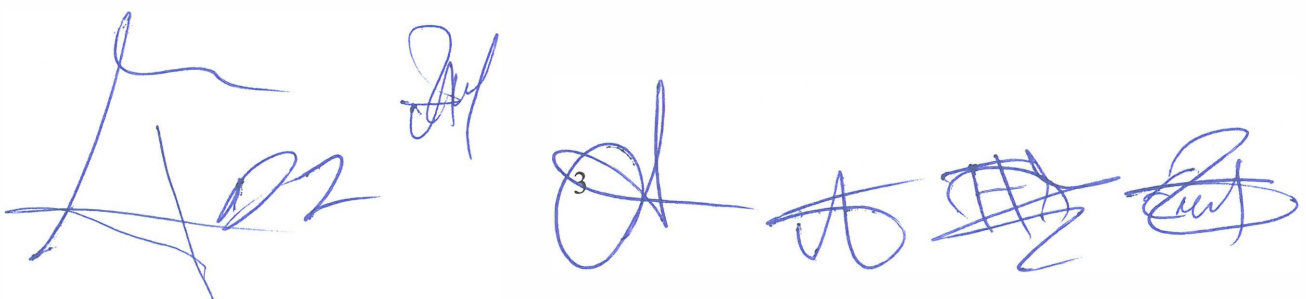
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A. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AQF	Albanian Qualifications Framework
ASCAL	Quality Assurance Agency on Higher Education
CEC	Continuous Education Centre
CEFRL	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CES	Center for European Studies
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CPAO	Career Planning and Alumni Office
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EIS	EPOKA Interactive System
ENQA	European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies
EPOKA	EPOKA University
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
ERA	European Research Area
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
EUA	European Universities Association
EVALAG	Evaluations Agentur Baden-Württemberg
F2F	face-to-face
FAE	Faculty of Architecture and Engineering
FCE	Final Comprehensive Exam
FEAS	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
FLSS	Faculty of Law and Social Sciences
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HyFlex	hybrid flexible
ICTCO	Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office
IFRS	International Financial and Reporting Standards
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
LMS	Learning Management System
MoESY	Minister of Education, Sports and Youth
NASRI	National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation
PANBioRA	Personalized And/or Non-specific Biomaterial Risk Assessment
PCQA	Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance
QKB	National Business Center of Albania
SEG	Self-Evaluation Group
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
TA	Teaching Assistants
YCBS	Yunus Center for Social Business and Sustainability



B. INTRODUCTION TO THE SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

Introduction and Overview

Founded in 2007, EPOKA University is an Albanian private higher education institution (HEI) that is one of the leading internationally-focused universities in the Western Balkans, with a technologically-friendly smart campus strategically located close to Tirana International Airport, just north of the capital city of Tirana, and nearby to the Albanian port city of Durrës. To date, EPOKA University is the only Albanian University that provides students with a fully-fledged comprehensive campus environment.

EPOKA University also occupies an important and unique space within the academic marketplace of Albania. The University provides degrees in critical and growing disciplines to ensure that EPOKA graduates are globally competitive and meet the real-world demands of professional work environments. EPOKA degrees lead directly to job opportunities for students in Albania, elsewhere in Europe, and across the globe.

Admitted students are held to high performance standards by well-trained faculty, many of whom are foreign faculty from countries across the globe. In addition to being committed lecturers, ensuring that updated curricula and cutting edge ideas enter the classrooms, our academic staff are also engaged in creative and innovative research. Furthermore, EPOKA's mission, its organizational and management structures, and its campus infrastructure and allocation of resources across the institution, and the University's student services also are designed to support the student experience.

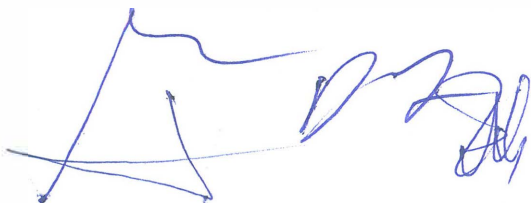
The Self-Evaluation Process

EPOKA University's Self-Evaluation Group (SEG) began its work in December 2020. The SEG team is made up of EPOKA personnel from across the different academic and administrative units of the university. The team is headed by the Vice Rector for International Relations and includes the head of the University's Internal Quality Assurance Office, the head of the Institutional and Legal Affairs Office, the head of the Rector's Cabinet, the head of the Research and Projects Office, a representative of the Dean of Students Office, a representative of the Office of the Administrator, and a student representative to bring to the table the views and opinions of EPOKA's student community. The SEG was established by the Rectorate of EPOKA University through its Decision No.02, dated 07.12.2020.

The SEG drafted the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) in compliance with the Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Science No. 126, dated 17.03.2011 "On the Approval of State Quality Standards for institutional evaluation and accreditation of Higher Education Institutions", in accordance with the Manual of the Quality Assurance Agency on Higher Education (ASCAL) "On procedures and deadlines for quality assessment in the framework of accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs 2017", and in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance for the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The SEG accessed university data and documents deemed necessary in order to prepare the SER. The work of the SEG has been characterized by professionalism, truthfulness, objectivity, full transparency and the involvement of a plethora of university stakeholders at all stages of internal evaluation. The preparation of the report reflects the collaborative culture within the institution.

Based on the evaluation agenda of ASCAL for the periodic institutional accreditation process, the Internal Quality Assurance Unit of EPOKA drafted a timeline of activities for the preparation of the



SER. The timeline of activities was approved by the Rectorate of EPOKA University through its Decision No.01, dated 07.12.2020.

Below is a timeline of the activities carried out by the SEG and other units of the University in drafting the Self-Evaluation Report for institutional re-accreditation with ASCAL. The SEG held an initial coordinating meeting for data collection from the relevant administrative units in December 2020 and worked on drafting the chapters from January to March 2021.

C. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

EPOKA University started its academic operations during the 2007-2008 academic year based on the Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania No. 281/2008. It was established and is owned by the “Turgut Ozal Education SH.A.”¹. In 2012, based on the Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania No. 338/2012, its legal status was changed from “School of Higher Learning” [*Shkollë e Lartë*] to “University”.

In order to ensure the full compliance of the University with the changes required under the provisions of Law No. 80/2015 “On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania”, a new University Statute was adopted by the relevant bodies of EPOKA University in 2016. The Statute represents the fundamental legal act of the university which stipulates the basic norms that regulate all its activities. Pursuant to the provisions of the Albanian higher education legislation, the Statute was approved based on the Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Sports No. 146, dated 31.03.2017.

The Mission of EPOKA University is “[T]o 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.”²

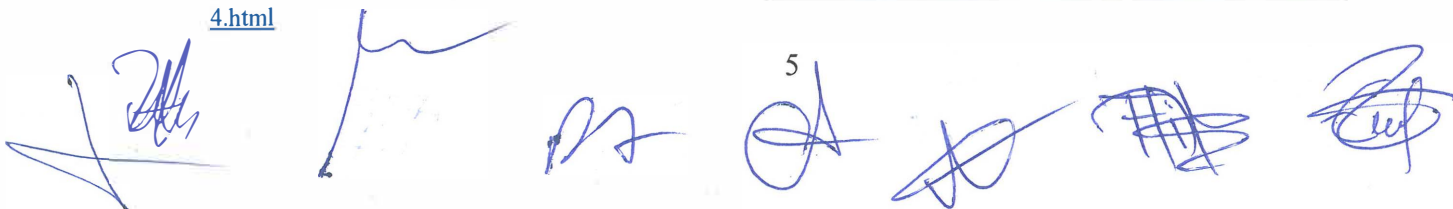
EPOKA University offers a total of 33 study programs across three Faculties: the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, and the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. The 33 study programs include 11 first cycle programs (Bachelor programs); 16 second cycle programs (8 Master of Science programs; 6 Professional Master programs; and 2 integrated second cycle programs); and 6 third cycle programs (PhD programs). Disciplines include economics, business, banking and finance, business informatics, marketing, law, political science, civil engineering, computer engineering, and architecture.

EPOKA University employs 83 full time academic staff members. The total number of students in all study programs is 2527, with the undergraduate student body representing 83 percent of the student body.

EPOKA University was granted initial institutional accreditation in 2011 by ASCAL and its first periodical institutional re-accreditation review in 2017 based on the Decision of the Accreditation Board No. 92, dated 20.10.2017. All EPOKA study programs have been nationally accredited by the

¹ Registered in the National Register Center, NIPT. K12125004O, Turgut Ozal Education sh.a.

² See Annex No.13 Statute: Article 3, and Web Page: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-about-epoka-mission-vision-1-4.html>



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Accreditation Board. The Bachelor in Banking and Finance study program has also been accredited by the international (German) EVALAG (Evaluationsagentur Baden-Württemberg) accreditation agency³.

EPOKA University has grown its number of international partnerships across the globe. The University has partner higher education institutions in the USA, UK, Italy, Germany, France, Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria, among other countries. In total, EPOKA University has 66 university partnerships around the world. EPOKA has hosted multiple student and staff mobility programs including the European Union's Erasmus+ program.

EPOKA University is also a member of several high-profile international bodies. It is the *first* Albanian university - and to date the *only* university in Albania - to become an institutional member of the highly regarded business accrediting agency AACSB International (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) and it will gradually seek accreditation in the future⁴. EPOKA is also a member of the European Universities Association (EUA)⁵, a signatory of the Magna Charta Universitatum⁶, and a member of the United Nations-supported initiative entitled "Principles of Responsible Management Education"⁷. It is also a member of the Yunus Centre in Dhaka⁸.

Furthermore, EPOKA University has been recognized and ranked at the international level. EPOKA is the only university in Albania to have been listed in U-Multirank⁹ since 2018. EPOKA University has also been ranked by QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) Rankings¹⁰ under the following categories:

- QS World University Rankings;
- QS Graduate Employability Rankings;
- QS Regional Rankings (EECA).

QS Rankings also awarded EPOKA a top score under the category of international faculty reflecting EPOKA's commitment to developing a strong and diverse international academic staff¹¹.

EPOKA University actively supports the research goals and projects of its academic staff members by granting financial support to participate in international conferences as well as financial remuneration for the publication of articles that are accepted in international peer-reviewed journals with high impact factor.

The University's academic staff have also participated in many international and national research projects, especially within the European Union research area. In 2020-2021, EPOKA University was involved in six (6) Erasmus+ CBHE projects and fourteen (14) COST actions. EPOKA is also a member of the consortium PANBioRA (Personalized And/or Non-specific Biomaterial Risk Assessment) which is part of European Commission's Horizon 2020 project.

EPOKA University's location and infrastructure help the institution realize its teaching and research objectives. The University is located close to the city of Tirana but is also in the vicinity of Tirana

³ Accreditation certificate issued by EVALAG dated 27.02.2020

⁴ <https://www.aacsb.edu/>

⁵ <https://eua.eu/>

⁶ <http://www.magna-charta.org/>

⁷ <https://www.unprme.org/>

⁸ <https://www.muhammadyunus.org/>

⁹ <https://www.umultirank.org/study-at/epoka-university-rankings>

¹⁰ <https://www.topuniversities.com/universities/epoka-university>

¹¹ <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-epoka-university-successfully-qualifies-for-qs-rankings-2021-as-a-leader-in-international-faculty-5469.html>

International Airport. EPOKA University has Albania's only self-contained campus, including three main buildings and a civil engineering laboratory. Both location and infrastructure advantages have enabled EPOKA to become a leading private university in both Albania and in the Western Balkans region.

The main body responsible for academic standards and the quality of learning at EPOKA University is the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance (PCQA). This Commission is responsible and accountable to the Academic Senate. PCQA is made up of ten members, including members of academic staff, administrative staff, one student body member, and two external members¹².

D. SELF-EVALUATION AGAINST INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW EVALUATION AREAS

EPOKA University received feedback and recommendations during the previous institutional accreditation review process in 2017. The University fully accepted and complied with the recommendations, taking steps to address the comments and recommendations made by the Accreditation Board.

Fulfilment of the Recommendations of the Previous Review

The Accreditation Board of the Albanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASCAL), in its Decision No. 92, dated 20.10.2017 "On the Institutional Periodical Accreditation of the Higher Education Institution EPOKA University", provided a *positive* final evaluation of EPOKA University. The Accreditation Board of ASCAL also made the following recommendations:

EPOKA University shall follow up the fulfillment of the following recommendations identified by the experts of the evaluation group, ranked according to priority in addressing, as follows:

- 1. The institution shall develop a clear and integrated research strategy, articulating and promoting its research priorities for all staff;*
- 2. The institution shall develop and implement an independent mechanism for controlling knowledge, including drafting exam questions, correcting them, proper curriculum coverage as well as the quality and impartiality of their assessment;*
- 3. The institution shall clarify the supporting criteria regarding the distribution of the teaching load of the academic staff, and balance with the administrative tasks in a consistent manner, throughout the institution, and, at the same time, make this transparent for the whole institution.*

Within 6 (six) months from the publication of the said decision, EPOKA University must draft a concrete Action Plan to meet these recommendations and submit it to the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

EPOKA University adopted an Action Plan to fulfil the recommendations emerging from the institutional review. The Action Plan was submitted to the Accreditation Board via Correspondence No. Prot. 257/1, dated 25.05.2018 (See **Annex No.1 Correspondence and EPOKA University Institutional Review Action Plan**). The Action Plan's specific actions, target dates, outcomes and evidence of implementation is presented in **Annex No.183 entitled 'EPOKA University Action Plan to Fulfil ASCAL Recommendations'**.

Discussion and Analysis of the Fulfilment of the Recommendations of the Accreditation Board

Numerous actions were undertaken by the University through its Action Plan in order to fulfil the recommendations put forth by Accreditation Board. The following paragraphs constitute a brief

¹² See <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/>

discussion and analysis concerning how EPOKA has satisfied the recommendations made by the accreditation agency.

In order to address Recommendation #3 of Accreditation Board, the teaching load of academic staff has been organized in a more balanced way so as to accommodate more research activities and administrative duties. In accordance with the Directive "On the Teaching Load", academic staff members who take on managerial and administrative roles will have reduced teaching loads to allow for more effective management of their respective academic study programs or centers.

Furthermore, through the adoption of the Directive "On Academic and Administrative Assessment and Quality Improvement", based on the Decision of the Academic Senate No. 03, dated 09.03.2019, coupled with the adoption of the Academic Performance Measurement and Assessment Form, based on the Decision of the Academic Senate No. 04, dated 09.03.2019, EPOKA University has applied quantitative measurements to the different tasks related to managerial and administrative duties of full-time academic staff members. This further ensures a more balanced distribution of administrative loads and also provides for the reduction of teaching loads of full-time academic staff members who take on more significant administrative loads.

Based on the above discussion, the SEG concludes that Accreditation's Board third recommendation, concerning the University - clarifying how teaching remission is calculated and awarded with a view to promoting consistency across the University, has been *fully met*.

Regarding Recommendation #2, the University has also taken steps to meet this recommendation. The framework for the fulfillment of the second recommendation includes the decision of the Academic Senate of EPOKA University to establish the *Exam Board* through Decision No. 9, dated 27.12.2017. The Exam Board of EPOKA University is composed of one representative from each of the University's three Faculties. The Exam Board carries out its activities under the auspices of the University's Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance.

The Basis and Functions of the Exam Board

The Exam Board is an EPOKA unit that resulted from the recommendations made by Accreditation Board in 2017. The basis for the exam board includes the **Directive "On the Functioning of the Exam Board"** (See Annex No.2)¹³ which includes information about the duties that the Exam Board, Faculties, and Study Program Experts should perform to ensure the quality of examinations; and the **Guideline "On Examinations"** (See Annex No.3)¹⁴ which is related to the infrastructure, invigilation responsibilities, student attitudes, and other matters concerning the examination process.

The Exam Board has the following functions. First, the Exam Board establishes guidelines and instructions for the organization of midterm exams, final exams, resit exams and additional exams; Second, the Exam Board ensures that the rules on the organization and invigilation of exams are duly implemented by all involved staff members; Third, the Exam Board ensures that midterm exams, final exams, resit exams and additional exams are conducted in compliance with the exam schedule approved by the Decanate of the each Faculty.

Fourth, the Exam Board oversees the quality assurance of tests and exams; Fifth, the Exam Board oversees and evaluates measures taken by the respective Faculties in cases of fraud (Article 4 of the

¹³ [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive On the Functioning of the Exam Board.pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive%20On%20the%20Functioning%20of%20the%20Exam%20Board.pdf)

¹⁴ [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/Guideline On Examinations.pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/Guideline%20On%20Examinations.pdf)

Regulation of EPOKA University “On Student Discipline”); Sixth, the Exam Board evaluates challenges of exam results (grade appeals) as well as the decisions of the respective Faculties (Article 23 of Regulation of EPOKA University “On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations”); Seventh, the Exam Board reviews the grade outcomes and grade appeal outcomes for all exams administered during the preceding semester submitted to it by the respective Faculty reports;

Eighth, the Exam Board prepares an annual report of its activities¹⁵; and Ninth, the Exam Board has developed documents and forms for the assessment of the quality of examinations. These include the ‘**Exam Assessment Form**’ (See Annex No.4) to be completed by experts in the relevant fields of study to assess the quality of exams on a random basis; and the ‘**Examination Period Assessment Form**’ (See Annex No.5) to be completed by respective Faculties for each study program in order to provide information regarding the number of courses and number of exams being organized, the forms of exams, the grade distribution, the number of fraud cases and decisions taken, the number of grade appeals, and the cases of grade appeals and decisions taken.

Based on the above actions taken in response to the second Recommendation of the Accreditation Board, that the University develop and implement an independent mechanism for checking exam paper questions and the marking of exams to ensure appropriate coverage of the curriculum and the quality and fairness of marking, the SEG concludes that the recommendation has been *fully met*.

Concerning Recommendation #1 of the Accreditation Board that the institution shall develop a clear and integrated research strategy, articulating and promoting its research priorities for all staff, the University has, through its Action Plan, other strategic documents, and specific research and projects strategic plans, addressed this Recommendation.

The three main strategic priorities that constitute the strategic goals of EPOKA University, stipulated in the Institutional Framework Strategy 2018-2022 are Teaching & Learning; Scientific Research & Projects; and Service to Society. These strategic goals establish the basis for the departmental strategies, including in the area of research and projects. Each faculty, department, center and other academic and administrative units make their own contribution to successfully implement the strategic goals of EPOKA University.

It is within this context that Scientific Research and Project development and implementation takes place, as stipulated in the Framework Strategy 2018-2022. EPOKA University has committed to providing opportunities to engage its staff in a wide range of research activities and other relevant projects. Such opportunities involve financial and infrastructural support which is used efficiently and productively. Research activities are oriented towards the needs of a variety of stakeholders, especially the local economy and the Albanian public administration. Scientific research activities include national and international research organizations and these activities have a strong interdisciplinary element. Project development reflects both national and European areas of interest and cooperation partners.

EPOKA has established three multidisciplinary research centers. First, the University has created the EPOKA University Center for European Studies (CES), whose main scope is to improve the understanding of European and global issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. Second, the University has created the Center of Research and Design in Applied Sciences (CoRDA), with the objective of promoting excellence in research as well as bridge-building with various sectors of the Albanian economy. Third, the University has created the Yunus Center for Social Business and

¹⁵ The report details are available upon request.

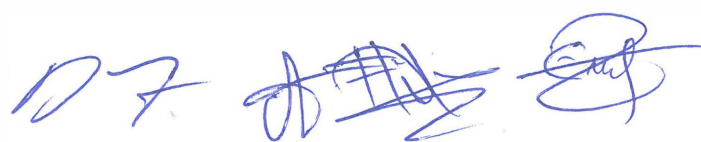
Sustainability (YCSBS) whose goals include advancing sustainable development and sustainable business practices¹⁶.

At the departmental level, the University is committed to encouraging the international mobility of researchers, participation in European-wide projects and other international programs, and the development of international networks and collaborations. Graduate programs (Master and PhD levels) are tailored towards promoting global research opportunities and are periodically updated according to the priorities of the University's strategy in Albania, the Western Balkans, and European Research Area (ERA).

The Research and Projects Office of the University also plays an important role in achieving the institutional objectives mentioned above by promoting EPOKA University's national and international reputation for research excellence; increasing the level of engagement in research among academic staff as well as the quality of research output produced; strategically building the capacities of the research base; building research capacity among PhD students and motivating them to disseminate and critically apply research.

Given the above actions taken in accordance with the Action Plan of EPOKA University in response to the recommendations made by the Accreditation Board, the SEG concludes that the first recommendation, that the University develop a clearly focused and integrated research strategy which articulates and promotes its research priorities for all staff, has been *fully met*.

Annex No.183 entitled 'EPOKA University Action Plan to Fulfil ASCAL Recommendations' describes in detail how the EPOKA University Action Plan responds to the three Recommendations.



1 - EVALUATION AREA: THE ORGANISATION AND ITS MANAGEMENT
Autonomy
Institution and its structures work in accordance with institution statute (Chapter III Standard I.1)

EPOKA University functions in accordance with its Statute¹⁷ and regulatory framework as well as its organizational scheme (**See Annex No.42 Organizational Scheme of EPOKA University**). In order to ensure full compliance with the provisions of the Law No. 80/2015 “On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania”, a new Statute was adopted by the competent bodies of EPOKA University in 2016. It was submitted for approval to the Ministry of Education and Sports. The Statute was approved by the Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Sports No. 146, dated 31.03.2017 (**See Annex No.13 Statute of EPOKA University, and Annex No.14 Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Sports No. 146, dated 31.03.2017**).

The mission and objectives of EPOKA University are in harmony with the mission of higher education in Albania as stipulated by the Law of Higher Education (80/2015). The mission of EPOKA University follows language discussed in Article 1 of the Law on Higher Education (2015) concerning teaching, research and professional training that support the economic priorities of Albania and its democratic values. The mission of EPOKA University is as follows:

Mission of EPOKA University

EPOKA University in all of its activities has as 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.

*EPOKA 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 (See Annex No. 13 Statute of EPOKA University, Article 3).*¹⁸

EPOKA has in place a whole set of rules and regulations that are based on the Albanian legislation and its Statute. These rules and regulations govern the processes and output of all the units and services at EPOKA University (**See Annex. No. 15 List of internal legal acts in force**).¹⁹

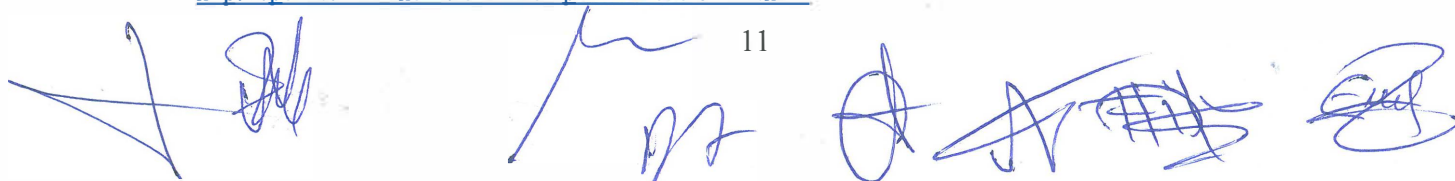
The Statute of EPOKA is approved by both the Academic Senate and the Administrative Board of the University, as stated in Articles 12 and 14 of the Statute, hence it is in compliance with Article 33 of the Law on Higher Education (80/2015) concerning the Statute (**See Annex No.16 Decision No. 02, dated 14.12.2016 of the Academic Senate, and Annex. 17 Decision No. 11, dated 11.01.2017 of the Higher Board of EPOKA University**).

EPOKA is in compliance with Article 18 of the Law on Higher Education (80/2015) concerning its status and its organization as a University. EPOKA is committed to teaching, research and professional development. EPOKA offers programs in all three degree cycles Bachelor, Master and PhD (**See Annex No. 18 List of**

¹⁷ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/legal-acts/Statute_Uni_epoka_en.pdf

¹⁸ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/legal-acts/Statute_Uni_epoka_en.pdf

¹⁹ <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-doc-publications-6-404.html>



study programs). Teaching is carried out by academic staff in three faculties. EPOKA has had a three-faculty structure since the 2017-2018 academic year.²⁰

The University also has three research centers: 1) Center for European Studies, which resides within the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences; 2) The Center for Research and Design in Applied Sciences, which operates under the Rector's Office; 3) The Yunus Center for Social Business and Sustainability which functions as part of the Rector's Office.²¹

The Statute and internal regulations of EPOKA are regularly updated to reflect the changes both in the Albanian national legal framework and EPOKA's institutional needs. Key changes occurred in 2012, with the approval of doctoral degrees, and in 2016, following the adoption of the new Law on Higher Education in Albania as well as several related acts.

In sum, the Self-Evaluation Group (SEG) considers EPOKA to be in full compliance with the requirement of National Quality Standard III, I.1, concerning EPOKA's Statute and its regulatory practices. Regulations are in harmony with Albanian national legislation as well as with the Statute and the overall mission of the University.

Institution is organised in such a way as to ensure efficiency in management (Chapter III Standard I.2)

There is a clear distribution of roles and functions within the University. There are vertical hierarchies of decision-making in the management of administrative, financial and student affairs resources. In the management of academic affairs and research, there are collegial decision-making systems and policies (**See Annex No. 13 Statute of EPOKA University**).

The organizational and management structure of EPOKA University includes decision-making bodies, notably, the Academic Senate, the Rectorate and the Administrative Board. The managing authorities at EPOKA include the Rector, University Administrator, Vice-Rector, and the Deans of the three Faculties.

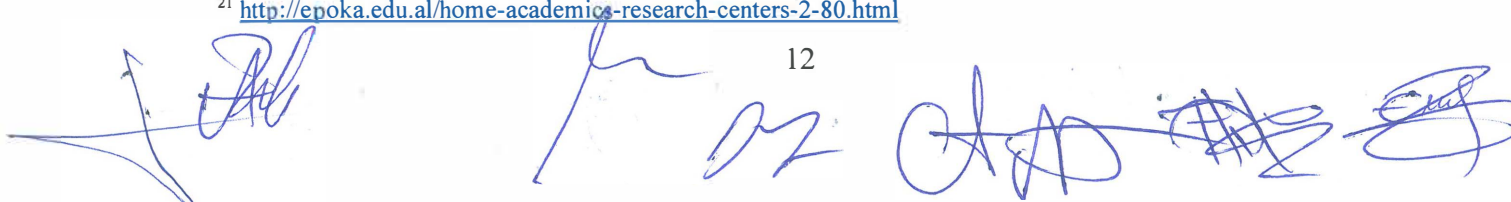
The Academic Senate is a collegial decision-making body of the University. The Academic Senate defines the institution's development policies, and it also plans, coordinates, directs and creates mechanisms for the control of teaching and scientific research activities. The Academic Senate also evaluates the effectiveness of teaching and scientific research activities and decides on the most important issues of the institution related to teaching and scientific research. The Academic Senate operates based on the legal provisions on higher education in the Republic of Albania as well as the University Statute and Regulations. During its operations, the Academic Senate cooperates in decision-making processes with the Administrative Board of the University (**See Annex No. 13 Statute of EPOKA University, Article 15/1 and 15/2**).

The Academic Senate meets regularly in ordinary sessions and also in extraordinary sessions during the calendar year. For instance, the Academic Senate held 10 meetings in 2020, 7 meetings in 2019, 7 meetings

²⁰ The Law on Higher Education (80/2015) stipulates that a higher education institution (HEI) holding the 'University' status shall have at least three faculties. In order to meet the requirements of the Law on Higher Education (80/2015), based on the Ordinance No. 116, dated 13.03.2017, of the Minister of Education and Sports, EPOKA University has been re-organized into a HEI comprising three faculties: the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, the re-organized Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences and the newly established Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. The Faculty of Law and Social Sciences started its academic activities during the 2017-2018 academic year.

<http://epoka.edu.al/home-academics-faculties-2-76.html>

²¹ <http://epoka.edu.al/home-academics-research-centers-2-80.html>



in 2018 and 10 meetings in 2017 (See **Annex No. 19 Sample - Decisions of the Academic Senate Meeting No. 02, dated 06.05.2020**).

The Ethics Board promotes and reviews issues related to ethics that arise during the teaching and research process, as well as during other institutional activities. The Ethics Board consists of five members. The Vice-Dean of Students and the Vice-President of the Student Council on ethics issues are members of the Ethics Board. The Academic Senate also elects a full-time academic staff member from each Faculty as a member of the Ethics Board for a two-year period with the right of re-election by also electing the Chairperson of the Ethics Board among them. The Board makes proposals to the Rector about ethics-related issues.²² The Ethics Board is also the body responsible for ensuring compliance with the Code of Ethics of the University by the academic staff, administrative staff, and students (See **Annex No. 20 Code of Ethics, dated 19.12.2018**).²³

The Rectorate is a collegial executive body of the University. It consists of the Rector, who chairs the meetings, Vice-Rector(s), Deans of Faculties, Administrator, the Dean of Students, the Vice-Dean of Students, and the head of the unit responsible for legal matters.

The Rectorate has as its main functions the drafting of the long-term strategic development plan of the institution, the formulation of criteria for the allocation of financial, material and human resources and their submission for approval to the Administrative Board, and the monitoring and publication of results concerning the evaluation of the activities of the University. The Rectorate also monitors the implementation of the institutional strategic development plan and follows-up the implementation of the decisions adopted by the Academic Senate and Administrative Board. It proposes to the Administrative Board the employment, promotion and dismissal of academic, assisting academic and administrative staff, and takes decisions on the appointment of the academic, assisting academic and administrative staff to parallel positions (See **Annex No. 13 Statute of EPOKA University, Article 23**).

Prior to the beginning of each academic year and in the framework of the drafting of the institutional budget, the Rector's Office requests that all departments and other units provide their justified requests in terms of human resources as well as physical, material and IT infrastructure needs for the subsequent academic year. After evaluation by the Rector's Office, these proposals are submitted for approval to the Administrative Board (See **Annex No.21 Table for HR and Infrastructure needs, and Annex No. 22 Decision of the Decanate of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences No. 2 dated 06.07.2020 "Proposal on the Human Resources and Infrastructure Needs for the 2020-2021 academic year"**).

In terms of the support for the activities of academic staff, the Rectorate is the body that decides on the granting of financial support to academic staff members concerning participation in international conferences and related scientific events as well as regarding the granting of financial rewards to academic staff members who publish in international peer reviewed journals (See **Annex No.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"**).

The Rectorate is convened, as a rule, no less than once every two weeks. The Rectorate held 46 meetings during 2020, 45 meetings during 2019, 43 meetings during 2018 and 41 meetings during 2017 (See **Annex No.24 Sample Decision of the Rectorate No. 5 dated 04.02.2020**).

²² Annex No.13 Statute of EPOKA University, Article 29.

²³ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/codes/01-Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>



The Administrative Board is the highest collegial administrative decision-making body, which guarantees the fulfillment of the institution's mission as well as the administrative and financial sustainability of the institution. The Administrative Board oversees and controls the activities of the University related to administrative, financial and economic management as well as the management of institutional assets. The members of the Administrative Board are appointed by the Supervisory Board of the Founding Company for a period of five years and may be re-appointed. The Administrative Board consists of five members. The University Administrator performs the function of rapporteur at the meetings of the Administrative Board. The Administrative Board held 7 meetings in 2020, 8 meetings in 2019, 12 meetings in 2018 and 13 meetings in 2017 (See **Annex No.25 Sample - Decisions of the Administrative Board Meeting No. 06, dated 11.11.2020**).

The Rector is the highest academic authority of the institution and is its legal representative for academic and protocol issues. The Rector holds the "Professor" title and is appointed for a four-year term which may be renewed only once in the same position and institution. The Rector chairs the Academic Senate and the Rectorate and ensures the implementation of their decisions. The other functions and competencies of the Rector are defined in Article 46 of the Statute of EPOKA University.²⁴

The Dean is the managing authority of the Faculty. There are three Deans representing three Faculties at EPOKA University. The Dean represents and acts on behalf of the Faculty, and he/she is part of the academic staff under the "Professor" category. The Dean is a member of the Academic Senate and exercises control over the lawfulness of managing authorities within the Faculty. The other functions and competencies of the Dean are defined in Article 50 of the Statute of EPOKA University.²⁵

The University Administrator is the highest authority responsible for the administrative and financial functioning of the institution. The University Administrator is the legal representative of the institution for financial and administrative affairs. The University Administrator is appointed and dismissed by the Administrative Board.

The University Administrator should possess a higher education degree at the level "Master of Science" or higher in the field of economics and at least seven years of experience in the field. The University Administrator cannot exercise any other academic or administrative functions. The University Administrator reports respectively to the Administrative Board and the Academic Senate with regard to the fulfillment of financial, administrative and academic duties. The other functions and competencies of the University Administrator are defined in Article 61/7 of the Statute of EPOKA University.²⁶

Institution encourages constructive debate (Chapter III Standard I.3)

As referenced above, the constitution of the decision-making bodies, their composition, competencies and functioning, as well as the monitoring and controlling of these functions, are based on EPOKA's Statute and its regulatory framework. The same is true for the managing authorities at EPOKA University.

EPOKA University is committed to further deepening the formal division of roles and activities between the management, administrative staff and academic personnel. This is explicitly stated in the Statute and the regulatory framework of EPOKA University.

²⁴ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/legal-acts/Statute_Uni_epoka_en.pdf

²⁵ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/legal-acts/Statute_Uni_epoka_en.pdf

²⁶ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/legal-acts/Statute_Uni_epoka_en.pdf



At EPOKA University, all university authorities, and academic and administrative units, are involved in the decision-making process relevant to their areas of competence and expertise. The relevant meeting agendas and related materials are distributed before all meetings, and the decision-making takes place within the formal meeting structure. This procedure is stipulated in the regulations (**See Annex No.26 Sample Agenda of the Meeting of Rectorate No.20 dated 16.06.2020**).

Institution respects its autonomy limits. (Chapter III Standard I.4)

In compliance with standards and guidelines (No. 1.1) of ESG, EPOKA University has set up a comprehensive system of accountability and monitoring. The main collegial bodies are the Academic Senate, the Rectorate, the Administrative Board, the Ethics Board, and the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance (PCQA). They ensure the legal compliance and the implementation of the rules and regulations of the University.²⁷

EPOKA University regularly makes use of external stakeholders in its decision-making processes, namely, external experts, representatives from the labour market, and EPOKA alumni. For instance, the PCQA has two external experts among its members, one of whom is an alumni and another one who has extensive experience in the labor market.²⁸

Transparency and accountability in financial policies and the administration of funds EPOKA has enabled EPOKA to become eligible to participate in different cooperation programs and activities such as EU programs, notably, Horizon2020, Erasmus+ Mobility and Capacity Building Projects, Jean Monnet, Visegrad Projects and COST Actions.²⁹

Institution establishes a development strategy. (Chapter III Standard I.5)

EPOKA as an institution has also followed a strategic process and has established a formal institutional development strategy (**Chapter III Standard I.5**). The first institutional development strategy was created in 2012 for the period 2013-2017, and was entitled the Strategic Plan “On Creating Public Value”. EPOKA University monitored and ensured that its obligations and promises were implemented successfully in its strategy document for 2013-2017 (**See Annex No. 27 Final Evaluation Report of the Strategic Plan 2013-2017**).³⁰

In 2017, the University developed new goals and aspirations for its future. The new goals in the Framework Strategy 2018-2022 build upon a decade of educational progress and institutional improvement (**See Annex No.28 Framework Strategy 2018-2022**).³¹ EPOKA ambitiously seeks to be faithful to the recent Albanian national development strategies, increasing public demand for higher education, as well as the interests of its stakeholders, including the owners, students, alumni, staff and the faculty. These goals are also consistent with the most recent regional and global educational and economic policies. This strategy envisages a greater

²⁷ See for instance, Annex No.13 Statute. The role of the Senate is to “monitor, assess, provide and maintain responsibility for providing a quality academic institution, in accordance with contemporary standards.”

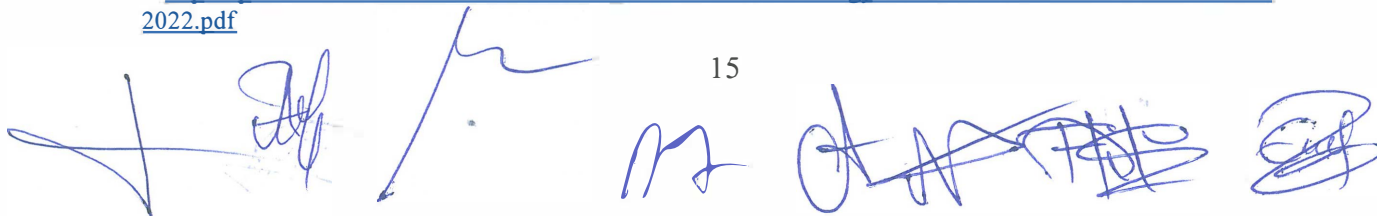
²⁸ See the composition of the PCQA <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/cat-permanent-commission-on-quality-assurance-1408.html>

²⁹ See Evaluation Area 2 “Resourcing” and Evaluation Area 4 Section – “Research”.

<http://projects.epoka.edu.al/home.html>

³⁰ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/Final%20Evaluation%20Report%20of%20the%20Strategic%20Plan%202013-2017.pdf>

³¹ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%2012%2019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf



role of EPOKA in local, national and regional development, and a greater engagement with the local and global community.

EPOKA's Framework Strategy for 2018-2022 was drafted with the participation of all the decision-making bodies and managing authorities, academic staff and administrative units. It was discussed in detail and approved by the Rectorate, Academic Senate and Administrative Board. The ongoing evaluation of the strategy allows for better and more efficient management and provides continuously updated information to all authorities.

The Framework Strategy for 2018-2022 has set the goals and objectives for the future development of the University in order to fulfill its mission, purpose, and obligations. The strategic plan contains the strategic goals and their respective performance indicators to measure outcomes as well as estimated budgets for different objectives and goals. EPOKA's Framework Strategy for 2018-2022 makes reference to its mission and status in its preamble. Furthermore, all units, academic and administrative, have drafted their own strategic plans based on and pursuant to the Framework Strategy for 2018-2022, establishing unit-based goals and objectives (See **Annex No.29 Sample Academic Unit – Department of Economics - Strategic Plan 2018-2022**, and **Annex No.30 Sample Administrative Unit International Relations Office - Strategic Plan for Internationalization 2018-2022**).³²

An interim evaluation report was planned at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year, however due to the complications created by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Rectorate decided to extend the implementation deadline to 2021-2022 with regards to the instruments and actions that were envisaged to be implemented in 2020. This was true for the Framework Strategy for 2018-2022 and respective Action Plan, and the strategic plans and action plans of all academic and administrative units.

Institution publishes the annual report, submits it to the Ministry of Education and Sport, academic staff and students (Chapter III Standard I.6)

Every year EPOKA publishes and submits its annual report to the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth according to the Law No. 80/2015. (**Chapter III Standard I.6**). The report contains the most important internal and external activities of the institution, its achievements and data on particular themes and subjects. More specifically, the Annual Report addresses the mission, accomplishment of objectives, institutional data, compliance, financing and management of resources, evaluation and recommendations.

The Annual Report is disseminated among the University's personnel, stakeholders, and other interested parties via the official page of the University³³ and in the form of a printed document.³⁴ The information provided by the Annual Report ensures transparency for stakeholders and helps the institution with the internal and external assessment.

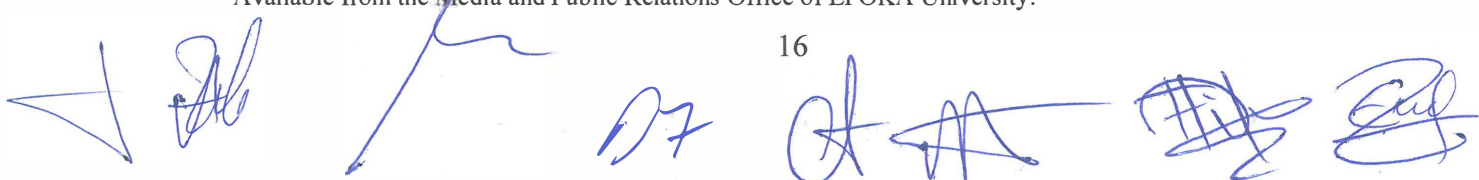
Organisation of Higher Education Institutions

Institution establishes appropriate structures to accomplish its mission and purpose (Chapter III Standard II.1)

³² <http://eco.epoka.edu.al/home-strategic-plan-243-1800.html>

³³ <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/home-annual-reports-1479-2743.html>

³⁴ Available from the Media and Public Relations Office of EPOKA University.



EPOKA has established appropriate structures to accomplish its mission and purpose (**Chapter III Standard II.I**). The organization and management structures are stipulated in the Statute of the University and they are in full compliance with the Albanian legal framework in force as evidenced by the Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Sports No. 146, dated 31.03.2017, which has approved the Statute of EPOKA University (See **Annex No.14 Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Sports No. 146, dated 31.03.2017**).

In compliance with the Law of Higher Education, the University ensures full autonomy to the Academic Senate and academic freedom to its academic staff (See **Annex No.13 Statute, Article 5**).³⁵ These norms and provisions are stipulated in both the Statute and the regulations and are in accordance with the requirements of the Law of Higher Education. The academic staff at EPOKA University enjoys academic freedom in the teaching and learning process and in research and innovation, as stipulated under the Law no. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015 "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Institutions of Higher Education in the Republic of Albania" and the Statute of EPOKA University (See **Annex No.13 Statute, Article 5 and 65**).³⁶

Furthermore, all organizational units are autonomous within their competencies (See for instance **Regulation on the Center for European Studies (See Annex No.31)**, and **Regulation on the Center of Research and Design in Applied Sciences (See Annex No.32)**).³⁷

EPOKA University is in full compliance with its status as a University according to the **Law on Higher Education No. 80/2015, Article 18**. The University has three faculties: Faculty of Architecture and Engineering (FAE), Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences (FEAS), and the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences (FLSS). The Center for European Studies is a basic unit under the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences whereas the Center of Research and Design in Applied Sciences, the Yunus Center for Social Business and Sustainability and the Center for Continuous Education are under the Rector's Office (See **Annex No.42 Organizational Scheme of EPOKA University**). EPOKA offers first, second and third cycle study programs (See **Annex No.18 List of study programs offered by EPOKA University**).

EPOKA offers high quality education in professional fields (engineering, architecture, economics and administrative sciences) as well as in social sciences and humanities (law and political science). The academic offerings have been classified under the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) (See **Annex No.33 Academic Offer according to ISCED**).

According to the Statute and Regulations, each Faculty has three basic units, out of which two are departments. Each basic unit has seven or more full-time academic staff members, three of whom hold at least a PhD. or higher academic title.³⁸

All the above information has been published online. Since 2009, EPOKA has had a website with an .edu domain registered in Albania.³⁹ EPOKA's website has consistently been among the three highest ranked in

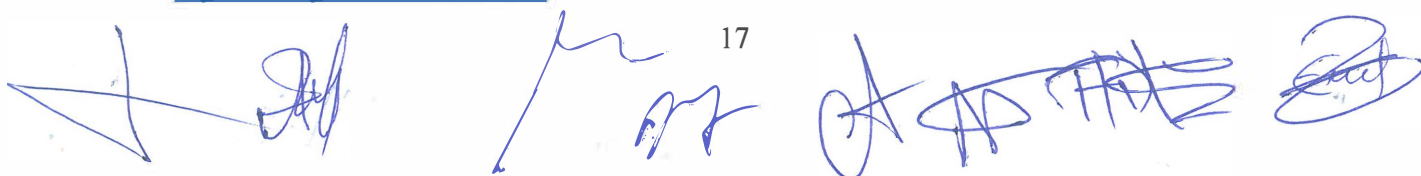
³⁵ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/legal-acts/Statute_Uni_epoka_en.pdf

³⁶ According to Article 5 of the Statute which is in compliance with the provisions of the 2015 Higher Education Law: "Academic freedom is guaranteed through the right a) to organize teaching, scientific research and creative activities; b) to prepare and develop study programs and to define scientific research areas; c) to organize the process of the promotion of academic personnel".

³⁷ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/RegCES.pdf>; Regulation on the Center of Research and Design in Applied Sciences <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-the-center-of-research-and-design-in-architecture.pdf>

³⁸ See Annex No.182 Summary Tables.

³⁹ <http://www.epoka.edu.al/home.html>



Albania.⁴⁰ This is an indicator that the website has been used frequently by students and other interested parties, and that it contains relevant and coherent information for its users.

Management bodies facilitate decision-making by favoring debate in institution boards (Chapter III Standard II.3)

In accordance with points mentioned in chapter 1.1.2, management bodies facilitate a collegial decision-making process at all levels and for all units across the University, favoring a process of inclusion. **(Standard III, II.3).** Boards give opinions and proposals, and make relevant collegial decisions, which are then forwarded to the decision-making bodies and managing authorities for the final decision to be taken (See **Annex No.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, and Annex No.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**).

The academic staff members participate in internal debates and discussions in accordance with institutional procedures prescribed by the Statute. Each Department is composed of all academic staff members and the latter are involved in the decision-making process of all areas of responsibility of each Department (See **Annex No.13 Statute, Article 12/5**). Furthermore, according to the Statute, all full-time academic staff are members of the General Assembly of Academic Staff of each Faculty (See **Annex No.13 Statute, Article 28**).

Partnership

Institution conducts market research to accomplish its mission and purpose (Chapter III Standard III.1)

Decision-making, policies and guidelines at EPOKA University are evidence-based and follow the best practices in higher education and the administration of world-class universities and related organizations concerning institutional cooperation and strategic partnerships.

The Framework Strategy 2018-2022 is based on research conducted at EPOKA University and other institutions (See **Annex No.28 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University 2018-2022, p. 10-11, 20**). Some of the flagship programs of the University are Architecture, Civil Engineering, Information Technology and Business, which are some of the most promising areas for the development of the Albanian economy and some of the most attractive programs for Albanian high school students (See **Annex No.36 INSTAT Studentë në arsimin e lartë sipas fushave të studimit [Students in higher education according to areas of study]**). These areas also employ more than 50% of the Albanian workforce. This focus is also consistent with the employment strategies of the Albanian government, which emphasizes the role of vocational education in the fields of ICT, business and construction to promote the expansion of small and medium enterprises (SME's).⁴¹

For instance, when introducing a new program proposal, the proposing Department conducts a thorough market study to justify the opening of the program, as in the case of the new Bachelor program in Software Engineering (See **Annex No.37 Sample - Report on the market study for the opening of the Bachelor**

⁴⁰ See Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (January 2021) Webometrics Ranking of World Universities. <http://www.webometrics.info/en/Europe/Albania>

⁴¹ National Employment and Skills Strategy (2014-2020) of the Albanian Government in http://www.sociale.gov.al/files/documents_files/Albania_EMP-SKILLS_STRATEGY_ActionPlan_2014_.pdf

Program in Software Engineering). In the above case, the new Bachelor program in Software Engineering was offered successfully as of the 2019-2020 academic year and the formally approved maximum admission quotas were filled for two consecutive years, demonstrating the relevance and the validity of the conducted market study.

EPOKA University also has a graduate tracking program to track student employment which is managed by the Career Planning and Alumni Office. The data is published in EPOKA's Annual Reports. The Office gives high priority to following our university graduates, because in this dynamic world networks are so important for everyone, and EPOKA wants to constantly strengthen University and alumni networks. The Career Planning and Alumni Office specialist contacts all graduates by phone, mail, email and social media. After contacting each student, the Office updates all information on alumni.

For instance, concerning the recent graduates for 2018-2019, it was found that 42.9% work in the private sector, 18.9% work in the State Administration, 16.4% pursued a Masters, 1% pursued a PhD., 2.3% work in the private sector while enrolled in a Masters, 0.4% work in the State Administration while enrolled in a Masters, 3.3% are doing Internship, 0.6% are business owners, 1.6 are business startup founders, 1.8% are looking for jobs, and for 9.7% there is no data. The employment rate for the 2018-2019 cohort was 87.4% **(See Annex No.38 Annual Report 2019-2020).**

Both the Turgut Ozal Education SH.A., the parent company, and EPOKA University comply with the legal framework of the Republic of Albania concerning competition in the education market. This commitment has also been incorporated into the Statute of EPOKA University **(Article 3 of the Statute).**

Institution pursues an open strategy of collaboration and partnership at a regional, national and international level (Chapter III Standard III.2)

EPOKA University has envisioned and actively promotes building strategic collaborations and partnerships at the regional, national and international level **(Chapter III, Standard III.2).** The commitment to cooperation and partnerships is confirmed in the Statute, Framework Strategy Plan for 2018-2022, and the Strategic Plan for Internationalization for 2018-2022 **(See Annex No.30 Strategic Plan for Internationalization for 2018-2022).**

The Strategic Plan for Internationalization for 2018-2022 includes actions and activities in the areas of institutional branding, outbound and inbound mobility, research collaboration, and curriculum and campus initiatives. These are aimed at accomplishing the growth, diversification and enhancement of the University. These goals and objectives are accompanied by specific measurable indicators that service to enhance the University's ability to realize comprehensive internationalization.

EPOKA has been active in promoting staff and student exchange programs through Erasmus+, and continually engages in research collaboration with foreign universities through Horizon 2020, as well as capacity building projects through Erasmus+ CBHE and the TEMPUS program. EPOKA is also the first-in-country Albanian member of AACSB International and will eventually seek accreditation of business programs in the future. EPOKA is also a member of the European Universities Association (EUA), a signatory of the Magna Charta Universitatum, a member of the United Nations-supported Principles of Responsible Management Education and an institutional participant in the Yunus Centre in Dhaka.⁴²

⁴² <http://epoka.edu.al/membership/cat-memberships-2332.html>

Institution pursues a cooperation strategy with other supporting institutions (Chapter III Standard III.3)

In order to better serve its student population, EPOKA collaborates with other national entities that support EPOKA's mission, objectives and activities (**Standard III, II.3**). Through its business partners, EPOKA offers transportation to and from the city of Tirana and Durrës, as well as catering services, printing facilities and services, among other services and functions.⁴³

EPOKA cooperates with other supporting organizations to help fulfill needs in order to successfully realize objectives of the study programs. EPOKA collaborates with about 50 institutions and enterprises in order to provide internships or facilities to carry out academic curriculum requirements and objectives.⁴⁴

Institution pursues a favouring policy for mobility of academic personnel and students at an international level (Chapter III Standard III.4)

EPOKA encourages the mobility of its academic personnel and its students at both the national and international levels (**Standard III, II.4**). The University supports the participation of its academic staff in international activities financially and logistically. Furthermore, international scholars and students find at EPOKA University a welcoming environment that enables them to enhance their professional experience within a welcoming and supportive social environment. The University is guided by a set of policies and guidelines that promote the mobility of its students and the academic staff (**See Annex No. 39 Policy on participation of academic and assisting academic staff members in activities outside the University and in activities representing the University, Annex No.40 Student Exchange Regulation, and Annex No.41 Directive on Promotion of Scientific Publications**).

The number of students and staff members participating in Erasmus+ programs has increased significantly. The University continues to increase efforts to further boost the number of opportunities or programs and encourage students and staff participation.

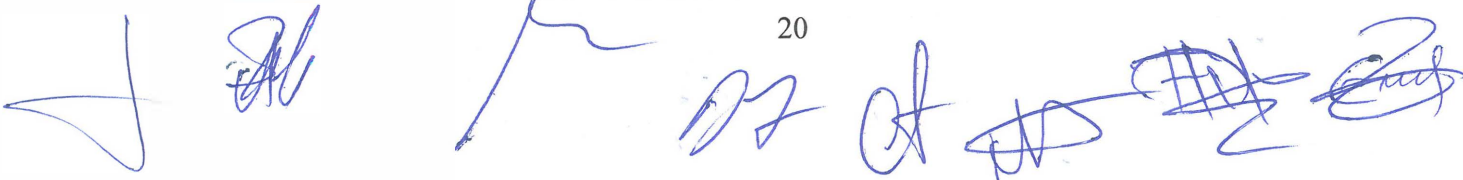
In its Strategic Plan for 2018 – 2022, EPOKA has laid out its purpose of increasing the satisfaction of students and academic staff, including those coming from other countries. The International Relations Office organizes Orientation Sessions for all incoming students and staff members within the framework of mobility programs. The Human Resources Office assists all foreign staff members with procedures related to the obtaining of work permits, residence permits, health certificates and other important documents. Among the activities organized for international staff is an Orientation Program that is organized by the Human Resources Office for every newly employed staff member, including foreign employees, in order to ensure a more comprehensive and smoother integration of newly hired staff members into the EPOKA University community (**See Annex No.172 Sample - Orientation Program for the New Full-Time and Part-Time Academic Staff dated 12/10/2020**).

Conclusion and Judgement

In sum, upon examining the standards and structures of the organization and management area at EPOKA University, the Self-Evaluation Group concludes that EPOKA's organization and management area is in full compliance with the Albanian higher education legal framework and state quality standards in this regard.

⁴³ See Evaluation Area 2 – Resourcing.

⁴⁴ <http://epoka.edu.al/membership/cat-partnerships-2322.html>



The organization and management is also in line with the mission of EPOKA and with the principles of academic management and administration, including autonomy, efficiency and openness, which are explicitly stipulated in the Statute of EPOKA University. EPOKA's best practices are also in line with the European standards and guidelines (e.g. ESG 1.1) concerning policies, procedures, structures and processes surrounding quality assurance.

EPOKA's best practices show that the standards of accountability and transparency are also fully met. While the Framework Strategic Plan discussed above sets out clear goals, indicators and monitoring structures to allow EPOKA to pursue its mission, policies and regulations are also transparent for students and other relevant stakeholders. EPOKA is also in compliance with standard 1.8 of the ESG in that it publishes information about its activities on a daily basis on its official website.

EPOKA's management and administrative structures are organized in a manner that provides efficiency, while its decision-making process is transparent and evidence-based, taking into consideration both institutional and environmental inputs (market demands, government policies, for example). EPOKA has also implemented an effective Covid-19 strategic plan (**See Annex No.184 EPOKA University's Response to the Covid-19 Crisis: Continuing Quality Assurance**) which resulted in a relatively seamless transition from classroom to online instruction, in accordance with guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth.

EPOKA's extensive network of reliable partners, nationally and internationally, further enables the University to implement its strategy for growth and to fulfill its higher education mission.

EPOKA has demonstrated that standards within this first area of evaluation are fully met.

2 - EVALUATION AREA: RESOURCING

Management of human resources

Institution pursues an open policy of human resources employment and recruitment (Chapter III Standard IV.1)

EPOKA University strives to manage its resources in the most effective, efficient and transparent manner (**Chapter III Standard IV.1**). There are clear rules and guidelines that ensure the full utilization of human resources, financial assets, infrastructure and learning resources.

The organizational scheme of EPOKA University is public and published on the main University webpage⁴⁵ (**See Annex No.42. Organizational Scheme of EPOKA University_EN & Sq**), in the Statute of EPOKA University (**See Annex No.13 Statute of EPOKA University**) and in the Annual Reports that EPOKA University submits every year to the Ministry of Education⁴⁶.

EPOKA University draws support from a large pool of part-time academic staff members that are engaged professionally and academically with the subjects they teach⁴⁷ (**See Annex No.182 Summary Tables - Table No.1**). The recruitment process is transparent and follows the Regulation of EPOKA University "On Staff Recruitment" (**See Annex No.43 Regulation of EPOKA University "On Staff Recruitment"**).

EPOKA University publicizes the specific procedures and criteria on staff recruitment as explicitly stated in the Regulation of EPOKA University "On Staff Recruitment". This can be accessed at the webpage⁴⁸. The respective information for each job vacancy and application criteria are integrated in the job vacancy description (**See Annex No.44 Sample of Job vacancy Description**). Positions are published on the official job opportunities website⁴⁹ and on other national⁵⁰ or international⁵¹ job advertisement sites (**See Annex No.45 Email sent to be Jobs.ac.uk, AKADEUS and Duapune**). In addition, EPOKA University publishes information to invite highly qualified candidates to join EPOKA University.

EPOKA University promotion policies and regulations for assessment of and the vertical or horizontal promotion of academic staff are set out in the Statute of EPOKA University (**See Annex No.13 Statute of EPOKA University, Chapter II "Academic Personnel", Chapter IV "Administrative Personnel"**). It is also set out in the Directive of EPOKA University "On Academic and Administrative Performance Assessment and Quality Improvement" (**See Annex No.46 Directive of EPOKA University "On Academic and Administrative Performance Assessment and Quality Improvement"**). Assessment is also set out in the Academic Performance Assessment and Quality Improvement Board (ACAQIB), Administrative Performance Assessment and Quality Improvement Board (ADAQIB), and the Regulation of EPOKA University "On the Organization and Functioning of the Permanent Commission on the Conferring of the PhD Scientific Degree" (**See Annex No.47**

⁴⁵See organization scheme of EPOKA University available at the link:

http://epoka.edu.al/mat/univ_org_scheme_EN_nov_2018.pdf

⁴⁶ See annual reports of EPOKA University available at the link:

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

⁴⁷ The number of the part-time academic staff engaged in teaching for the academic year of 2020-2021 is 22.

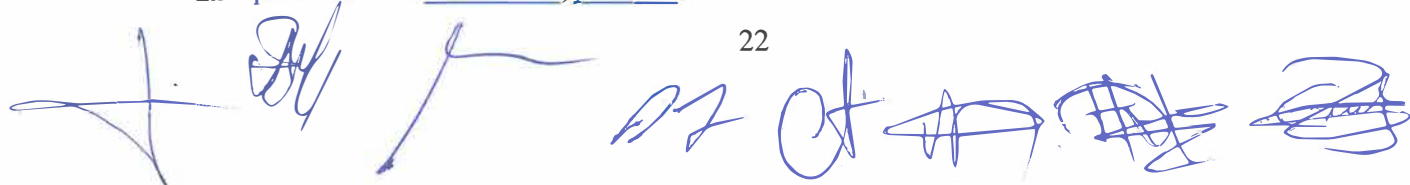
⁴⁸ See Regulation available at the link:

http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/Regulation_Staff_Recruitment.pdf

⁴⁹ See available at the link: [Job Opportunities Webpage](#)

⁵⁰ Example available at: duapune.com

⁵¹ Example available at: akadeus.com; jobs.ac.uk.



Regulation “On the Organization and Functioning of the Permanent Commission on the Conferring of the PhD Scientific Degree”).

Moreover, the regulations for the awarding of academic titles (i.e. “Associate Professor” and “Professor” titles) have been developed in cooperation with Albanian public universities, such as the University of Tirana, Tirana Polytechnic University and the Agricultural University of Tirana which are entitled to confer these academic titles pursuant to the provisions of the Albanian higher education legislation.

The hiring regulations and policies are in accordance with **Articles No. 64-66 of the Law No. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015 “On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania”,** and the **Labor Code of the Republic of Albania.** The internal regulation and procedures also set out the employment and assessment criteria (**See Annex No.43 Regulation “On Staff Recruitment”, Articles 6, 8, 10 and 11).**

Procedures on staff recruitment at EPOKA University are also regulated by the internal Regulation of EPOKA University “On Staff Recruitment” (**See Annex No.43 Regulation “On Staff Recruitment”**) and are in compliance with the Statute of the University and the Albanian national legislation governing the recruitment of full-time academic staff, part-time academic staff, assistant academic staff and administrative staff.

The recruitment process is transparent, and it is in accordance with the Regulation of EPOKA University “On Staff Recruitment”, which can be also accessed at the webpage⁵². At the same time, **see Annex No.48 Sample of the individual employment contract for “Academic Staff”, “Administrative Staff”, “Adjunct Academic Staff”, “Laboratory Assistants” and “Teaching Assistant”.**

EPOKA University’s mission is to be an excellent national and international institution in education and research. In this context, hiring international academic staff and qualified academic staff from internationally recognized universities is a priority and serves to fill EPOKA’s objective of internationalizing the University.

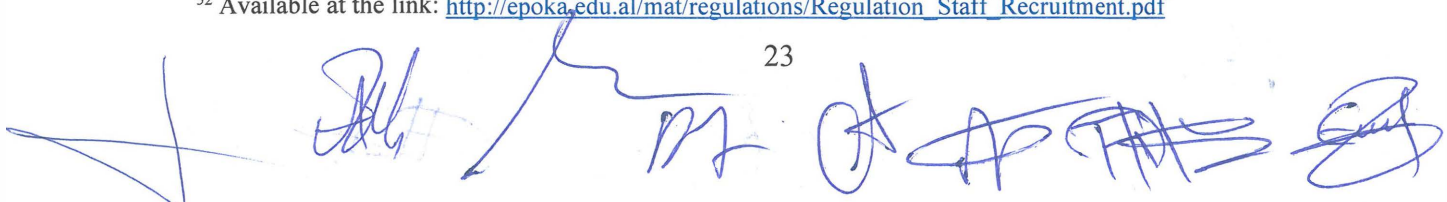
Over 60% of EPOKA University academic staff is trained in internationally-renowned universities. The university attracts such staff because its language of instruction is English and because of its aspirations for academic excellence. Yet the university does not have a hiring policy to positively discriminate in favor of those that have graduated from international universities.

Institution pursues a policy of integration of academic staff, assisting teaching, scientific staff and administrative staff (Chapter III Standard IV.2)

Each Faculty at EPOKA has set out a practice for the orientation and integration of new employees at the university in the academic and organizational culture of EPOKA University. The staff is greeted with a ‘welcome information package’ and is socialised through informal meetings with other members of the faculty.

At the same time, at the beginning of their employment, new employees participate in orientation sessions organized by the Human Resources Office and the ICTC Office of EPOKA University (**See Annex No.172 Sample - Orientation Program for the New Full Time and Part Academic Staff dated 12/10/2020).** Through these orientation sessions, new employees are introduced to the university

⁵² Available at the link: http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/Regulation_Staff_Recruitment.pdf



procedures and operational regulations. Each new employee is provided with a 'Staff Guide' (**See Annex No.49 Staff Guide**). This can be accessed at the webpage⁵³ alongside other materials available to students and the general public.

New employees are also invited to attend welcome lunches that serve the purpose of introducing them to the management and to their new colleagues. These activities tend to create a pleasant and friendly environment at EPOKA University. The departing staff is also given with a farewell event.

EPOKA University also engages its staff in the organization of an information day for prospective students. Each year the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, in collaboration with the Regional Directorate of Education, organizes an Education Fair where EPOKA University participates. At the Education Fair, the staff of EPOKA University informs high school students about the study programs, scholarship opportunities, and other benefits offered by EPOKA University. At the Education Fair, EPOKA University has its own stand and provides interested students and parents with information brochures containing detailed information about EPOKA University (**See Annex No.50 Promotional Brochures and Leaflets**).

Additionally, the EPOKA University webpage publishes information about admissions deadlines, the Career Planning Program, its schedule (**See Annex No.51 Plan of Career Planning program for High School Students**), admissions criteria and scholarship opportunities, and other key facts and data to help inform students and parents⁵⁴. The Admission Office and the Media and Public Relations Office at EPOKA University prepare and print brochures and other informational leaflets. This information is distributed to all the students, parents, stakeholders, and other parties who are interested in EPOKA. At the same time, the Admission Office has published all contact details on the University website. The Admission Office can be contacted via phone, mobile phone, e-mail, Facebook⁵⁵, Instagram⁵⁶, Twitter⁵⁷, LinkedIn⁵⁸.

Institution pursues a policy of periodic assessment of its staff skills (Chapter III Standard IV.3)

EPOKA University provides training and development for both academic and administrative staff as stipulated in the Goal G.4 of the EPOKA University Framework Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2022 (**See Annex No.28 Framework Strategy EPOKA University 2018-2022**)⁵⁹. Training activities⁶⁰ in the area of teaching, learning and research are tailored to the needs of staff (**See Annex No.52 List of Training Activities for the staff**). Each department at EPOKA University has a plan that integrates the research strategy and the training development plan to be in line with the development strategy of their respective Faculty as well as that of the University.

⁵³ See Staff Guide http://epoka.edu.al/mat/staff_guide.pdf

⁵⁴ Admission Office webpage is available at the link: <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/cat-general-information-493.html>

⁵⁵ Available at the link: <https://www.facebook.com/Uniepoka/>

⁵⁶ Available at the link: <https://www.instagram.com/epokauniversity/?hl=en>

⁵⁷ Available at the link:

https://twitter.com/epokauniversity?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

⁵⁸ Available at the link: <https://www.linkedin.com/school/epoka-university/mycompany/>

⁵⁹ Available at the link:

http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%2012%2019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf

⁶⁰ Available at the link: <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/cat-training-activities-1411.html>

Based on the internal academic quality assurance standards concerning the improvement of the quality of teaching and research, the existing Directive of EPOKA University “On Academic and Administrative Performance Assessment and Quality Improvement” as well as the Directive of EPOKA University “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications”, both of which are published on the webpage⁶¹, regulate the workload in terms of the performance assessment and quality improvement, and aim at promoting motivation and achievement among staff members.

EPOKA University participates in several Erasmus+ Programs (See **Annex No.182 Summary Tables-Table No. 5.2** and **Annex No.53 List of Institutional Cooperation**). These initiatives of the European Union have enabled EPOKA University to become active in the European exchange and mobility programs for staff members. Staff members have participated in training activities in the area of teaching and learning (See **Annex No.54 List of staff members who participated in exchange programs**).

At the same time, EPOKA University organizes different social activities⁶² for its staff during the academic year. These activities may be in the format of staff retreats, open forums, training programs⁶³ with distinguished guests from the public and political realm, as well as book promotions and other intellectually rewarding activities. The above mentioned social activities, especially the open forums, provide a safe space for social dialogue among different important actors of the Albanian political and economic class, where both researchers and policy-makers exchange opinions and ideas.

Staff members involved in research and other activities are nationally and internationally distinguished professors. Almost all of them have studied in Western countries and possess good backgrounds in their respective fields of study, consistent with the EPOKA University Framework Strategy and Action Plan for 2018-2022.

EPOKA University provides academic staff with the possibility of furthering their qualifications in Albania and abroad, by supporting them financially and granting administrative permission to them throughout the duration these programs. The Research and Projects Office and the International Relations Office support staff members with the related procedures in accordance with Chapter III of the Regulation “On Scientific Research”⁶⁴ (See **Annex No.55 Regulation “On Scientific Research”**; and **Annex No.56 Sample Decision on the approval of requesting financial support**).

The University also encourages giving reference letters as well as annual leave permissions to lecturers in their applications for higher academic degrees and titles such as “Post-Doctorates”, “Associate Professor” or “Professor” titles in Albania and abroad.

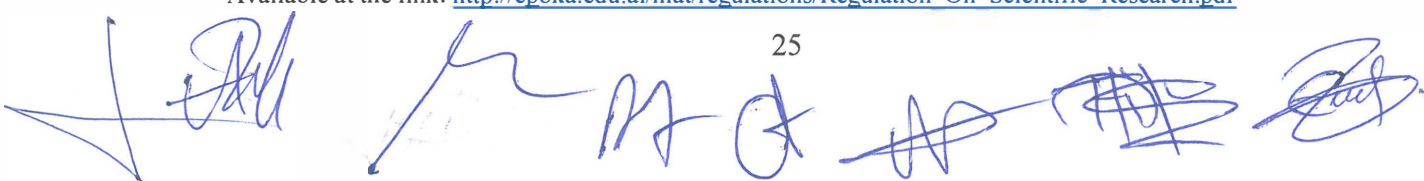
Based on the internal academic quality assurance standards concerning the improvement of the quality of teaching, the existing Regulation of EPOKA University “On Staff Recruitment” (See **Annex No.43 Regulation “On Staff Recruitment”**), the Directive of EPOKA University “On Teaching Load” (See **Annex No.57 Directive “On Teaching Load”**), and the Directive of EPOKA University “Promotion of Scientific Publications” (See **Annex No.41 Directive “Promotion of Scientific Publications”**) regulate

⁶¹ Available at the link: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-doc-publications-6-404.html>

⁶² News available at the link: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-workshop-on-emotional-intelligence-sei-eq-model-its-importance-to-boost-personal-and-professional-performance-5386.html>

⁶³ News available at the link: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-online-academic-workshop-for-epoka-university-staff-5397.html>

⁶⁴ Available at the link: [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/Regulation On Scientific Research.pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/Regulation%20On%20Scientific%20Research.pdf)



EPOKA's policies in this regard. These acts are also published on EPOKA's web page⁶⁵ and they regulate the workload in terms of the performance assessment, quality improvement and staff motivation.

Institution pursues a social development policy (Chapter III Standard IV.4)

At EPOKA University, students may regularly turn to the Dean of Students Office for assistance. The Dean of Students Office is responsible for organizing different activities and also handling student concerns and requests (**See Annex No.58 Students Activities Request for Approval Form; and Annex No.59 Student Request Form**).

The nature of activities dealt with by the Dean of Students Office may be both social and educational. The Dean of Students Office coordinates student clubs, though these are directed and managed voluntarily by the students of EPOKA University. There are various clubs that have various purposes, interests and focal points (**See Annex No.60 List of Students Clubs**). The Dean of Students Office ensures that each student club organizes at least two activities per semester and it fully supports almost all proposals and initiatives that come from students in this regard (**See Annex No.61 List of activities organized by students clubs**).

Moreover, the Dean of Students Office organizes a 'Welcome Ceremony'⁶⁶, a Club Fest, a Spring Fest and many other activities in collaboration with students of EPOKA University. Popular and significant student clubs are the Sensitive Society Club, Women Leadership Club, Sports Club as well as Art and Culture Club (**See Annex No.60 List of Students Clubs**).

At EPOKA University, students continuously organize numerous activities whose purpose is to increase the capacity of students to work in teams and to foster collaboration between students and other stakeholders inside and outside EPOKA University.⁶⁷

The Sensitive Society Club organizes different activities that aim to help people in need. Since 2007, this student club has continued to help orphans and homeless people. Students who are members of Sensitive Society Club also organize blood donation campaigns in collaboration with the Red Cross of Albania and Fundjavë Ndryshe.⁶⁸ Students also organize competitions that stimulate dialogue between students and guests.

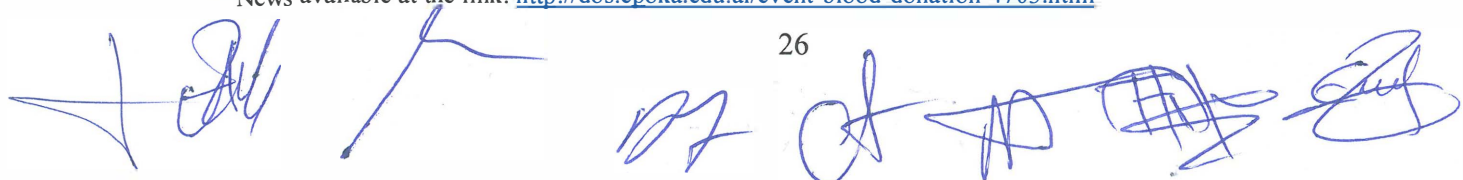
The Women Leadership Club is another important student club at EPOKA, whose main goal is to encourage and stimulate the participation of female students at EPOKA University in different debates and discussions that treat relevant topics. During these activities, students expand their networks by

⁶⁵ Available at the link: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-doc-publications-6-404.html>

⁶⁶ News available at the link: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-welcome-to-the-opening-ceremony-of-the-2019-2020-academic-year-at-epoka-university-4920.html>

⁶⁷ News available at the link: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-epoka-university-organized-the-clubs-fest-6-5048.html>
<http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-spring-fest-2019-4760.html>
<http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-e-fest-goes-online-for-the-first-time-5335.html>
<http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-innovators-club-in-collaboration-with-vodafone-albania-organized-technology-trends-nowadays-workshop-4602.html>

⁶⁸ News available at the link: <http://dos.epoka.edu.al/event-blood-donation-4703.html>



getting in touch with other people outside of EPOKA University, thus further improving their communication and leadership skills.⁶⁹

EPOKA University pursues a strict policy regarding ensuring the safety of life and health of students and staff. Firstly, the EPOKA University campus - the only self-contained university campus in Albania - is located in a very safe area, outside of the center of Tirana, surrounded by green areas. This gives a great advantage in terms of fostering an idyllic setting for teaching, learning and research for EPOKA community members. On a practical level, it also reduces the risks and threats of automobile accidents and air pollution.

Furthermore, everyone at EPOKA University may access the medical doctor of the university who has his own office on campus and carefully monitors the health of students and staff. The office of the medical doctor contains the proper medicines and facilities to service the EPOKA community.

Standard II.2 - Institution provides effective management of human resources

(Chapter III Standard II.2)

EPOKA University has in place a whole set of rules and regulations that define the functions and responsibilities for each unit and member of the EPOKA staff. These rules are also subject to changes in order to reflect amendments in national legislation as well as to meet the evolving needs of the institution and of the EPOKA community. At the same time, there are clear rules in place regarding the way offences carried out are managed, and how academic and administrative staff members are to be disciplined for offences (See **Annex No.62 Regulation "On the Discipline of the Managing, Academic and Administrative Staff", Chapter 2**).

Financial management

Institution drafts the budget in accordance with defined procedures (Chapter III Standard VI.1)

The budget is drafted and approved based on the decision of the Administrative Board after receiving input and requests from all academic and administrative units for the subsequent academic year (See **Annex No.13 Statute of EPOKA University, Chapter 2**).

EPOKA University has an independent budget. The preparation of the annual budget goes through several steps before final approval by the Administrative Board of EPOKA University.

Each academic year during January-March, the Rector's Office requests from Faculties, base units and other units of the University to submit their human resource needs as well as their needs for infrastructure, physical equipment, information technology, printed materials, and the electronic library, by completing

⁶⁹ See news available at the link: <http://dos.epoka.edu.al/event-blood-donation-4703.html>; <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-sensitive-society-club-distributed-the-donations-for-the-damaged-people-by-the-earthquake-5011.html>; <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-dr-ahart-and-dr-demaliaj-speak-at-epoka-university-on-the-incidence-and-prevention-of-gender-based-violence-3933.html>

the respective forms in accordance with the EPOKA University Framework Strategy 2018-2022 and the Unit Strategic Plans⁷⁰.

The units send the completed forms to the Rector's Office. The Rectorate takes the relevant decision and sends the proposal for final approval to the Administrative Board (**See Annex No.63 Decision for the Approval of the HR and Infrastructure needs 2020-2021**).

Furthermore, every academic year in January-March, the Rector's Office requests from the Faculties, base units and other units to submit information on the activities planned for the following academic year by each unit, by completing the respective form in compliance with the EPOKA University Framework Strategy 2018-2022 and the Unit Strategic Plans. All units submit the completed forms to the Rector's Office. The Rectorate takes the relevant decision and sends the proposal for final approval to the Administrative Board (**See Annex No.64 Decision for the approval of the Event and Activities Calendar for the 2020-2021 Academic Year**).

Both these processes feed into the drafting of the institutional budget for the subsequent academic year and its eventual approval by the Administrative Board.

Institution provides the necessary means to implement the financial policy (Chapter III Standard VI.2)

After the approval of the human resources needs, infrastructure needs and activities planned by each unit, as well as taking into consideration the income and expenses during the preceding academic years, the institutional draft budget of the University is prepared by the Administrator and is approved by the Administrative Board.

The Administrative Board approves the annual budget of the institution based on the needs stipulated, including the investment plan, and supervises its implementation.

After the approval of the budget, the Finance Office, in cooperation with the Administrator, follows the distribution and the implementation of the budget.

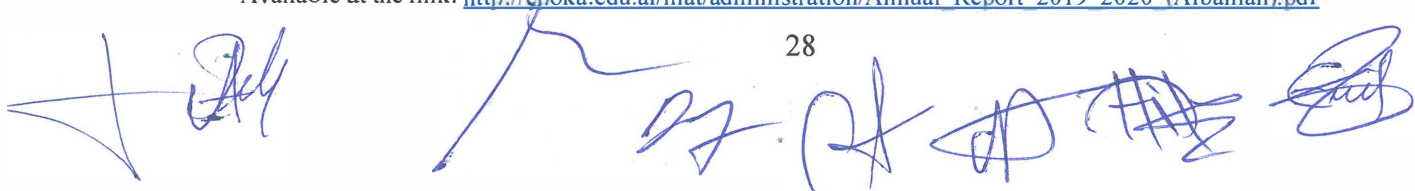
The distribution and management of financial resources are monitored and accounted for in compliance with Albanian tax laws (**See Annex No.65 Law No. 9228/2004, For Accounting and Financial Statements**) and the Albanian Accounting Standards (**See Annex No.66 SKK - National Accounting and Reporting Standard**). The manner of use of the funds for each academic year is published in the Annual Report of EPOKA University, and published on the web page of the University. A copy of the approved and projected budget is found at the Office of the Administrator and another one at the Finance Office (**See Annex No.38 Annual Report 2019-2020, p.99⁷¹, and Annex No.182 Summary Tables – Table No.11**).

EPOKA University is part of Turgut Ozal Education sh.a. All the financial statements of the Turgut Ozal Education sh.a are prepared based on the International Financial and Reporting Standards (IFRS) by using *Finance 5* as a licensed financial program. Turgut Ozal Education sh.a conducts an annual external audit regarding the financial situation using an international auditing company, Deloitte, and the detailed report

⁷⁰ Available at the link:

http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%2012%2019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf

⁷¹ Available at the link: [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_\(Albanian\).pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_(Albanian).pdf)



can be found at the main offices of Turgut Ozal Education sh.a. A copy of the annual audit is found at the Finance Office of EPOKA University as well.

The rules and regulations of financial management of EPOKA University are different from those of public higher education. EPOKA University's rules and regulations are in accordance with the Law No. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015 "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania".

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

Institution pursues a policy of budgetary and financial control (Chapter III Standard VI.3)

Turgut Ozal Education sh.a conducts an annual external audit regarding 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. Also, an internal audit is conducted by the main offices of Turgut Ozal Education sh.a concerning EPOKA University.

The annual report of external audit is published every year at the web page of the National Business Center of Albania (QKB)⁷².

Financial activities regarding the University are reported and made public in its Annual Report⁷³ submitted every year to the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, which is available for discussion and review by both students and staff members.

The audit reports demonstrate that the institution's management team is improving in efficiency, especially concerning the delivery of academic services to students. Revenues generated from students' fees, together with a statement on expenses and distribution of earnings from other resources are also presented in Annual Reports (See for example Annex No.38 Annual Report 2019-2020: p. 99).

Information Management System

Institution has an information system (Chapter III Standard VII.1)

EPOKA University's information management system was recently integrated into one system called EPOKA Interactive System (EIS), developed in-house by the Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office (ICTCO) of EPOKA University. EIS contains integrated information on student affairs and services, teaching and learning, human resources, financial management and infrastructure. EPOKA University's ICTC Office has drafted the respective EIS Guidelines for lecturers and students (See Annex No.67 EIS Guideline Role for lecturers, and Annex No.68 EIS Guideline Role for students). The system integration provided by EIS has improved the delivery of services and facilitated the exchange of information among University units.

EIS generates automatic and real-time reports that assist management with decision-making, both at the policy and execution level. The information generated and managed by EIS (e.g. the number of students

⁷² Available at the link: <https://qkb.gov.al/home/>

⁷³ Available at the link: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-annual-reports-6-48.html>

for each department and for each program) is then prepared for publication on the web and inserted into the Annual Report.⁷⁴

EPOKA University's webpage contains relevant information for its stakeholders and the general public, such as information about the staff, registration procedures for students, the University Statute, and regulations (See **Annex No.69 Information and Communication Technology Services**).

The abovementioned information on reporting, including statistical data, on students can be found in the Annual Report (See **Annex No.38 2019-2020 Annual Report p. 18-19**). Academic offerings can be found at EPOKA University's main web page⁷⁵. All the main legal acts of EPOKA University can be accessed through the main web page⁷⁶.

Institution coordinates activities in the field of information technology (Chapter III Standard VII.2)

EPOKA has an integrated system (EIS) in place which is one of EPOKA's innovative initiatives. EIS is kept up to date in order to deliver the most agile solutions and the best services to students and staff members (See **Annex No.69 Information and Communication Technologies Services**).

EPOKA University uses information communication technology in the areas of teaching and learning, research, and administration and management, which are in full compliance with the ICTCO Strategic Plan for 2018-2022 (See **Annex No.70 ICTCO Strategic Plan 2018-2022**).

For convenience and security purposes, students and staff members are equipped with a smart card that they use to receive or deliver information and services.

EPOKA University has a total of 360 PC computers with 172 PC computers being located in its three computer laboratories. Laboratories and classrooms are equipped with internet access, printers (16), photocopy machines (16), scanners (16) and video-projectors (30) (See **Annex No.69 Information and Communication Technology Services, Table No.1, p. 5**).

EIS enables teaching staff to provide blended learning by delivering content through digital and online media. The Covid-19 situation, as noted above, as resulted in complete online digital learning.

Furthermore, all staff offices are equipped with computers with access to the internet and wireless internet is available in all the buildings. All classrooms are equipped with computers for the conduct of lecturers, and video projectors and/or smart boards are installed in all teaching venues. Computer labs are equipped with high-quality computers, meeting the demands of different study programs for superior computer resources, such as Computer Engineering, Architecture and Civil Engineering.

All computer labs as well as the electronic lab are exclusively available for the use by students and staff members. The latest hardware and software applications are installed in all computers. All software applications are licensed (See **Annex No.71 List of Licenses for software programs**).

Prior to the situation caused by Covid-19, EPOKA did not offer distance education. In the framework of the switching to remote teaching as of March 2020 due to Covid-19, EPOKA University has installed a HyFlex infrastructure in all classrooms and auditoria. Detailed information on this area is available at the

⁷⁴ Available at the link: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-annual-reports-6-48.html>

⁷⁵ Available at the link: <http://epoka.edu.al>

⁷⁶ Available at the link: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-doc-publications-6-404.html>

report explaining the response by EPOKA to the situation caused by the Covid-19 crisis (**See Annex No.184 “EPOKA University’s Response to the Covid-19 Crisis: Continuing Quality Assurance”**).

Institution manages real estate (Chapter III Standard VII.3)

EPOKA University properties are administered by the parent company, i.e. Turgut Ozal Education sh.a (**See Annex No.72 Certificate of property**). Currently there are three main university buildings. In two of these buildings (Building A and Building E), there is a total built space of 14,352 m², and in these two buildings teaching, research and extra-curricular activities are conducted.

Policies and strategies for the development and preservation of EPOKA University properties and other physical assets lie with Turgut Ozal Education sh.a. and also with the Administrative Board of EPOKA University.

EPOKA University has a Master Plan for the development of its real estate as stated in the EPOKA University Framework Strategy 2018-2022⁷⁷. The campus, according to the Strategic Plan, was projected to accommodate about 3500 students, which entails further investments and development of the actual infrastructure (**See Annex. No.73 Master Plan of EPOKA University**)⁷⁸.

There is a record of EPOKA University’s real estate and a Master Plan for the future development of the EPOKA campus (**See Annex. No.73 Master Plan of EPOKA University.**)

Institution provides storage, maintenance and development its academic, cultural and scientific heritage (Chapter III Standard VII.4)

EPOKA University has a policy of preserving and developing the heritage of its academic, cultural and scientific property. The procedures are regulated through the Directive of EPOKA University “On Purchases” (**See Annex No.74 Directive of EPOKA University “On Purchases”**), whose purpose is to define 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 (**See Annex No.75 Infrastructure in Function of Study Programs**).

At the same time, EPOKA Interactive System (EIS)’s proprietary information is deposited at the Directorate of Patents and Trademarks of the Republic of Albania (**See Annex No.76 Depositing of the Trademark EIS**) and is registered at the Directorate of Patents and Trademarks of the Republic of Albania (**See Annex No.77 Certificate of Trademark for the Registration of EIS**) as per the Article 154 of the Law No. 9947, dated 07.07.2008 “On Industrial Property”, as amended.

⁷⁷ See

http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%202012%202019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf

⁷⁸ Upon request, the Office of the Administrator may provide the external reviewers with a copy of EPOKA’s most recent and detailed Master Plan.

The Rectorate and its staff members are responsible to ensure the adequacy and the development of the facilities. Their decisions are based on the immediate needs of the University and EPOKA University's Framework Strategy 2018-2022⁷⁹

The University has a policy of developing and maintaining its academic, cultural and scientific property (See for instance **Annex 78: Directive "On the Library", Chapter 2**). At the same time, EPOKA University has an institutional inventory that can be shown to the External Review Team upon request. The cultural values of EPOKA University are stored in laboratories, the library, and the public digital repository⁸⁰ which preserves the academic and scientific property of EPOKA University. EPOKA University is the only higher education institution in Albania to possess a digital repository.

Institution pursues a policy of management of its assets

(Chapter III Standard VII.5)

Teaching, research and service are provided by adequate facilities (See **Annex No.75 Infrastructure in Function of Study Programs**) and in compliance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (See **Annex No.79: Law No. 10138, dated 11.05.2009 "On the Public Health", Chapter IX-XV**), and the Ministry of the Interior (See **Annex No.80 Law No.80 152/2015, dated 21.12.2015 "On the Service of Fire Safety and Rescue", Chapter VII and XI**)

EPOKA University facilities are in compliance with the standards set by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 418, dated 10.05.2017 "On the standards, criteria and procedures for the opening, reorganization, division, merger or closure of Higher Education Institutions and their branches". Facilities also provide adequate space for the staff, including parking places, offices, cafeteria and a recreational park (See **Annex No.81 Parking area, and Annex No.82 Recreation spaces**).

Both the A- and E-Building have a modern infrastructure and a central heating and cooling system. The classrooms are equipped with video projectors and smart boards that enable the normal conduct of the learning process. All classrooms have a height (ceiling-floor) of not less than 3 meters and have natural lighting where the surface of the windows covers 25% of the floor area and are positioned to the left side of the students (See **Annex No.88 Structural Project of EPOKA University**). Every year the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth prepares and releases the 'Report on the Verification of the Capacities' which evaluates EPOKA's capacities (See **Annex No.83 Report of the MoESY on the Verification of the Capacities 2020-2021**).

The average available space per staff number is 16 m²/person in full compliance with the standards set by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 418, dated 10.05.2017 "On the standards, criteria and procedures for the opening, reorganization, division, merger or closure of Higher Education Institutions and their branches." (See **Annex No.75 Infrastructure in function of the study programs**).

⁷⁹ Available at the link:

http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%2012%2019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf

⁸⁰ Available at the link: <http://dspace.epoka.edu.al>

Institution establishes a logistics administrative structure to carry out functions of common interest (Chapter III Standard VII.6)

EPOKA University conducts surveys on a regular basis to measure the satisfaction of its staff and students in order to improve its services and to adapt to the needs of its community. The most recent survey expresses above average satisfaction with services (**See Annex No.84 Template of the Student Satisfaction Survey**).

The Student Satisfaction Survey for Fall 2020-2021 will be available to the External Evaluation Group during the site visit. Services such as catering, transportation and accommodation are provided according to the needs of the students and evaluated based on their expectations.

Management of Institution Activity**Institution provides appropriate facilities and infrastructure for academic and scientific activity (Chapter III Standard V.1)**

EPOKA University provides venues with comfortable physical and IT infrastructure, which offer high-quality services and facilities to students, staff and other stakeholders, and which include three computer labs, one electronics lab and one civil engineering lab.

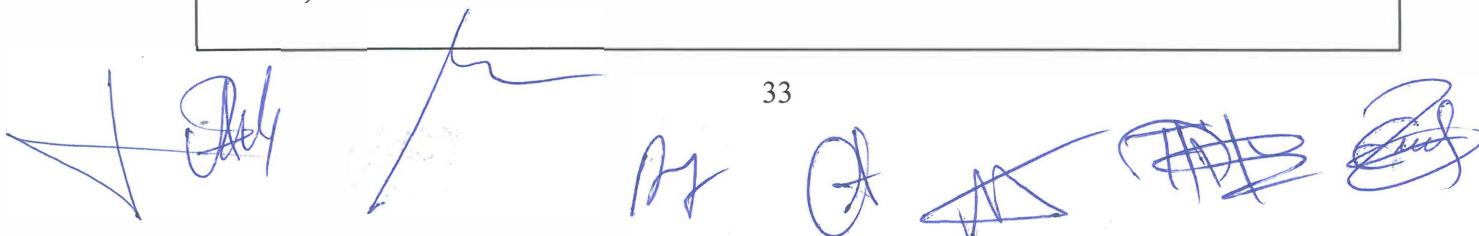
In addition to classroom facilities, there are plenty of recreational facilities for students such as cafeteria, library, Wi-Fi, facilities for the Student Council and Student Clubs, and sports facilities (**See Annex No.85 Photos of recreational spaces**).

EPOKA University campus is conveniently situated in a green area outside the city of Tirana on the Tirana-Rinas road, on the 12th kilometer. The campus extends over a total area of 67,000 m² representing a very favorable higher education campus setting.

The teaching and scientific process is carried out in adequate and high-quality premises, which are clean and appropriately maintained. The institution's campus – completed in 2011 - has had modern facilities since its beginning. The administration has subcontracted a cleaning company that is always present on campus. Also, an experienced team of technicians employed full-time maintain all the facilities including materials, electrical system, heating of all the interior spaces in the winter, air conditioning during the summer, as well as sports facilities. The buildings on campus comprise labs, classrooms, offices and other facilities with electronic equipment and information technology for the proper conduct of teaching and research (**See Annex No.75 Infrastructure in the function of study programs**).

All the classrooms are equipped with the necessary infrastructure for a convenient and effective learning process such as video projectors, sound systems, wireless connections and smart boards that enable the normal conduct of the teaching process. To enable a more effective teaching methodology based on ICT, the classroom computers and the computers located in the laboratories contain all the necessary software programs and packages needed in specific courses of the respective study programs (**See Annex No.69 Information and Communication Technology Services**).

From 2017 until January 2021, the fund of the EPOKA Library has been enriched with around 15.000 titles of books (**See Annex No.86 Titles of the Books added in recent four years; Annex No.87 Library Services**).



All related norms are in compliance with the standards set by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 418, dated 10.05.2017 “On the standards, criteria and procedures for the opening, reorganization, division, merger or closure of Higher Education Institutions and their branches.”

The verification and certification of the norms and capacities is carried out every year by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth which prepares and releases the Report on the Verification of the Capacities (See **Annex No.83 Report of the MoESY on the Verification of the Capacities 2020-2021**).

E-Building and A-Building possess emergency stairs which can be verified at the Structural Project (See **Annex.88 Structural Project of EPOKA University**). E-Building and A-Building also have a system of fire protection (See **Annex No.89 Project on fire protection system and Safety at workplace of EPOKA University**). At the same time, EPOKA University renews annually the Technical Act on Fire Protection and Safety (See **Annex.90 Act on Fire Protection and Safety of EPOKA University**). A fire safety training is conducted twice a year by a subcontracted company specialized in the field of Workplace Safety (See **Annex No.91 Contract with TRAJF shpk, and Annex No.92 Training of Staff on Fire Protection & Evacuation, Photos**). The buildings also possess a central heating and cooling system.

EPOKA University possesses three available generators (with a total power 1080 KVA) as alternative sources of power supply in case of power cuts. EPOKA also has two UPS with a total power of 130 KVA to ensure uninterrupted power supply in classrooms and offices. EPOKA also has a central water storage of 150 m³ to ensure a secure water supply.

Institution possesses full documentation of academic activity in hard copy and electronic form
(Chapter III Standard V.2)

The Rector's Office is responsible for maintaining and curating documentation in hardcopy and digitalized format for archival purposes. The most important documents kept in the Rector's Office are: decisions and meeting minutes of the Rectorate, the Academic Senate, the Administrative Board as well as incoming and outgoing external and internal correspondence.

The Faculty Administrators keep copies of decisions of decision-making bodies at the Faculty-level as well as incoming and outgoing external and internal correspondence from the Faculty⁸¹.

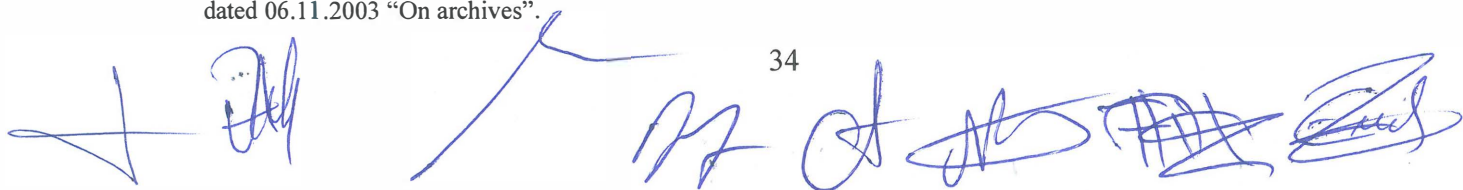
The Registrar's Office keeps hard copies of student records and other important student documents⁸². At the end of each calendar year, all correspondence is submitted to the Archive of the institution where it is stored and managed in compliance with the legislation in force.

EPOKA University also has an information management system (EPOKA Interactive System or EIS) that preserves digital footprints and copies of every digital document issued through the system. Every administrative and academic unit has access to the system according to their types of responsibilities (see **Annex No.69 Information and Communication Technologies Services, p.4-5**).

At the same time, the ICTC Office is close to finalising the module of E-Correspondence which will provide the generation of information related to meetings, decisions taken, as well as documents associated with these decisions.

⁸¹ Documents are available to the external reviewers upon request.

⁸² These documents are kept and archived according to the Albanian legal framework, namely the Law No. 9154, dated 06.11.2003 “On archives”.



At the end of each academic year the respective units prepare unit reports, where statistics are included for presentation. At the same time, EIS generates reports and statistics.

Documentation on the enrollment of students is accompanied by an archive of student files which comprises the basic information in the student database in both hard copy and soft copy (student profile in EIS).

In compliance with the timelines defined by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, the list of enrolled students is submitted the Center of Education Services (QSHA) alongside the necessary information in order to obtain the individual matriculation number for each student. The individual matriculation number and all the relevant information related to students which is included in their files and recorded in the EIS system is also written in the base registers maintained in hardcopy, in compliance with the national higher education legislation in force.

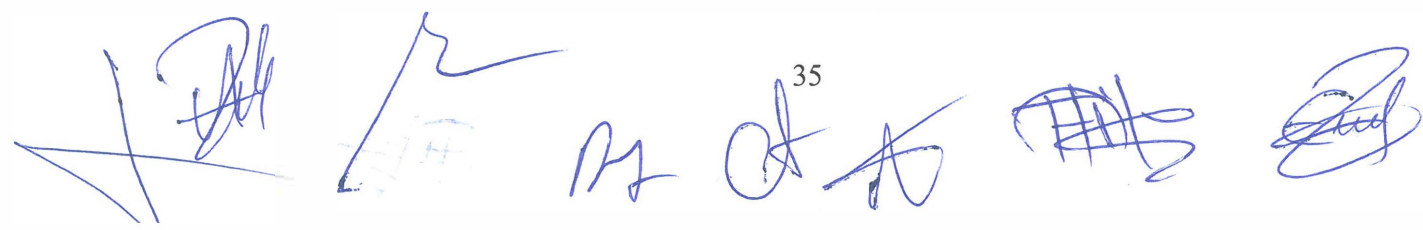
General Information on the study program, modules and course syllabi is offered in the Departments' websites at: <http://epoka.edu.al/homeacademicsfaculties276.html>. Detailed information is offered to students, staff and visitors by accessing the curriculum and course syllabus of each course from the main web page at: <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>.

In compliance with the Law on higher education and the Directives of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth on the enrollment of students, all student personal information is kept in database files. Information includes student personal information related to their ID card or passport, information related to their high school diploma, information on requested certificates during enrollment and information on their enrollment status from initial enrollment until graduation. Hard copy registers such as base registers, registers on the performance assessment (grades) and registers on the issuing of diplomas are issued by the QSHA upon request by the university and are kept separately at the Registrar's Office for each study program and for each academic year.

In compliance with the legal framework of EPOKA, all student grades are entered in the EIS system by the respective course instructors and the process is followed according to the deadlines set by Departments and Faculties. At the same time, printed grade lists bearing the signature of the course instructor and the seal of the institution are collected from departments and are delivered to the Registrar's Office according to the timeline stipulated in the respective procedure. The Department keeps one copy of the grade lists in its own archive and delivers the other copy to the Registrar's Office.

After processing all grade change procedures like grade appeal requests, additional exams and necessary controls and checking from the Registrar's Office, all the grades are written by hand on student grade registers. These registers are kept separately at the Registrar's Office for each study program and for each academic year.

After graduation, at the diploma conferring stage and in compliance with the related procedures, students fill in and sign the diploma distribution forms and in the register on the issuing of diplomas. Personal information on the graduating student and on the issued diploma are included in this register. In the last column of the register on the issuing of diplomas, there is a student signature area which confirms that the diploma was delivered to the respective student.



Conclusion and Judgement

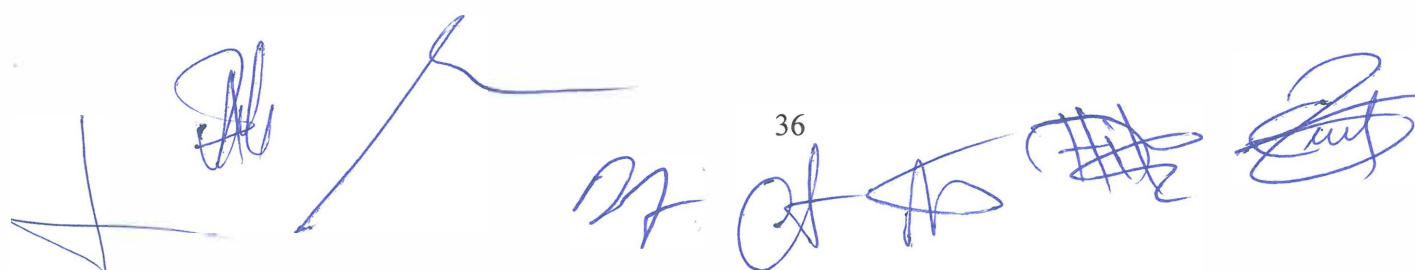
Based on the overall assessment for this area the Self-Evaluation Group concludes that the EPOKA best practices in the management of human resources show that standards of transparency, integration policies, assessment and effectiveness are fully met.

The Self-Evaluation Group is confident that EPOKA University fully meets the standards concerning financial management, the budgeting schedule and distribution, and the financial policies and means.

The budgetary and financial accountability measures in place are fit for EPOKA's purpose. It fits the specificity of EPOKA University as a private for-profit higher education institution.

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

The Self-Evaluation Group confirms that record keeping policies and processes are in compliance with the national standards of accreditation and those of the ESG (e.g. 1.7, on information management). Hence, the SEG concludes that *EPOKA has demonstrated that standards within this second area of evaluation are fully met.*



3 - EVALUATION AREA: THE CURRICULUM

Institution offers study programs in accordance with its mission and capacities (Chapter I Standard I.1)

As of the 2020-2021 academic year, EPOKA University offers [11 Bachelor](#), [8 Master of Science](#), [6 Professional Master](#), [2 Integrated Second Cycle](#) and [6 PhD study programs](#) (See **Annex No.18 List of study programs offered by EPOKA University**).

The institution provides numerous means of informing the public concerning the study programs it offers. Detailed and comprehensive information is published on the institutional website⁸³, the institutional social media accounts, and via promotional brochures and leaflets (See **Annex No.50 Promotional Brochures and Leaflets; and Annex No.93 Marketing policy of study programs**).

In particular, admissions criteria⁸⁴ and detailed information about the curriculum and course syllabi of each study program⁸⁵ are published on the University web page. EPOKA also participates in educational fairs where universities present their programs⁸⁶.

All the above information is sent to secondary educational institutions and the programs are presented in the high schools. At the same time, the Career Planning Program for high-school seniors is coordinated by the Admissions Office, where groups of students from secondary educational institutions, accompanied by school counselors, visit the premises of EPOKA University for an organized visit.

During the high school student visits, potential students are informed about the admissions criteria and the requirements needed to register at EPOKA University. They also receive information about the education opportunities offered by EPOKA University as well as additional benefits such as exchange programs like Erasmus+, summer internships, the organization of student conferences, and other opportunities. After obtaining general information from the Admissions Office, applicants obtain more detailed information from relevant academic staff members for specific study programs. They also do a computer-based examination with which they test their English proficiency level (See **Annex No.94 Template of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors**). Each department also posts information on its respective website about programs, updating it promptly in the case of structural or content changes.

EPOKA maintains formal relationships with the majority of high schools in Tirana and other major centers of Albania. This is where most of its students come from. At the beginning of each academic year, the Admissions Office staff visits these high schools. EPOKA staff have discussions with the principals of these high schools and explain the details of the organization of the Career Planning Program for each year (See **Annex No.95 Plan of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2018-2019 academic year; Annex No.96 Report by the Admission Office on the Number of Participating High Schools and Students in the Career Planning Program for the 2018-**

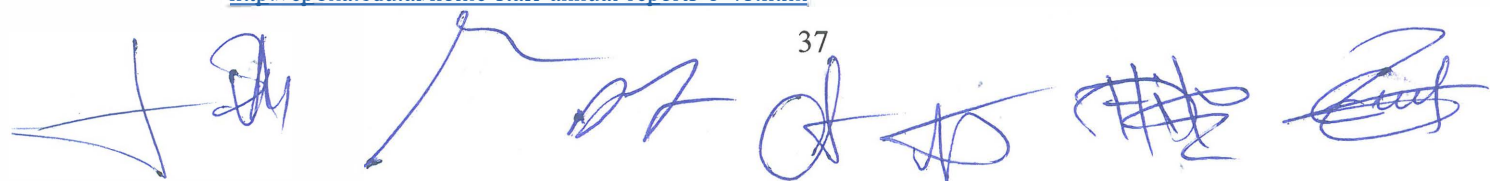
⁸³ <http://epoka.edu.al>.

⁸⁴ <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/home-admission-criteria-1923-1924.html>

Additional information about admissions in each cycle and program, scholarships, tuition fees, visiting EPOKA and more can be found in EPOKA web page: <http://epoka.edu.al> -> Admissions at the top menu.

⁸⁵ <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>

⁸⁶ A short description of such yearly activities is presented in the annual reports since 2010. See <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-annual-reports-6-48.html>



2019 academic year; Annex No.97 Plan of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2019-2020 academic year; Annex No.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; Annex No.99 Plan of the Online Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2020-2021 academic year).

EPOKA's priorities lie in building the quality of its study programs. Maximum efforts are put in to ensure that study programs fulfill their objectives and realize the University's mission. Although EPOKA's public image in the higher education landscape is one that has strong engineering, computer engineering and business programs, the institution has also prioritized turning EPOKA into a research hub for the social sciences and humanities (See **Annex No.100 Decisions of the Academic Senate and Higher Board on the establishment of the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences**).

In compliance with the economic development priorities of Albania, the 2018-2022 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University envisages a particular focus on providing education and training in the fields of engineering, business, tourism and social enterprises (See **Annex No. 28 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University for 2018-2022, p. 8.**).

EPOKA pursues a clearly defined policy of student admissions concerning all study programs it offers. This refers to the admissions criteria and procedures as well as the admissions quotas available to local students, Albanian students from the wider region, and to foreign students⁸⁷ (See **Annex No.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**).

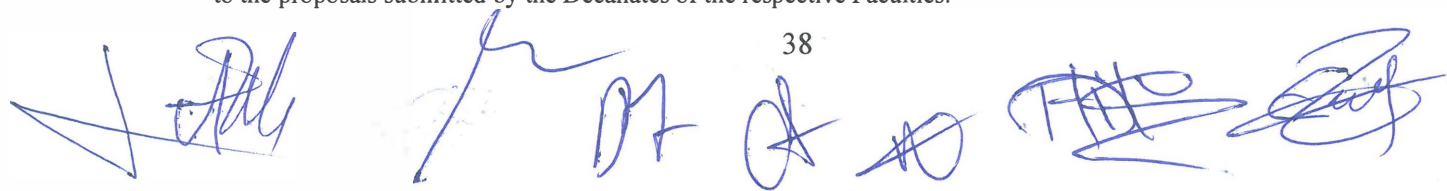
The admissions policies and procedures are set in the University Statute and in various institutional regulations (See **Annex No.102 Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations"; Annex No.103 Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs"; Annex No.104 Regulation "On PhD Study Programs"; Annex No.105 Directive "On Student Transfer"**).

Program descriptions are made transparent for interested parties through EPOKA's website alongside the admissions criteria for each study program. Information on the admissions criteria and procedures can be found on the websites of the respective departments. For instance, please see the website of the Department of Political Science and International Relations, <http://pir.epoka.edu.al/home-admissions-for-native-students-361-362.html>).

EPOKA's short-term and long-term admissions strategies are also set out in the 2018-2022 Framework Strategy and in the annual marketing plan which focus heavily on activities related to student admissions with appropriate budget and development strategies of the departments (See **Annex No.28 Framework Strategy off EPOKA University for 2018-2022, p. 8**).

Study programs are fully compliant with the requirements of the Albanian higher education legislation, the State Quality Standards as well as with the requirements of the Bologna process. Study programs are harmonized in their goals and curriculum components, as confirmed by both internal and external reviewers of quality assurance during the accreditation process of the study program carried out by both

⁸⁷ Admission quotas are adopted through the Decision of the Academic Senate and Administrative Board further to the proposals submitted by the Decanates of the respective Faculties.



the Albanian Quality Assurance Agency on Higher Education (ASCAL) as well as foreign accreditation agencies⁸⁸.

All study programs offered by EPOKA have obtained national accreditation and one study program has also obtained accreditation by a foreign accreditation agency which is a full member of the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA)⁸⁹.

Requirements used for assessing students' skills and knowledge are provided in the course syllabi and syllabi are continuously reviewed and improved by the collegial bodies within the respective departments after their approval by the Academic Senate (**See Annex No.106 Policy on the Continuous Improvement of Study Programs**).

Examination rules and requirements are clearly stipulated in the Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations" (Articles 17-25), the Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs" (Articles 26-29) and the Regulation "On PhD Study Programs" (Articles 42-44), which are also published on EPOKA's website⁹⁰ (**See Annex No. 102 Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations"; Annex No.103 Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs", Annex No.104 Regulation "On PhD Study Programs"**).

Examination rules and requirements are also available in the Student Guide which is provided to each incoming freshman student upon her/his enrollment at EPOKA. The Student Guide is also published on EPOKA's website (**See Annex No.107 2020-2021 Student Guide**). The Student Guide is also available at http://epoka.edu.al/mat/Student_Guide_2020-2021.pdf.

Course instructors are free to choose the best assessment method to measure the learning outcomes of the course in alignment with the learning outcomes of the program. The grading system is based on EPOKA's evaluation system (**See Annex No.102 Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations"; Annex No.103 Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs"; Annex No.104 Regulation "On PhD Study Programs"**).

The submission of the thesis at the undergraduate and graduate levels are subject to the provisions of the respective regulations (**See Annex No.102 Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations"; Annex No.103 Regulation "On Second Cycle study programs"; Annex No.104 Regulation "On PhD study programs"**).

Student assessment is in compliance with Standard 1.3 of the ESG (See ESG, Standard 1.3, page 12) and grading criteria and examination methods are published in advance in the syllabus. There is a formal grade appeal procedure in place (**See Annex:102 "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations"; Annex:103 Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs"; Annex:104 Regulation "On PhD Study Programs"**).

⁸⁸ This has been confirmed by various external and internal evaluators of the study programs. All study programs of EPOKA University have been accredited.

⁸⁹ For the national accreditation of study programs, see the database at the website of ASCAL:

<https://www.ascal.al/en/hei-list/hei/universiteti-privat-epoka-2>

For the accreditation of the Bachelor in Banking and Finance study program by the German EVALAG Agency see the database at the website of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR):

<https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/search/by-institution/institution/?id=5881>

⁹⁰ See: <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-doc-publications-6-404.html>



Additionally, in compliance with the ESG, assessments are carried out by more than one assessor in the final comprehensive exam or during the review of the final thesis. External evaluators have expressed confidence in EPOKA's assessment process⁹¹.

Furthermore, EPOKA University has established a well-structured system of ensuring the quality of examinations. Each academic year, the Faculty Decanate assigns an expert for each study program to assess the quality of examinations on a random basis (**See Annex:3 Guideline "On Examinations"**).

Departments also prepare reports on an annual basis which include data on academic issues, data on student performance, including passing rates and teaching data (**For instance see Annex:108 Annual Report of the Department of Economics for the 2019-2020 academic year**).

At the same time, each Faculty, through its Decanate meetings, assesses periodically the efficiency of the teaching, research and administrative activities.

Constant qualification is an integral part of study programs (Chapter I Standard I.2)

EPOKA offers short-term training courses for students to focus on their further professional development⁹². Students receive a certificate upon completion of these courses (**See Annex:109 Certificates of training programs**).

Short-term training programs are also offered to staff and third parties as part of lifelong learning by the Continuous Education Centre (CEC), a unit that focuses on offering training modules on education, foreign languages, and information and communication technologies, to academic and assisting academic staff members, teachers working in pre-university educational institutions, as well as other stakeholders⁹³.

EPOKA does not offer part-times studies. However, the management and delivery of second and third-cycle study programs can be adapted to meet the needs of employed students⁹⁴.

Study programs are reviewed continuously. Curricula changes and updates are initiated by Departments following proposals by academic staff members, other EPOKA stakeholders (students, employers and alumni) or external evaluation and accreditation processes. For each proposal on curricula changes and updates, a detailed form is filled out by the relevant department (**See Annex:110 Curriculum Change Proposal Form; and Annex:111 Track Record of the Curriculum Change Proposal Form**).

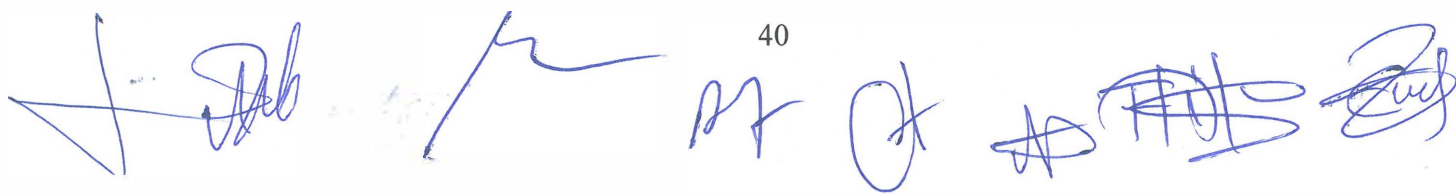
After their approval by the Decanate of the concerned Faculty, a detailed review of the said proposal is carried out by the Curricula Development Commission and ultimately by the Permanent Commission

⁹¹ For instance in their evaluation report, external institutional reviewers (Korini et al., 2011) in their SWOT analysis concluded that EPOKA University has an integrated system of indicators to measure students' knowledge (p. 86).

⁹² See for instance an announcement on some training courses on May 03, 2018: <http://dos.epoka.edu.al/event-training-program-for-4018.html>

⁹³ For instance see: the organisation of the Annual Education Today Conference available at <http://educationtoday.turgutozal.edu.al>, and the organisation of training modules on adopting content and language integrated learning (CLIL) as a teaching methodology in higher education institutions with English as a medium of instruction available at <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-training-on-adopting-content-and-language-integrated-learning-clil-as-a-teaching-methodology-in-hei-with-english-as-medium-of-instruction-5492.html>
For more information see: <http://cec.epoka.edu.al>

⁹⁴ In particular, classes of the Master programs are held from Monday to Friday during the 18:00-20:45 hours time interval to accommodate graduate students who work till late in the day so that they are able to fund their studies.



on Quality Assurance prior to their adoption by the Academic Senate (See Annex:112 Example of the conduct and approval of curricula changes in study program).

The learning outcomes of several programs at the University are aligned with the institutional strategies for promoting employability as well as international links and cooperation agreements. The course syllabi as well as teaching materials and methods are reviewed and updated continuously in order to ensure the full alignment of the knowledge, skills and competencies gained by students with the demands of the labour market in the country and beyond (See Annex:106 Policy on the Continuous Improvement of Study Programs).

Professional experience may be counted towards earning a degree only within the framework of an internship carried out under supervision and formalized by an agreement and a training program (See Annex:113 Guideline “On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Bachelor and Integrated Second Cycle Study Programs”; and Annex:114 Guideline “On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Professional Master Study Programs”)⁹⁵.

Given the importance of the evaluation and recognition of gained professional experiences, EPOKA University has included Professional Practice as a compulsory course in the curricula of all Bachelor, integrated second cycle, and Professional Master study programs⁹⁶.

Study programs are offered in accordance with institution development strategy (Chapter I Standard I.3)

Study programs offered at EPOKA University are aligned with the development goals of the University and those of the departments. The objectives of the study programs are in alignment with the educational strategic objectives envisioned in the institutional development strategy (See Annex:28 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University for 2018-2022, p. 10-11) as well as in the strategies of departments such as internationalization⁹⁷ or cooperation with the industry⁹⁸.

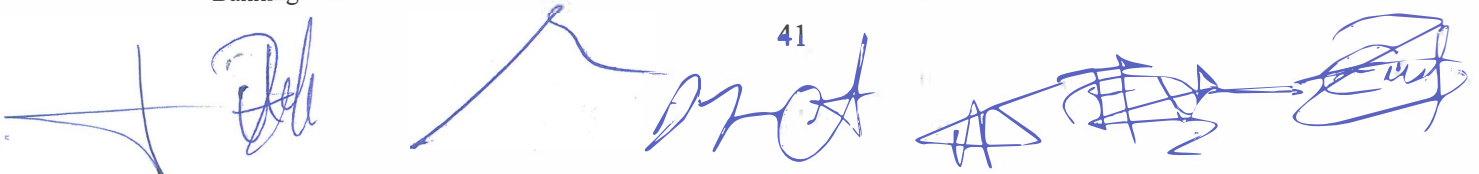
The goal to develop and train students is also described in the objectives of EPOKA’s development strategy. The 2018-2022 Framework Strategy clearly states that *“the focus of the curriculum and teaching will remain on the student, their support and development. The curriculum will continue to provide mainly practical training and personal instructions to students seeking to develop technical*

⁹⁵ Available also at <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-doc-publications-6-404.html>

⁹⁶ For the curricula of the said study programs, see: <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>

⁹⁷ For instance one of the aims of the study programs offered by the Department of Political Science and International Relations as set out in the Strategic Plan of this Department is “M1.6. Apply to mobility programs such as Erasmus + and have teaching staff and students attend mobility programs with other universities and attend or deliver lessons/seminars in other places” and “M3.7. Establish double or joint degree programs and Erasmus + mobility programs with other universities in Europe”. See: <http://pir.epoka.edu.al/home-strategic-plan-335-1801.html>

⁹⁸ In the fulfillment of the strategic goal of “The involvement with the industry is to be encouraged even further and departments will develop strategies on how to further attract the best professionals in the teaching career at EPOKA” (2018-2022 Framework Strategy, p. 18) and “The partnership with the industry has been of benefit to the students for internship and employment” (2018-2022 Framework Strategy, p. 20), EPOKA has actively supported students to find internships in their relevant sectors during their study program. Departments also engage professionals from the labour market in teaching courses at the undergraduate level. For instance, professionals who work full-time at the Ministry of Finance, (Central) Bank of Albania, commercial banks and the Albanian Institute of Statistics have been engaged in teaching classes in the first cycle Bachelor program in Banking and Finance. See Annex:115 List of academic staff during 2017-2021.



skills in combination with academic study and professional development” (See Annex:28 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University for 2018-2022, p. 10).

The Framework Strategy further states that “*students at EPOKA will acquire the relevant knowledge and technical skills needed for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles. The promotion of human rights, gender equality, the values of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, social inclusion and appreciation of cultural diversity will be integrated in the curriculum*” (See Annex:28 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University for 2018-2022, p. 10) and that “*the curriculum will emphasize the role of creativity and innovation, by promoting critical thinking skills and entrepreneurship*” (See Annex:28 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University for 2018-2022, p. 12).

The academic offerings of EPOKA’s study programs fully comply with the requirements of the Bologna Process in terms of structure, level and credit values, such as offering study programs in the three cycles of studies, adoption of the ECTS credit system alongside the American credit-hour system, as well as the provision of the diploma supplement for all its graduates. Each course description contains information on “placement opportunities”, as set out in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)⁹⁹. Upon the fulfillment of the graduation requirements at the said study program, students are provided with a Diploma (See Annex:116 Diploma Template) and Diploma Supplement (See Annex: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) in line with the requirements of the Bologna process and Albanian higher education legislation.

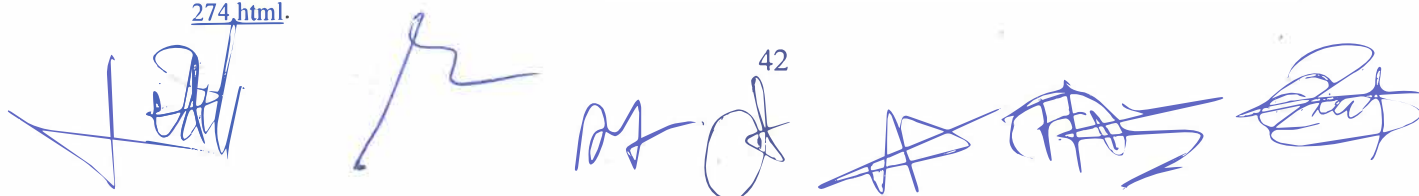
Study programs are offered in line with local, national and international trends (Chapter I Standard I.4)

The 2018-2022 Framework Strategy has set out the goals and objectives for the future development of EPOKA’s study programs. EPOKA’s study programs are designed and updated based on the most recent trends and development in the labor market. All study programs offered by EPOKA University comply with the required level in the Albanian Qualification Framework (See Annex:118 Table of the Albanian Qualifications Framework).

All undergraduate and graduate study programs are defined in ECTS credits which supports transparency for employers as well as student transfers and progression (See Annex:119 Student Transcript). Study programs are reviewed continuously and curricula updates are undertaken by the department and program teams to support progression and employability (See Annex:106 Policy on the Continuous Improvement of Study Programs).

The Alumni Survey is carried out every academic year by the Career Planning and Alumni Office to learn about the applicability and practicality of the knowledge, skills and competencies gained as a result of the study program as described in Quality Assurance Handbook (See Annex:120 Quality Assurance Handbook, p. 23-24).

⁹⁹ Number 1.2 “Design and Approval of Programmes.”; See for instance the description of the program Master of Science in Business Administration: “The mission of the Business Administration Department is to prepare and graduate students for careers in business, government and non-profit organizations by providing a broad professional education.” Retrieved from <http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-msc-in-business-administration-271-274.html>.



The Company Satisfaction Survey is also carried out every academic year. The Career Planning and Alumni Office administers the questionnaire to get proper feedback on the performance of EPOKA University graduates in the job market (See **Annex:121 Company Satisfaction Survey**). Theories, principles and soft skills included in degrees have led to high rates of employment among graduates (See **Annex:38 Annual Report 2019-2020, p. 39-42**).

A considerable factor for the design of the study programs are the Albanian national policies and sectoral strategies that aim to meet the challenges of globalization. There are several government strategies which have impacted the design of the study programs and have an effect on the internationalization agenda of EPOKA University such as the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2016-2020 and the National Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020 etc.¹⁰⁰

EPOKA actively promotes the learning of foreign languages by its students. In this context, besides English, which is the language of instruction in almost all study programs offered by EPOKA, French, German, Italian and Turkish are delivered as elective courses to all undergraduate students as part of the respective curricula.¹⁰¹

EPOKA offers joint degrees with the University of Applied Sciences in Mainz, Germany¹⁰². The formats of all diplomas issued by the University (See **Annex:116 Diploma Template**) are adopted by the Academic Senate and approved by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, as the ENIC/NARIC¹⁰³ center of Albania, in compliance with the legal framework in force, and the ESG standards (1.4) for diploma recognition.

Study programs are offered in accordance with institution capacities (Chapter I Standard I.5)

The teaching load is assigned to the full-time academic staff members of EPOKA University in accordance with the provisions of the Directive of EPOKA University “On the Teaching Load” (See **Annex:57 Directive “On the Teaching Load”**) and EPOKA’s human resource capacities (See **Annex:122 Academic capacities of EPOKA University**).

Full-time academic staff members who exceed the normal teaching load envisaged by the Directive “On the Teaching Load” fill in a relevant form on a monthly basis and submit it to the Department Coordinator and Faculty Administrator for final approval by the University Administrator (See **Annex:123 Form on the Request for the Payment of Extra Hours to Lecturers**).

The additional teaching load of the full-time academic staff members of EPOKA University is compensated from the respective budget line of EPOKA University (See **Annex:124 Additional teaching load payment from the budget of EPOKA University for the 2017-2021 period**).

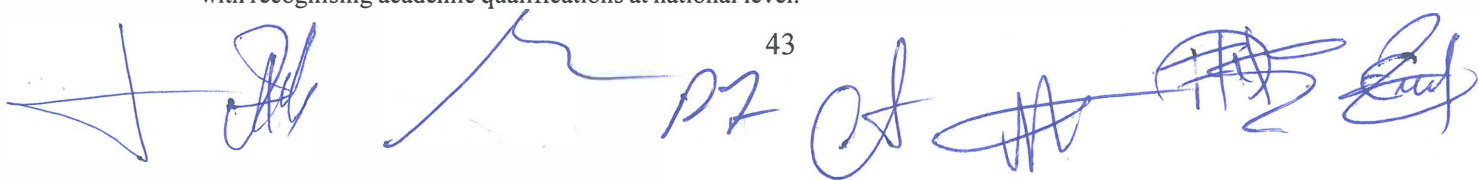
The teaching load of academic staff is organized effectively and balanced to allow time for research and administrative duties. According to the Directive “On the Teaching Load”, academic staff members who

¹⁰⁰ For a list of strategies and policy papers which have guided the strategic planning process at EPOKA see **Annex:28 2018-2022 Framework Strategy**.

¹⁰¹ See <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>

¹⁰² See <http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-joint-msc-with-university-of-applied-sciences-mainz-271-275.html>

¹⁰³ The European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) on mobility and recognition, set up by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, which works in close co-operation with the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC), a network put in place by the European Union, brings together the national centres tasked with recognising academic qualifications at national level.



carry out managing and administrative duties have a reduced amount of teaching hours in order to allow for better management of study programs.

Furthermore, through the adoption of the Directive “On Academic and Administrative Assessment and Quality Improvement”, EPOKA University has quantified the different tasks that stem from the managing and administrative duties of full-time academic staff members in order to ensure a balanced distribution of the administrative load and to also provide for the reduction of the teaching load of those full-time academic staff members who have a higher administrative load (**See Annex:46 Directive “On Academic and Administrative Assessment and Quality Improvement”, p. 5-7).**

Study programs are easily understandable and their objectives are clearly defined (Chapter I Standard I.6)

The content of study programs, curricula, course syllabi and other relevant materials is made available to students and may be accessed through EPOKA’s website¹⁰⁴ and the online resources of EPOKA’s Interactive System¹⁰⁵. During the first week of the academic year, with the Orientation Sessions organized to this end, entering freshman students are informed in details about the objectives and the content of study programs, assessment methods, grading system, class attendance requirement, the normal duration of studies, and the accreditation status (**See Annex:125 Program of the Orientation Session for the 2020-2021 academic year).**

At the same time, a Smart Student Guide is delivered to all registered students with all necessary information regarding the above mentioned details (**See Annex:107 2020-2021 Student Guide available also at http://epoka.edu.al/mat/Student_Guide_2020-2021.pdf.**

Study programs have clear objectives¹⁰⁶ as assessed by both internal and external evaluation carried out in the framework of previous institutional accreditation processes as well as in the framework of the periodical internal and external evaluation, as well as by the accreditation processes of the said study programs¹⁰⁷.

Admissions criteria are clearly defined for all study programs and are transparent to the interested parties by being available on the institutional website¹⁰⁸. Induction programs, as recommended by ESG, Standard 1.4, are provided in the form of Orientation Sessions and are very effective. Orientation Sessions are organized at the beginning of each academic year for incoming freshman students. These sessions provide information on all the relevant academic and administrative aspects concerning the organization and conduct of the study programs such as curricula, teaching process, grading system, academic advisor, thesis supervision, accreditation process, diploma and diploma supplement, and employment opportunities (**See Annex:125 Program of the Orientation Session for the 2020-2021 academic year).**

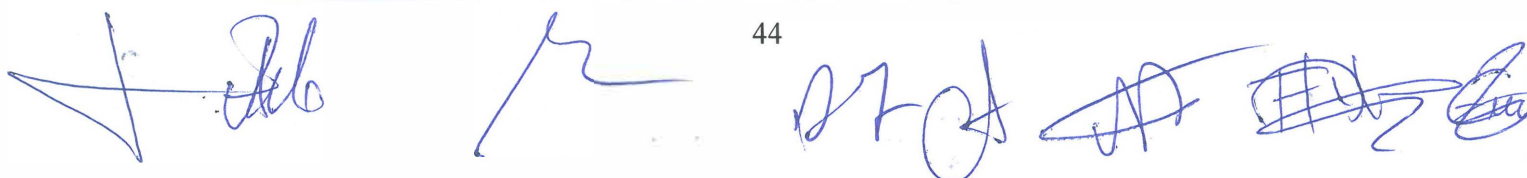
¹⁰⁴ See <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>

¹⁰⁵ See <https://eis.epoka.edu.al>

¹⁰⁶ See for instance the objectives of the integrated second cycle study program in Architecture: <http://arch.epoka.edu.al/home-architecture-5-year-integrated-1893-1985.html>

¹⁰⁷ See for instance an external review by Prof. Dr. K. Sevrani (2015) on the Bachelor program in Business Informatics available at <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/aeqi/RVJ-BA-in-Business-Informatics.pdf>. According to Prof. Sevrani (2015), EPOKA has a very high quality of curriculum (p. 48) and the programs contain information about their objectives (p. 28).

¹⁰⁸ See: <http://admissions.EPOKA.edu.al/cat-general-information-493.html>



Study programs of first cycle provide students with basic knowledge, general scientific methods and principles (Chapter I Standard I.7)

As of the 2020-2021 academic year, EPOKA University offers 11 first cycle (Bachelor) study programs. The primary goal of the first cycle of studies is to offer students a degree that will enable them to easily integrate into the labor market. First cycle study programs have a normal duration of three academic years and are completed with 180 ECTS. The form of studies of the first cycle study programs offered by EPOKA University is full-time. After the completion of the graduation requirements from the said study programs, the student is conferred the “Bachelor” degree (See **Annex:13 Statute, Art. 83**).

In first cycle study programs, priority is given to the transmission of professional skills in the discipline as well as soft-skills that ensure gainful employment. Second cycle programs at EPOKA then build on the knowledge gained from the undergraduate level, which allows for a smooth transition through the cycles. Second cycle programs contain both advanced theoretical and applied knowledge. Graduation from a first cycle study program grants access to pursuing second cycle study programs (See **Annex: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**). Graduation represents one of the requirements for enrollment in second cycle study programs offered by EPOKA University (See **Annex:13 Statute, Art. 91**).

The curricula of the first cycle (Bachelor) study programs have been developed in compliance with the provisions of the Law No. 10247, dated 04.03.2010 “On the Albanian Qualifications Framework”, as amended. The Bachelor study programs offered by EPOKA University correspond to Level 6 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and include the knowledge, skills and competencies that a student graduating from the Bachelor study program shall possess according to Level 6 in the AQF.

In compliance with Level 6 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework (See **Annex:171 Level 6 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework**), which is adopted from the European Qualifications Framework, Level 6, first cycle programs at EPOKA University provide advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, by involving a critical understanding of theories and principles, as well as advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work or study.

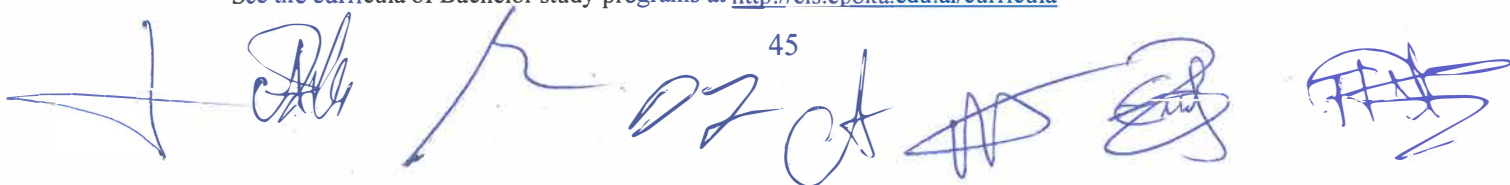
The curricula of first cycle study programs consist of core courses, basic courses, interdisciplinary courses, foreign language courses, professional practice as well as concluding requirements in the form of the preparation and submission of a graduation project or completing the final comprehensive exam (See **Annex:126 Decision of the Senate No. 01, dated 16.11.2016**)¹⁰⁹.

The subject specific courses are divided into compulsory courses and elective courses to enable students to be prepared for employment or study in their specific areas of interest¹¹⁰.

EPOKA encourages student mobility and has set out a transparent process (See **Annex:13 Statute, Art. 88; Annex:105 Directive “On Student Transfer”**) for the recognition of credits during the transfer

¹⁰⁹ Based on the Decision of the Senate No. 01, dated 16.11.2016, last-year students in Bachelor study programs who at the end of the fifth semester have a minimum CGPA in the respective Bachelor study program above the respective level determined for each study program, shall be able to opt to prepare and defend a Graduation Project in order to graduate from the said study program, whereas last-year students who do not meet the minimum CGPA criterion at the end of the fifth semester, shall be subject to the Final Comprehensive Exam to be held at the end of the sixth semester.

¹¹⁰ See the curricula of Bachelor study programs at <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>



between the study programs belonging to the same level both within EPOKA and at other higher education institutions (**See Annex: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**).

Each course has a defined set of ECTS and learning outcomes that enables students to transfer their credits within a program at EPOKA or outside. Information on the transfer of studies is available at EPOKA's website¹¹¹. The Directive of EPOKA University "On Student Transfer" is in compliance with ESG standard 1.4 for the institutional practice of recognition, which is in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Study programs in the first cycle provide the knowledge and skills necessary for a successful integration into the labor market. Prior to opening a new study program, EPOKA conducts a detailed study about market needs. All first cycle study programs offered by EPOKA have been quite successful at meeting the labour market needs in Albania and abroad (**See Annex:128 The Graduate Outcomes in the Labour Market: Ten Years of Achievements**, also available at <http://cpao.epoka.edu.al/cat-publications-2292.html>).

Program objectives refer to the skills and the placement opportunities which are clearly stated in the websites of departments as well as in the Diploma Supplement Document (**See for instance Annex: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**).

There is also a high rate of employment among EPOKA first cycle graduates in comparison to other higher education institutions according to national statistics, with International Marketing and Logistics Management (94.7%) and Civil Engineering (92.7%) being the most successful in this regard in 2018-2019

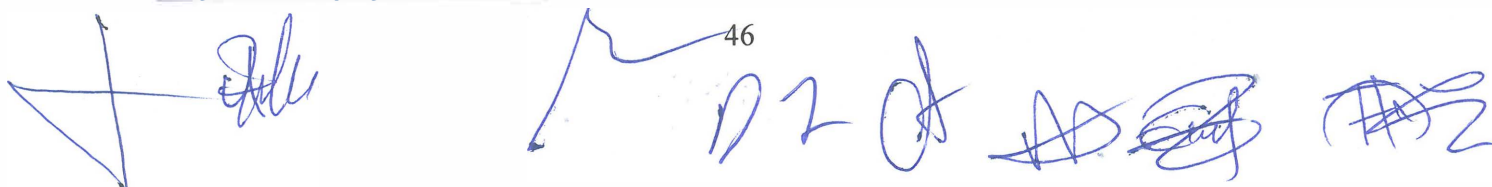
(**See Annex:38 Annual Report 2019-2020, p. 41**, also available at [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_\(Albanian\).pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_(Albanian).pdf)).

First-cycle study programs are drafted in such a way as to facilitate students' acclimatization in a university environment (Chapter I Standard I.8)

Students are guided and supported throughout the year and across all program cycles. They each have personal academic advisors whom they can contact. At the beginning of each academic year, the department assigns an academic advisor to each student from among its full-time academic staff members (**See: Annex:102 Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations", Article 6**).

The academic advisor offers counseling services to students, tracks their progress, and assists them in addressing and solving issues related to the program teaching and learning process. Furthermore, the Dean of Students Office, the Registrar's Office, Department Coordinators, the IT Office and Library staff provide continuous support to students in line with their respective duties and responsibilities. During the first week of the academic year, with Orientation Sessions organized to this end, incoming freshman students are informed in detail about the objectives and content of study programs, assessment

¹¹¹ See <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-application-process-for-the-transferring-of-studies-for-bachelor-and-integrated-study-programs-5368.html>



methods, grading system, class attendance requirements, the normal duration of studies, and the accreditation status (**See Annex:125 Program of the Orientation Session for the 2020-2021 academic year**).

At the same time, a Smart Student Guide is delivered to all registered students with all the necessary information regarding the above mentioned details (**See Annex: 2020-2021 107 Student Guide, also available at http://epoka.edu.al/mat/Student_Guide_2020-2021.pdf**). The Dean of Students Office also organizes Mentorship Programs for students facing difficulties with course requirements and assigns students or teaching assistants as mentors for these students¹¹².

The continuing support has supported EPOKA's graduation rates for the first cycle study programs, which are higher (51% within the three-year period, or 57% for fifth-year) than those for other national higher education institutions (which vary between 30% and 35%)

(**See Annex:38 Annual Report 2019-2020, p. 36-37, available at [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_\(Albanian\).pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_(Albanian).pdf)**)).

Faculty members are encouraged to apply alternative teaching methods. Course instructors do make use of different teaching and assessment methods. Program regulations encourage the use of both traditional style, such as lectures, as well as student-centered teaching methods, such as assignments, projects, workshops, case studies, site work, studio work and seminars (**See for instance Annex:102&103 Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations", Article 20/a and Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs", Article 26/1**).

EPOKA targets and attracts academic staff with high numbers of scientific publications and project participation (**For more details on the research performance of EPOKA's academic staff see Annex:129 List of Publications of Academic Staff Members during the 2016-2020 period**).

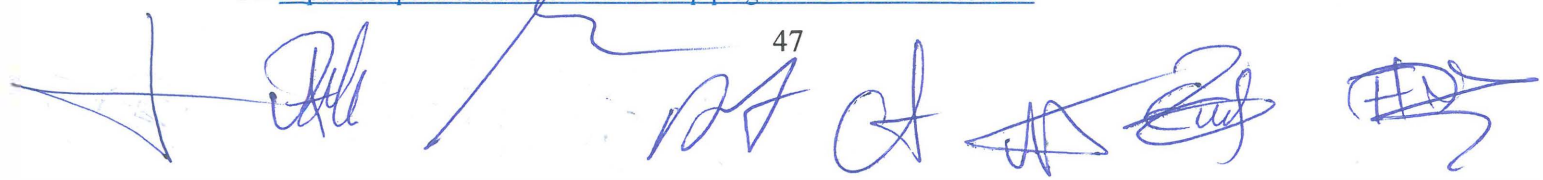
For the first cycle programs, EPOKA engages mainly full-time academic staff members who cover more than 87% of the teaching load of Bachelor study programs, providing high quality instruction for EPOKA first cycle students (**See Annex:182 Summary Tables-Table No.4**).

Second-cycle study programs rely on research and institution collaborates with economic field actors for their realization (Chapter I Standard I.9)

As of the 2020-2021 academic year, EPOKA University offers 2 integrated second cycle study programs, 8 Master of Science study programs and 6 Professional Master study programs. The second cycle study programs offered by EPOKA University correspond to Level 7 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework (AQF). They offer advanced theoretical and practical knowledge as well as training in conducting independent research in a specific area (**See Annex: Statute, Article 89**).

The academic staff members at EPOKA University engaged in the provision of the second cycle of studies hold a Ph.D or higher academic title (**See Annex:103 Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs", Art. 8 and Annex:130 Course Appointment Documents of the 2019-2020 academic year**). Courses at the master level are taught by lecturers actively involved in research (**See Annex:129 List of Publications of Academic Staff Members during the 2016-2020 period**).

¹¹² See <http://dos.epoka.edu.al/event-mentorship-program-2019-2020-5073.html>



As for all other study programs offered by EPOKA University, academic staff members play a key role in designing, developing, implementing, reviewing and updating the curricula of second cycle study programs. In this context, curricula changes and updates are initiated by departments principally following proposals by academic staff members. After their approval by the Decanate of the concerned Faculty, a detailed review of the said proposal is carried out by the Curricula Development Commission and ultimately by the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance prior to their adoption by the Academic Senate (**See Annex: 112 Example of the conduct and approval of curricula changes in different study programs**).

Study programs at Master level are drafted based on the formal research policy (set out in the **Framework Strategy of EPOKA University for 2018-2022, p. 10-11**) and the strategic goals of EPOKA University (**see Framework Strategy of EPOKA University for 2018-2022, p. 12-13 concerning the strategic goals of the Faculties in research and p. 13-14 on the strategic goals of research centers on research**).

They also reflect research areas and the goals of the development strategies at the departmental level¹¹³. All program regulations emphasize the research component of the program (**See for instance Annex:131 Regulation “On Second Cycle Study Program in Political Sciences and International Relations”, Article 3; Annex:132 Regulation “On the Master of Science Study Program in Architecture”, Article 3; and Annex:133 Regulation “On the Master of Science Study Program in Civil Engineering”, Article 3**).

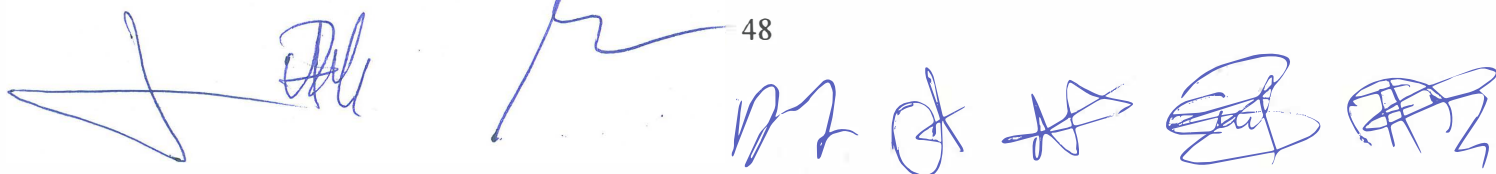
In the Master of Science study programs, 25 percent of the credits in the curriculum are dedicated to the conduct of research for the preparation of the Master thesis under the supervision of academic staff members with the appropriate qualifications (**See Annex:103 Regulation “On Second Cycle Study Programs”, Article 32**).

EPOKA University places a particular emphasis on the application in practice of the knowledge acquired in the classroom. In this regard, Professional Practice is a compulsory course in all Bachelor programs, integrated second cycle programs and Professional Master study programs offered by EPOKA University¹¹⁴.

The detailed institutional guidelines on the conduct of professional practice at the Bachelor, integrated second cycle and Professional Master study programs clearly define the roles and responsibilities of Departments, the students who take the Professional Practice course, the Career Planning and Alumni Office, Department Professional Practice Supervisors, and Professional Practice Site Supervisors with regard to the conduct and evaluation of professional practice. Professional Practice is carried out at public and private institutions, companies and other entities, whereby the student is mentored on a regular basis by a staff member of the institution/company/entity and is finally evaluated by both the Professional Practice Site Supervisor and the academic supervisor assigned by the Department (i.e. Department Professional Practice Supervisor) (**See Annex:113 Guideline “On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Bachelor and Integrated Second Cycle Study Programs”; Annex:114 Guideline “On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Professional Master Study Programs”**);

¹¹³ See for instance Theme No. 5: “Provide a high quality environment for research” at the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan of the Department of Business Administration at <http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-strategic-plan-1894-1796.html>

¹¹⁴ See <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>



and Annex:134 Information on the conduct of professional practice at the Department of Computer Engineering).

EPOKA University actively makes use of its network of institutions, companies and entities with which it maintains close relations, in order to facilitate the placement of the respective students (**See Annex:135 List of cooperation agreements between EPOKA University and third parties**).

Data on the employment of graduates are collected by EPOKA on a regular basis. EPOKA University has a tracking program to trace student employment which is managed by the Career Planning and Alumni Office. Data on the employment of graduates are published in EPOKA's Annual Reports (**See for instance Annex:38 Annual Report 2019-2020, p. 39-41**).

The majority of adjunct faculty members who teach at Master level programs - including Professional Master study programs - are full-time employees in their respective industries. This is especially the case in business-related programs where there is a higher presence of professionals, for instance in Banking and Finance (**See Annex:182 Summary Tables-Table No.6 and Annex:136 List of experts/professionals engaged in teaching at Master programs**).

Almost 90 percent of the teaching load in integrated second cycle study programs and more than 92 percent of the teaching load in Master of Science/Professional Master study programs is covered by the full-time academic staff members of EPOKA University (**See Annex:182 Summary Tables-Table No.4**).

Study programs aim to achieve Albanian students' mobility in Europe and beyond (Chapter I Standard I.10)

All study programs offered by EPOKA University are in line with the standards set out by the Bologna Process, as well as the requirements of the 2015 Albanian law on higher education. The University offers study programs in three successive cycles (Bachelor, Master and PhD) in accordance with its development strategy and its faculty structures (**See Annex:13 Statute, Article 79/2, and Annex No.185 Study Programs and Cycles offered by EPOKA University, 2021**).

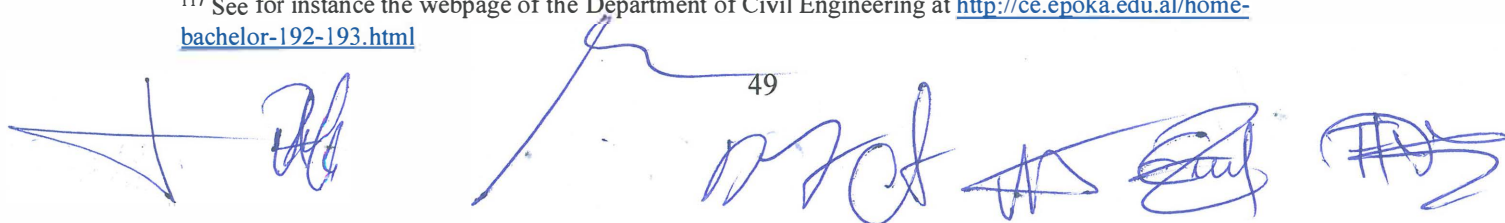
Provision is adequately structured and aligned to the Bologna requirements and the Albanian Qualifications Framework. The University operates with a full set of rules and procedures embodied in the Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations", the Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs" and the Regulation "On PhD Study Programs". All regulations are published on the University website¹¹⁵ and communicated to all staff via official channels.

The curriculum is organized in such a way as to provide the necessary information for any interested observer. All the relevant information concerning the curriculum, the course syllabi, and the course descriptions is provided in English and is available on the main webpage of the institution¹¹⁶ as well as on the web pages of the Departments¹¹⁷. All study programs are offered by EPOKA as full-time study programs and are organized as courses and evaluated with credits, according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). A full-time student has to complete 60 ECTS credits per

¹¹⁵ See <http://EPOKA.edu.al/home-staff-doc-publications-6-404.html>

¹¹⁶ See <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>

¹¹⁷ See for instance the webpage of the Department of Civil Engineering at <http://ce.epoka.edu.al/home-bachelor-192-193.html>



academic year (See **Annex:13 Statute 79/3**) with 25 hours per ECTS consisting of theory, practical and laboratory work as well as individual study.

The diploma formats issued by the University (See **Annex:116 Diploma Template**) are adopted by the Academic Senate (See **Annex:13 Statute, Article 86/4**) and approved by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth as the ENIC/NARIC center of Albania, and in accordance with the higher education legislation in force, as well as the ESG standards (1.4) for diploma recognition.

The diploma supplement format is adopted by the Academic Senate and is issued to every graduate in English and Albanian alongside the diploma (See **Annex:13 Statute, Article 86/4 and 86/6**). The diploma supplement contains the elements envisaged by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Albanian higher education legislation (See **Annex: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**).

All study programs offered by EPOKA are designed to facilitate student mobility within EHEA and beyond. English is the language of instruction of almost all study programs offered by EPOKA¹¹⁸. Study programs are organized into ECTS, the syllabi contain learning outcomes and competencies, as well as the detailed workload for the respective course (For an example of the syllabus template see **Annex:137 Course syllabus template**)¹¹⁹.

The language of instruction of almost all study programs offered by EPOKA – including all Master and PhD study programs - is English. Hence, English proficiency, in line with CEFRL (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), is an additional admissions criterion for all the concerned study programs. In this context, students either have to provide an internationally recognized certificate of English for Bachelor, Master and PhD level programs or they have to demonstrate fluency in the English proficiency exam organized by EPOKA (See **Annex :102 Regulation “On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations”, Article 5, Annex.103 Regulation “On Second Cycle Study Program”, Article 13, and Annex 104 Regulation “On PhD Study Programs”, Article 8/c, which is in compliance with the 2015 Law on Higher Education (Article 76/4) and the Directive of the Minister of Education and Sports 52/2015, as amended, which sets the level B1 to C1 according to the CEFRL (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).**

The minimum level of required English proficiency is set by an Academic Senate Decision in compliance with the provisions of the Albanian higher education legislation in force (See **Annex: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**).

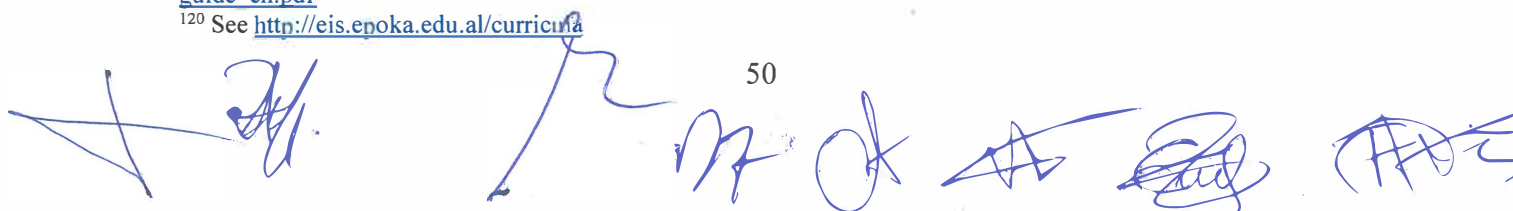
Furthermore, French, German, Italian and Turkish are delivered as elective courses to all undergraduate students as part of the respective curricula.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Only the Bachelor study program in Banking and Finance is also offered in Albanian and the integrated second cycle study program in Law is bilingual being offered in English and Albanian.

¹¹⁹ This is in compliance with the Albanian legal framework (e.g. Directives of the Minister of Education and Science No. 14 & 15/2008) and the ECTS Users' Guide (2015)

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/publications/2015/ects-users-guide_en.pdf

¹²⁰ See <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>



Credits transferred from a partner higher education institution within the framework of a formal agreement are recognized based on the proposal of the Scientific Committee of the respective Department and the approval of the Decanate of Faculty. Otherwise EPOKA's transfer policies allow for the transfer of studies from all accredited programs and institutions through a review process at the department level. The department can recognize all or part of the credits of the study programs which belong to the same cycle of studies both within EPOKA University and at other higher education institutions in Albania or abroad (**See Annex:13 Statute, Article 88 and 92; and Annex:105 Directive "On Student Transfer"**).

Study programs enable practical application of knowledge and skills acquired by students in theoretical courses (Chapter I Standard I.11)

Besides theoretical knowledge, Bachelor and Master level programs transmit and provide students with practical skills. These are set out in the learning outcomes of each course syllabus. Skills are learned and practiced in the labs, assignments, essays, presentations and projects, which make up a considerable part of engineering and business course instruction¹²¹.

Furthermore, Professional Practice is a compulsory course in all Bachelor, integrated second cycle and Professional Master study programs offered by EPOKA University¹²². The Professional Practice is supervised by academic staff members. The Professional Practice Site Supervisor also evaluates the student's performance as part of his/her final assessment (**See Annex:113 Guideline "On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Bachelor and Integrated Second Cycle Study Programs"; and Annex:114 Guideline "On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Professional Master Study Programs"**).

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has been effectively used since the University began its academic activities during the 2007-2008 academic year. All study programs are designed in accordance with the regulations and objectives of the Bologna Process and comply with the required level of the Albanian and European Qualifications Framework.

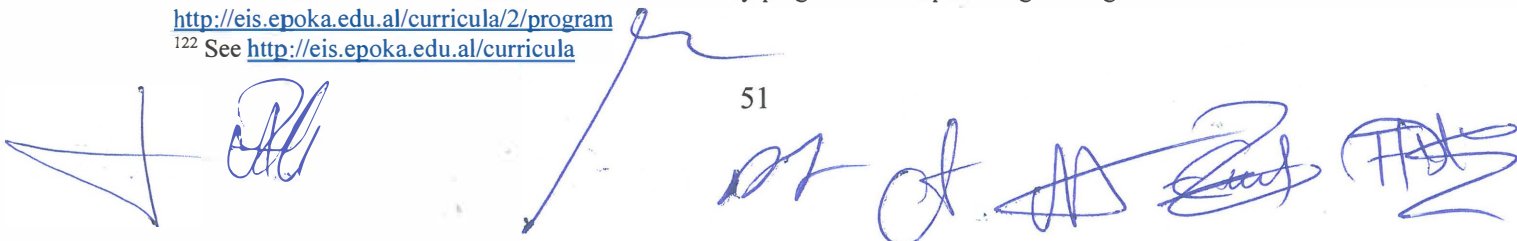
The curricula of all study programs offered by EPOKA are organized according to the ECTS. All courses are assessed in credits according to the ECTS, and the average amount of credits accrued during the year by a student who attends a full-time study program is 60 ECTS (**See Annex:13 Statute 79/3**).

The assessment methods of student performance are clearly stated in course syllabi. Each lecturer is free to organize the assessment methods in compliance with the learning outcomes of the course by assigning the respective percentages to each assessment component. Besides the mid-term and final exams which are mandatory, projects, term projects, assignments, essays, presentations, quizzes, and active participation can also be included as part of the assessment methods (**See Annex:137 Course syllabus template**).

¹²¹ See for instance the curriculum of the Bachelor study program in Computer Engineering at

<http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula/2/program>

¹²² See <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>



Grading is fair and averages for each of the study programs are made public in the Annual Reports (See for instance **Annex:38 Annual Report 2019-2020, p.36-39**). Each semester the University provides transcripts with the CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average).¹²³

Obtaining sufficient grades is set as a criterion for graduation or academic advancement, depending on the study program. Grades are reported in the student transcripts (See **Annex: 119 Template of the Student Transcript**) and in EPOKA's Letter of Performance which is part of the contract incoming freshman students sign with EPOKA University at the moment of their enrollment (See **Annex:140 Template of the Study Contract; and Annex:139 Template of EPOKA's Letter of Performance**).

A grading table for EPOKA and for the Albanian higher education system is presented in all relevant regulations and official documents (See **Annex:102 Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations", Article 17; and Annex:103 Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Program", Article 36; Annex: 107 2020-2021 Student Guide, p. 32**) as well as with respect to student transcripts (See **Annex:119 Template of the Student Transcript**) to also help facilitate conversion for transfer students.

The successful implementation of the ECTS system at EPOKA has had a profound impact on facilitating student mobility in the framework of exchange programs – particularly under Erasmus+ (See **Annex:141 Participation by students in exchange programs**) - but with regard to pursuing of further studies in universities in the EHEA.

Until 2016, all study programs, both at the Bachelor and Master level, required the submission of a research paper in the form of a final thesis¹²⁴. Since 2016, in compliance with the provisions of the 2015 Higher Education Law, Bachelor students below a CGPA level determined by the Academic Senate have to take the final comprehensive exam (See **Annex:126 Decision of the Senate No. 01, dated 16.11.2016**).

All Professional Master students have to submit and defend a Microthesis consisting of 6-7.5 ECTS and all Master of Science students have to submit and defend a thesis of 30 ECTS prior to graduation (See **Annex: Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs", Article 32-33**).

EPOKA's policies encourage students to lead a socially active life (See **Annex:142 Directive "On Student Clubs"**). To this end, EPOKA University has established the Student Clubs and Activities Office under the Dean of Students Office as the responsible unit to coordinate and follow-up on the organization of extracurricular activities by students (See **Annex:42 Organizational Scheme of EPOKA University**).

EPOKA University organizes numerous sports events and Open Forums events that have become active in many issues pertaining to the most recent concerns of the country, ranging from foreign policy to gender issues. There are also 24 active student clubs representing the interests of students in different areas (sports club, art and culture etc.). The Spring Fest and the Student Clubs Fest have also become traditional annual events organized by EPOKA (See **Annex:12 Dean of Students Annual Activity Report 2019-2020 Academic Year**).

¹²³ CGPA: Multiplication of the course credit by the grade points, and the division of the sum by the total course of GPA credits.

¹²⁴ This was a legal requirement by the 2007 Higher Education Law (2007).

Study programs aimed at preparing students for employment (Chapter I Standard I.12)

EPOKA study programs, especially in business, finance and engineering, offer special education components that are exclusively vocational in their character (**See for instance Annex: 143 Curricula of study programs pertaining to three cycles of studies at the three Faculties of the Bachelor study program in Civil Engineering, Professional Master study program in Banking and Finance, and Master of Science study program in Computer Engineering**). The development and offering of the Professional Master study programs has the primary aim of providing the labor market with graduates who possess interdisciplinary knowledge and understanding.

In particular, internships, which are part of the Professional Practice course, represent an important instrument for students to gain both application of theory to practice and also employment skills¹²⁵. The Career Planning and Alumni Office – in close cooperation with academic departments – facilitates the placement of students in professional practice sites by making use of the extensive cooperation agreements EPOKA maintains with public and private institutions, companies and other entities (**See Annex:135 List of cooperation agreements between EPOKA University and third parties**).

EPOKA's study programs in technical sciences, e.g. architecture, civil engineering and computer science, include sufficient modules and time for practical lessons (laboratory work, internships etc.)¹²⁶. EPOKA's state-of-art infrastructure fully supports the offering of laboratory work by the said study programs through the use of three computer laboratories, the electronics laboratory, and the civil engineering laboratory. Teaching facilities are also equipped with video projectors, smart boards, as well as camera and sound systems (**See Annex:75 Infrastructure in Function of Study Programs**).

The practical components of the teaching and learning process equip students with the necessary skills to facilitate their integration into the labor market upon their graduation. Indeed, EPOKA University boasts an excellent employability rate of its graduates (**See Annex:38 Annual Report 2019-2020, p. 40-41**).

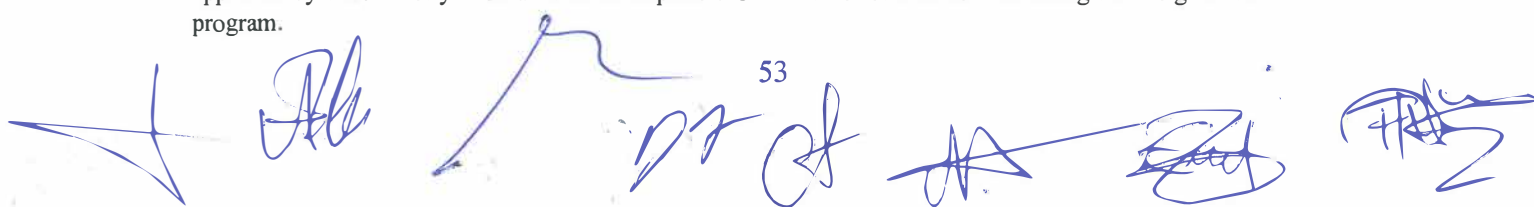
Conclusion and Judgement

EPOKA's study programs and curricula are fully aligned with the mission of the institution, its strategic plan and the demands of the Albanian economy as stipulated in the different sectoral strategies of the Albanian Government. The University fully meets the national accreditation standards in the area of curriculum and those of the ESG (e.g. 1.2 on the design and approval of programs).

In terms of academic content and student employability, the programs are designed and approved based on the national regulatory framework and EPOKA's policies by involving students and other internal and external stakeholders from EPOKA's network. Qualifications issued by the University meet program objectives and the learning outcomes, and they enable mobility and employment by following the national qualification framework.

¹²⁵ See for instance the course syllabus of the Professional Practice course at the Bachelor study program in Business Administration at <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula/syllabus/16054/1/43>

¹²⁶ The Albanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education has evaluated each program before being approved by the Ministry of Education and Sports based on these standards concerning the design of the program.



Based on the evidence presented above, the SEG concludes that *EPOKA has demonstrated that standards within this third area of evaluation are fully met.*

4 - EVALUATION AREA: TEACHING, LEARNING, ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH**Organisation of the study programmes**

Announced study programs are applied in appropriate circumstances (Chapter I Standard II.1)

EPOKA University ensures efficient organization and documentation of the curricula of its offered study programs. The documentation of the approved curricula is archived by the basic unit, main unit, Rector's Office and Internal Quality Assurance Office (**See Annex No.143 Curricula of study programs pertaining to three cycles of studies at the three Faculties**).

The study program curricula and the syllabi are also publicly available at the main webpage of EPOKA University¹²⁷ and the webpages of basic units¹²⁸. The Academic Senate¹²⁹ reviews and approves curricula for each study program, based on basic unit proposals. Prior to the Decision of the Academic Senate, the curriculum change proposals are also evaluated by the Decanates of the Faculty, the Curricula Development Commission¹³⁰ and Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance¹³¹.

EPOKA University has a set of rules and procedures to ensure the quality of study programs, for instance see, **Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations"** (**See Annex No.102**)¹³², **Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs"** (**See Annex No.103**)¹³³ and **Regulation "On PhD Study Programs"** (**See Annex No.104**)¹³⁴.

To ensure that the coherence of the content delivered in the courses, the work of academic staff is coordinated by regulations and directives published in the institution's website and distributed through official channels of communication¹³⁵. Each Faculty is responsible for planning staff members' teaching hours and the exact work plan for the academic year based on the **Directive "On Teaching Load"** (**See Annex No.57**)¹³⁶ (**Annex No.182 Summary Tables-Table No.4 Total Teaching Load of Academic Staff for the Current Academic Year**).

EPOKA University provides sufficient capacity for the realization of the practical and professional development of students, including by way of laboratories combining both practical and theoretical aspects (**See Annex No.75 Infrastructure in Function of Study Programs**). The university supports student internships through its partnership network (**See Annex No.182 Summary Tables-Table No.5.1 Cooperating Institutions and Organization**).

Theses and internships are supervised by the lecturers and at the beginning of the semester are approved by the Decanate of the Faculties. The departments monitor the process of thesis submission, student projects, seminar work, practices, research etc. Students graduating from EPOKA University should demonstrate that they have completed the educational cycle and are trained professionally, as published

¹²⁷ <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula>

¹²⁸ <http://eco.epoka.edu.al/home-curriculum-253-2104.html>

¹²⁹ <http://epoka.edu.al/governance/home-academic-senate-1425-1427.html>

¹³⁰ <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/cat-curricula-development-commission-2609.html>

¹³¹ <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/cat-permanent-commission-on-quality-assurance-1408.html>

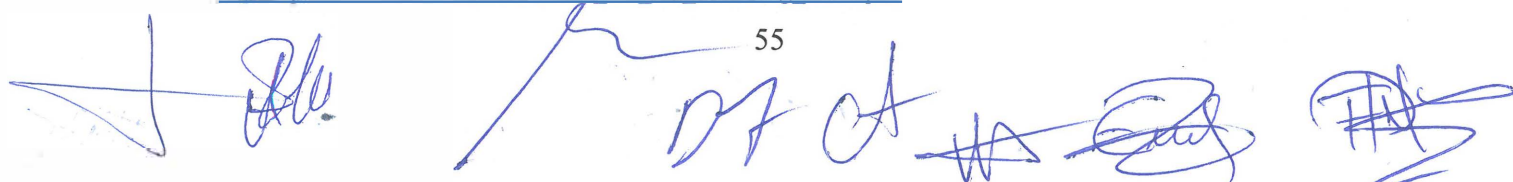
¹³² <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/04-undergraduate-studies-and-examinations.pdf>

¹³³ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-second-cycle-study-programs.pdf>

¹³⁴ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-phd-study-programs.pdf>

¹³⁵ <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-doc-publications-6-404.html>

¹³⁶ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/11-Directive On the Teaching Load.pdf>



in the University's website under the regulation on "Undergraduate Studies and Examinations", **Guideline "On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Bachelor and Integrated Second Cycle Study Programs"** (See Annex No.113), **Guideline "On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Professional Master Study Programs"** (See Annex No.114)¹³⁷, the Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs" and the "Regulation On PhD Study Programs", **Directive "On the Graduation Work of Undergraduate Programs"** (See Annex No.144)¹³⁸.

The University library provides supporting literature for all study programs. The library has a total of 25,000 printed books including a range of online resources¹³⁹ (See Annex No.87 Library Services). The institution enhances the library resources based on the basic unit's needs (See Annex No.145 **Decision of the Rectorate of EPOKA University, dated 02.07.2019**).

When a basic unit conducts an evaluation of study programs, they may request curricular changes and, as a result, may add new courses. A detailed form is filled out for each course that will be offered for the first time, and in this way the basic unit includes new literature and new resources such as textbooks, manuals and software. The request to purchase new textbooks for new courses is sent to the library representative who follows up with the purchases (See Annex No.86 **Titles of Books added in recent four years**).

Higher Education Institutions provide students who have passed all obligations of a study program, with relevant diploma, which is an official document (Chapter I Standard II.2)

Examination rules and regulations are found in the Regulations "Undergraduate Studies and Examinations", articles 16-23, "Second Cycle Study Programs", articles 26-29 and "PhD Study Programs", and articles 42-44, **Guideline "On Examinations"** (See Annex No.3)¹⁴⁰. All regulations and directives are published on EPOKA's website¹⁴¹.

Graduation criteria and procedures are published on the University's website under the regulation "Undergraduate Studies and Examinations", articles 25-27, "Second Cycle Study Programs", article 41, and "PhD Study Programs", article 47.

The institution has a dedicated system to ensure the anonymity of exam papers. Students receive a personalized code for each exam period, which is known only by them and the department coordinator. The codes are also incorporated into the EPOKA Interactive System (EIS). The lecturer then enters the grade pertaining to the relevant code. The lecturer can see the student names only after he/she finalizes the course grades. The exam rooms are also surveilled by a system of security cameras that serve as proof in case of any irregularities. Also, for each exam, an academic or assisting academic staff is assigned as invigilator. They also responsible for the implementation of anonymity of the exams (See Annex No.146 **Decision of the Rectorate of EPOKA University No. 04, dated 05.11.2019, and Annex No.147 Exam Anonymity Process**).

¹³⁷http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/7_Guideline_on_the_Conduct_of_the_Professional_Practice_at_BA_and_PICD.pdf;

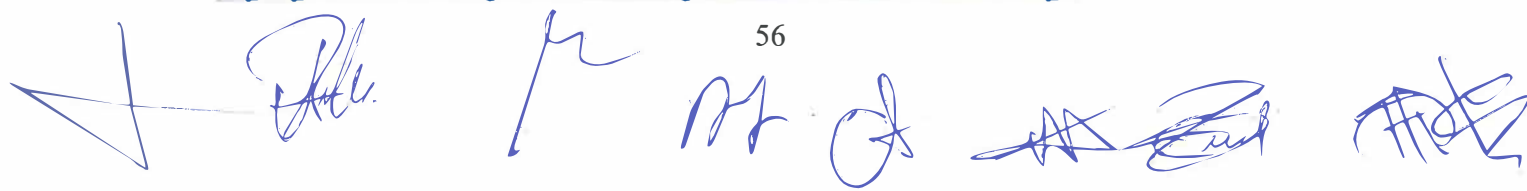
http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/Guideline_on_the_Conduct_of_the_Professional_Practice_at_PM.pdf

¹³⁸<http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive%20Graduation%20work%20of%20undergraduate%20programs.pdf>

¹³⁹<http://lib.epoka.edu.al/>

¹⁴⁰http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/Guideline_On_Examinations.pdf

¹⁴¹<http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/04-undergraduate-studies-and-examinations.pdf>



As stipulated in Art. 23 of the Regulation “On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations”, and Art. 29 of the Regulation “On Second Cycle Study Programs”, a student may complain about the result of a final examination by submitting a grade appeal form to the Registrar’s Office, the former Student Affairs Division, within one week following the announcement of final grades. The complaint is assessed by the relevant instructor in terms of material mistakes and the application is finalized by the relevant Decanate upon the proposal of the department offering the course. This procedure is described in detail in University documents such as Student Guide¹⁴² point 23.1 p 41 (**See Annex No.107 2020-2021 Student Guide**), Regulation of EPOKA University “On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations”¹⁴³. The Registrar’s office follows up, documents, and archives the overall procedure.

When enrolled at EPOKA University, students are provided with a personal student account which facilitates the registration of all study courses and enables them to be informed about their academic performance for each course. Students have access to their personal accounts and information is kept confidential (**see Guidelines for the use of EPOKA Interactive System Guideline: Annex No.67 EIS Guideline Role for lecturer, Annex No.68 EIS Guideline Role for students**).

The system used by EPOKA University is named EPOKA Interactive System (EIS). EIS is an automated online system developed by the ICTC Coordination office of EPOKA University which manages all operations, including university students and academic and administrative staff. Users log into the system via the official email that is provided by EPOKA University¹⁴⁴.

Study programs are subject to their continuous improvement to increase quality (Chapter I Standard II.3)

EPOKA University uses feedback from both lecturers and students to ensure that the delivery of teaching and learning is of the highest quality, as stipulated in the Quality Assurance Handbook p.23-24¹⁴⁵ (**See Annex No.120 Quality Assurance Handbook**).

The indirect evaluation methods have been implemented through surveys¹⁴⁶ conducted with students on a regular basis. The survey is activated in students EIS account prior to the start of final examinations for each semester and it includes: Questions about the course content; Questions about the performance of the course instructor; Questions about the service offered by EPOKA University; Conceptual Questions; Recommendations from students.

Other direct methods included in the syllabi of the subject such as:

-Evaluation with points for class participation of student; Evaluation of grades and points; Evaluation of the assignments completed by students; Evaluation of the involvement of the students in extracurricular activities

Students are represented in the governing bodies of EPOKA University through their Student Council, which aims at increasing the direct representation of students in the decision-making bodies of the University. The President and Vice- President of the Student Council are members of the Academic

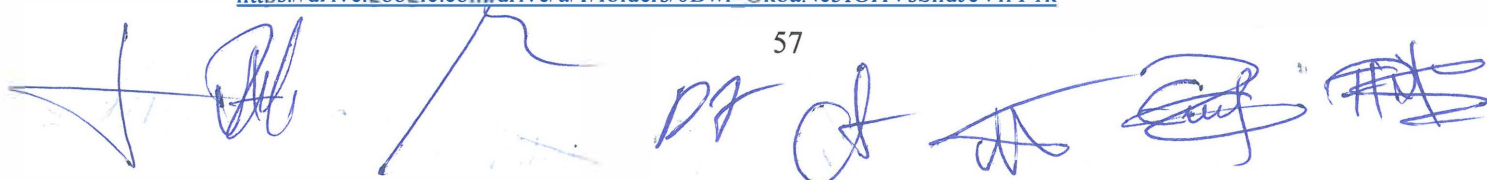
¹⁴² http://epoka.edu.al/mat/Student_Guide_2020-2021.pdf

¹⁴³ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/04-undergraduate-studies-and-examinations.pdf>

¹⁴⁴ <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/login>

¹⁴⁵ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/igao/EPOKA_Quality_Assurance_Handbook_19_12_2018_final.pdf

¹⁴⁶ https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/0Bwl_OkbaNe5IOHVvsSndJeVliY1k



Senate¹⁴⁷. The Vice-President of the Student Council on Quality Assurance Issues is a member of the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance¹⁴⁸. Students are also part of the self-evaluation group during the preparation of self-evaluation reports. This was true for all periodic accreditation SEG teams.

EPOKA University provides annual assessments of the progress of study programs, which include data on academic aspects and data on student performance such as passing rate and teaching data. These reports are part of the annual activity reports prepared by the University and by the respective departments. The University conducts student evaluations each semester and publishes the results of the student evaluations through its Annual Report (**See chapter 4, point F, p. 48 and Annex No.38 Annual Report 2019-2020**)¹⁴⁹. Related reports also include student surveys and internal evaluation reports.

Outcomes of entrance examinations, competitions, activities and various achievements of the institution are published both on the EPOKA website and in its the Annual Reports¹⁵⁰.

In terms of curricula improvement, an alumni survey is also carried out every academic year by the Career Planning and Alumni Office to find out about the applicability and practicality of the knowledge, skills and competencies gained from the study programs, as described in Quality Assurance Handbook p.23-24¹⁵¹.

Also, a Company Satisfaction Survey is carried out every academic year. The Career Planning and Alumni Office administers the questionnaire to get maximum feedback on the performance of EPOKA University graduates in the job market (**See Annex No.121 Company Satisfaction Survey Form**).

The University has established a process of evaluating the teaching, research and administrative activities of individual staff using an internally developed benchmarking system (**See Annex No.46 Directive "On Academic and Administrative Assessment and Quality Improvement"**)¹⁵².

At the end of each academic year, the study programs are reviewed and curricula updates are undertaken by the basic units to support improvement and employability (**See Annex No.106 Policy "On Continuous Improvement of Study Program"**)¹⁵³.

Initially the discussions about curricular changes take place in the department level. Following this, proposals are sent for review to the Decanate of the Faculty, the Curricula Development Commission, the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance, and, finally, for review and approval at the Academic

¹⁴⁷ See composition of the Academic Senate: <http://epoka.edu.al/governance/home-academic-senate-1425-1427.html>

¹⁴⁸ See Composition of Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance: <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/cat-permanent-commission-on-quality-assurance-1408.html>

¹⁴⁹ [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_\(Albanian\).pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_(Albanian).pdf)

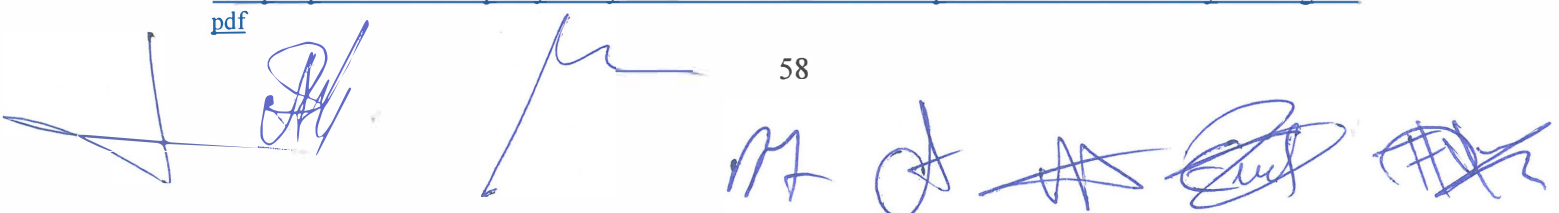
¹⁵⁰ See for instance on (1) Competitions: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-department-of-architecture-international-design-competition-for-high-school-students-idchss-2019-4736.html> ; (2) List of Winning Candidates: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-listat-e-kandidateve-fitues-per-programet-bachelor-dhe-te-integrue-per-vitin-akademik-2020-2021-per-raundin-e-pare-te-aplikimeve-5372.html> ; etc.

¹⁵¹ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/igao/EPOKA_Quality_Assurance_Handbook_19_12_2018_final.pdf

¹⁵²

http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive_Acad%20&%20Admin%20Perfor%20Assess%20&%20Quality%20Improv.pdf

¹⁵³ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/policy/Policy%20on%20Continuous%20Improvement%20of%20Study%20Program.pdf>



Senate. Inclusion of theories, principles and soft skills in degrees have led to high rates of employment among graduates, as can be seen in the Annual Reports (see Chapter 3, Section D, Point 2 p.39-42¹⁵⁴).

Institution pursues a clear policy to improve teaching quality (Chapter I Standard II.4)

The basic units are responsible for the proper functioning of the respective study programs as well as the internal quality assurance of the respective study programs as stipulated in Article 12 point 1 of Statute of EPOKA University (See Annex No.13 Statute of EPOKA University) ¹⁵⁵.

EPOKA University has a set of instruments and structures to ensure the delivery of teaching at the highest standard. The Academic Senate of EPOKA University evaluates, guarantees, and is responsible for quality assurance in the institution, in accordance with State standards. The Academic Senate of EPOKA University has established the Internal Quality Assurance System in accordance with higher education legislation. At the University level, the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance (PCQA), with its sub-units such as the Internal Quality Assurance Office, Curricula Development Commission, and Exam Board, constitutes the Internal Quality Assurance Unit of EPOKA University (See Annex No.182 Summary Tables- Table No.16 Members of Internal Quality Assurance Unit).

The structure and the functioning of the PCQA and its subunits are defined in the respective regulation¹⁵⁶ (See Annex No.148 Regulation “On the Organization and the Functioning of the PCQA”). The University has in place the policy entitled “On Continuous Improvement of Study Programs” which covers the main instruments for the improvement of teaching quality¹⁵⁷.

The academic staff at EPOKA University enjoys academic freedom in the learning process, and in research and innovation, in accordance with Law no. 80/2015, dated 22.07.2015, "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Institutions of Higher Education in the Republic of Albania".

EPOKA supports further pursuit of qualifications and training by its staff, and encourages the pursuit of academic research, as stipulated in Article No.1 of the directive “On the Promotion of Scientific Publication” (See Annex No.41)¹⁵⁸, Regulation “On Scientific Research” (See Annex No.55)¹⁵⁹ and Goal G.7 and Goal G.8 of the Framework Strategy EPOKA University for 2018- 2022 (See Annex No.28)¹⁶⁰.

Financial support has been provided on a regular basis to enable the participation of staff in conferences, to encourage publications in internationally-recognized journals, and to engage and collaborate in

¹⁵⁴ [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_\(Albanian\).pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_(Albanian).pdf)

¹⁵⁵ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/legal-acts/Statute_Uni_Epoka_en.pdf

¹⁵⁶

http://epoka.edu.al/mat/aeqi/2019_05_15_Regulation_On_the_Organization_and_Functioning_of_the_PCQA_tracking_changes.pdf

¹⁵⁷ <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/cat-quality-assurance-documents-1404.html>

¹⁵⁸ See Directive EU-DIR-004-EN, 16.02.2009 “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications”,

<http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/03.pdf>, Article 1: “The objective of this directive is to define the methods and principles on the encouragement of the academic staff of EPOKA University to carry out publications and participate in scientific activities.”

¹⁵⁹ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-scientific-research.pdf>

¹⁶⁰ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%202012%2019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf

research projects (See Annex No.149 List of Sponsored Conference Participations 2016-2020, See Annex No.129 No List of Publications of Academic Staff Members during the 2016-2020 period).

Additionally, EPOKA University supports the pursuit of qualifications and training of its staff, as stipulated in the EPOKA University Framework Strategy for 2018- 2022 Goal G.4 and Goal G.2. The academic staff has participated in different training activities organized by the institution, and have participated in seminars and projects for the improvement of teaching and learning. The training activities organized by EPOKA¹⁶¹ in the area of teaching and learning are tailored to the needs of staff and based on student feedback regarding their teaching and learning experience¹⁶². (See Annex No.52 List of Training Activities for Staff, See Annex No.150 Example of Documents on Training Activities).

Furthermore, academic staff of the University have been part of the staff mobility for teaching and training purposes within the framework of the Erasmus + Program¹⁶³ (See Annex No.54 List of staff members participated in exchange programs).

At EPOKA University, the quality of teaching is a priority. One of the main strategies of EPOKA University is to provide a high-quality environment for teaching and learning in all study programs offered by EPOKA University. This indicates that the University takes responsibility for delivering high quality teaching. Ensuring high academic standards, especially in teaching, constitutes a significant part of the mission of the University and an important aspect of staff evaluation.

EPOKA is committed to supporting and improving its teaching and learning environment. To provide the highest quality delivery in teaching and in implementing its study programs, EPOKA University retains the necessary infrastructure which is updated in accordance with program requirements (See Annex No.75 Infrastructure in Function of Study Programs).

Learning resources such as the library (See Annex No.87 Library Services) electronic labs, and computer facilities (See Annex No.69 Information and Communication Technology Services) are evaluated by students and staff through the Student Satisfaction Survey (See Annex.84 Template of the Student Satisfaction Survey) and the Academic Staff Satisfaction Survey (See Annex No.151 Template of Academic Staff Satisfaction Survey).

EPOKA University has specific criteria for the assessment of academic activities that must be fulfilled by prospective staffing candidates (See Annex No.43 Regulation on Staff Recruitment) in order to ensure the recruitment of a high quality and diverse academic staff (See Annex No.182 Summary Tables-Table No.6 Data for the Qualification of Staff). This also includes international reputation as well¹⁶⁴.

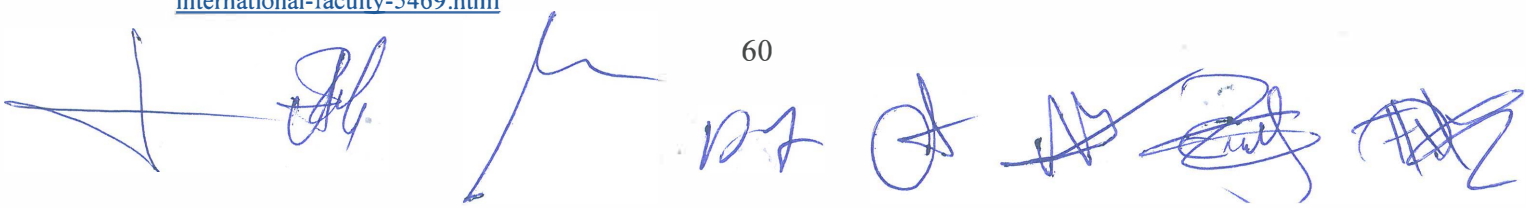
As demonstrated by the relatively high satisfaction levels of annual evaluations given by the students, EPOKA's staff (faculty, research assistants and administrative personnel) show commitment to enhancing the educational experience and improving the quality of study programs. Student satisfaction

¹⁶¹ Some of training activities available at the link: <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/cat-training-activities-1411.html>

¹⁶² Upon student and staff feedback regarding the remote teaching and learning experience the university organized a training on "Online Teaching" http://epoka.edu.al/mat/igao/Summary_Report.pdf; <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-online-academic-workshop-for-epoka-university-staff-5397.html>

¹⁶³ Example of Mobility of Staff for teaching purposes available at the link: <http://bus.epoka.edu.al/news-dr-kruja-was-part-of-staff-mobility-for-teaching-at-university-of-salerno-italy-4704.html>

¹⁶⁴ <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-epoka-university-successfully-qualifies-for-qs-rankings-2021-as-a-leader-in-international-faculty-5469.html>



levels are high - the average score for each question on the survey varied from 3.32 to 3.57 out of 4 (See **Annex No.38 Annual Report 2019-2020, p.48**)¹⁶⁵.

In the most recent Student Satisfaction Survey, students show high satisfaction levels in terms of service provided by the library, by the electronics lab, by the computer labs, as well as other infrastructural services.¹⁶⁶

Research: research outcomes, their dissemination, assessment and transfer

Department, as the basic unit of the institution, highlights its strengths and weaknesses in the field of scientific research (Chapter II Standard I.1)

Scientific research and planning are conducted at departmental level. The department is the basic academic unit of EPOKA University as stated in the Statute and the Law on Higher Education (See **Annex No.13 Statute of EPOKA University**)¹⁶⁷.

Departments include homogenous research groups with relation to the academic discipline they cover. Each academic staff member is engaged in particular research groups that are established within the department. The fields of existing research groups relate to the objectives of the study program respectively.

Research in the departments aims to further prepare academicians with specialized knowledge and expertise in their fields of interest. The department supports scientific research and the publication by lecturers and encourages the conduct of joint research activities. EPOKA University's platforms, such as conferences, forums, lectures, and symposia offer ample space for scientific exchange and transfer of knowledge.

Within and across departments there are research groups engaged in several research projects. Research groups are organized into specific research areas¹⁶⁸. Research areas are established in compliance with; 1. The European Research Area (ERA)¹⁶⁹ priorities for excellence in research.; 2. The provisions of the Law no. 80/2015 "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education in the Republic of Albania (See **Annex No.152 Law 80/2015 "On higher education and scientific research in higher education institutions in the Republic of Albania"**)¹⁷⁰; 3. The National Strategy on Science, Technology and Innovation, 2017-2022 (DCM No. 710, dated 01.12.2017) (See **Annex No.153 National Strategy on Science, Technology and Innovation**)¹⁷¹; 4. The Institutional Framework Strategy 2018-2022 of EPOKA University (See **Annex No.28 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University for 2018-2022**)¹⁷².

¹⁶⁵ [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_\(Albanian\).pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/administration/Annual_Report_2019_2020_(Albanian).pdf)

¹⁶⁶ Students Satisfaction Survey Report details are available upon request

¹⁶⁷ See Article 12 at <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/legalacts/StatuteUniEpokaen.pdf>

¹⁶⁸ In total there are 29 areas of research identified across departments.

¹⁶⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/era_en

¹⁷⁰ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/links/Ligj_80_2015_22_07_2015.pdf

¹⁷¹ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/links/VKM%20Nr.%20710,%20dt%2001.12.2017,%20Strategjia%20Kombetare%20per%20shkencen.pdf>

¹⁷² http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%2012%2019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf

Research groups and research areas are posted on the website of the respective departments. For example, at the Department of Business Administration, following the National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation, research areas of Business Administration Department fit with the national research priority area “Social Sciences and Albanology Sciences”¹⁷³. For more information on the research areas and groups at the Departmental level see **Annex No.186 entitled ‘Research areas/groups at the departmental level, 2021’**.

Departments promote, coordinate, and manage teaching and research activities. Course appointments and timetables are set by the departments to respect academic freedom. Academic staff use available materials based on the approval of the respective departments (syllabus, learning outcomes, books, course evaluation etc.). Academic staff members are expected to use the financial support provided by the University to develop their scientific expertise and for scientific publications¹⁷⁴. EPOKA is a private higher education institution. Hence, departments issue their financial requests to the Administrative Board through the Academic Senate and the Dean of the respective Faculty. The financial responsibility lies within the Faculty and the Administrative Board¹⁷⁵.

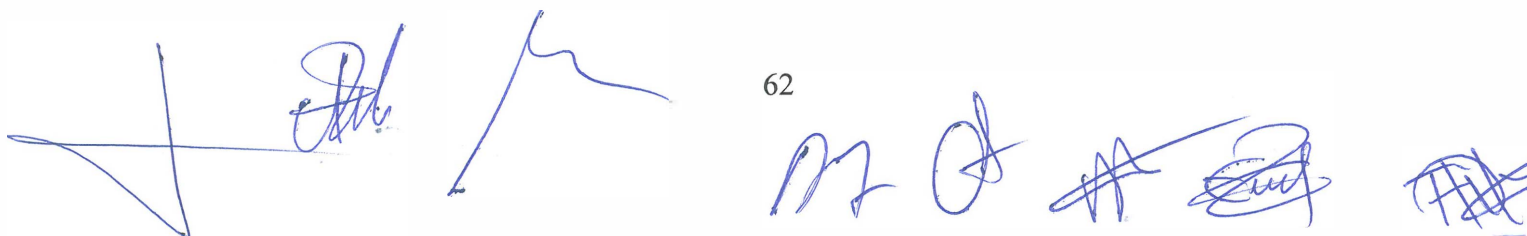
Research is evaluated at departmental level. The University encourages all members of the academic staff to be active in research by providing financial support. At the end of the academic year, academic staff prepares and submits a report (hard and soft copy) to the faculty about all scientific publications published by the academic staff members for that year. The Rector’s Office, in accordance with the Directive “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications”, evaluates the publications on a points basis and a monetary reward is granted to the staff engaged in the publications (**See Annex No.41 Directive on the Promotion of Scientific Publications**)¹⁷⁶. Each year, the Rectorate decides the amount of remuneration for each earned point and based on the points collected, each member of the academic staff receives the appropriate remuneration.

EPOKA University also offers financial support for the participation of academic staff in conferences and scientific activities, organized inside and outside the country, under the same above directive. Newly employed academic staff members have the right to use the support for participation in scientific activities for the first three years of employment. At the end of this period, the concerned academic staff members who apply for financial support to participate in international conferences and other related scientific events should have published an article belonging to the A1 category (**See Annex No.41 Directive on the Promotion of Scientific Publications**)¹⁷⁷ during the three-year period prior to the date of the submission of the application to benefit from the financial support.

Furthermore, EPOKA University financially supports research projects for academic staff members according to the Guideline for Research Projects (**See Annex No.154 Guideline for Research Projects**)¹⁷⁸, where academic staff members, members of research centers, and, above all, PhD students are financially supported, with PhD students able to conduct their field studies for their doctoral thesis.

EPOKA University organizes or co-organizes conferences and scientific activities at the international level, which is another important dimension of the scientific research policy of EPOKA University¹⁷⁹

Research activities have been subject to external evaluation during accreditation processes for the Bachelor, Master and PhD study programs and the majority of external reviewers have concluded that scientific research activities and financial support policies for scientific research at EPOKA University constitute one of the strongest points of the institution.



Institution encourages development, dynamism and scientific research (Chapter II Standard I.2)

EPOKA University is an institution of higher education oriented towards scientific research. EPOKA University manages and organizes its scientific research policies through the Research and Projects Office, which supports scientific research and training of its staff in accordance with the Institutional Framework Strategy (See **Annex No.28 EPOKA Framework Strategy 2018-2022**)¹⁸⁰, the Regulation “On Scientific Research” (See **Annex No.55 Regulation on Scientific Research**)¹⁸¹, the Directive “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications” (See **Annex No.41 Directive on the Promotion of Scientific Publications**)¹⁸², and the Guideline for Research Projects (See **Annex No.154 Guideline for Research Projects**)¹⁸³.

Scientific research at EPOKA University remains an essential element of academic activity along with teaching, since an active research culture is essential for the future of our University and society in general. EPOKA University remains a pioneer in encouraging scientific research and publications and accordingly has established a consolidated internal policy to promote and incentivize high-quality scientific research and publications by its academic staff.

Financial support has been provided on a regular basis to enable the participation of staff in conferences, publications, and workshops. Due to the above-mentioned institutional support, there has been an increase in scientific research output, scientific conferences organized¹⁸⁴, participation in international conferences (See **Annex No.149 List of Sponsored Conference Participations_2016-2020**)¹⁸⁵, scientific publications,¹⁸⁶ and staff mobility for teaching and research purposes (See **Annex No.155 List of Student and Staff Mobilities**).

The average number of publications since 2017 has been about 53 publications per year. The percentage of funds allocated and invested for Research and Development at EPOKA University is calculated at an average of 14% per year since 2017, with the exception of the last year, 2020-2021, since the covid-19 pandemic affected the situation and the figure dropped to 9% of total expenditure¹⁸⁷.

EPOKA University has established three functional research centers, the Centre for European Studies (CES), the Centre of Research and Design in Architecture (CORDA), and the Yunus Center for Social Business and Sustainability (YCSBS). CES is a multi-disciplinary research, education and outreach

¹⁷³ See <http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-organization-of-the-study-program-2172-2594.html>

¹⁷⁴ This policy has been stipulated in the Statute, Article 12 available in Annex No.13.

¹⁷⁵ See Annex No.13 Statute, Article 39 for the role of the Administrative Board, and Article 16 on the Academic Senate.

¹⁷⁶ [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive On the Promotion of Scientific Publications.pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive%20On%20the%20Promotion%20of%20Scientific%20Publications.pdf)

¹⁷⁷ See Article 5 [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive On the Promotion of Scientific Publications.pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive%20On%20the%20Promotion%20of%20Scientific%20Publications.pdf)

¹⁷⁸ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/Common%20Guidelines%20for%20Scientific%20Research%20Proposal%20Submission.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ <http://conf.epoka.edu.al>

¹⁸⁰ [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%202012%202019 Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%202012%202019%20Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf)

¹⁸¹ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-scientific-research.pdf>

¹⁸² [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive On the Promotion of Scientific Publications.pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive%20On%20the%20Promotion%20of%20Scientific%20Publications.pdf)

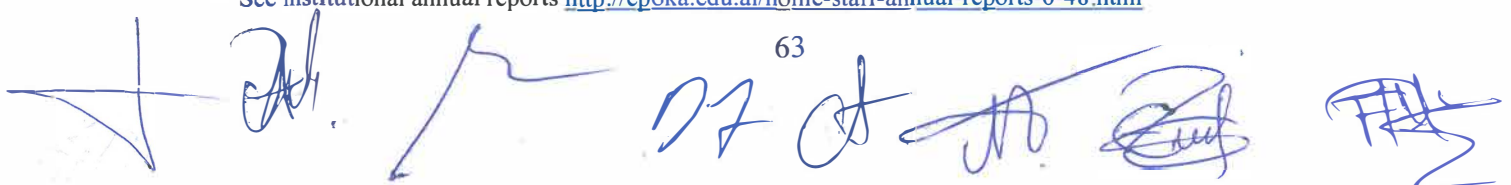
¹⁸³ [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive On the Promotion of Scientific Publications.pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive%20On%20the%20Promotion%20of%20Scientific%20Publications.pdf)

¹⁸⁴ <http://conf.epoka.edu.al/>

¹⁸⁵ For example during 2016-2020 EPOKA supported financially 76 participations in international scientific conferences. For a list of academic staff members who have profited from EPOKA's financial support see Annex List of Sponsored Conference Participations 2016-2020

¹⁸⁶ <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-scientific-research-excellence-at-epoka-university-4927.html>

¹⁸⁷ See institutional annual reports <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-annual-reports-6-48.html>



program, having as its main scope the improvement of the understanding of global issues and interdisciplinary studies. The centre aims to organize various forums, conferences, and activities to provide the proper interaction of staff, students, and individuals interested in the center. It addresses issues related to current themes of the European Union.¹⁸⁸

CoRDA is a project and research unit that aims to build a bridge between industry and academia, contributing to the environment with expertise and academic research. CoRDA seeks to implement design strategies based on interdisciplinary principles, generating integrative design between the user and the designer; and to develop projects in different areas from Architecture to Urban and Landscape Design and Planning, in Restoration and Conservation.

The Office provides consulting services in the fields of urban planning, building physics, and universal design. Functioning as a research entity, it aims to offer to the academy an environment for developing research projects and publishing the results of the related subjects as scientific research. One of the main objectives of CoRDA is to facilitate the engagement of undergraduate students and graduates in professional practice.¹⁸⁹

The mission of the Yunus Center for Social Business and Sustainability (YCSBS) is “building social business awareness to address pressing economic, social and environmental challenges through interdisciplinary research, knowledge-sharing and mentoring services”.¹⁹⁰ It serves as a research center to map the social business ecosystem, gather knowledge on social business, examine and test theories of social business, while also seeking to find predictors of success in social business and its ultimate impact in reducing poverty and other social, economic, or environmental problems. YCSBS further works to disseminate knowledge on social business within academia, in the market, with government, and in civil society.

Additionally, YCSBS educates students about the principles of social business and prepares them in accordance with market needs. By offering training and mentorships on how to build and develop social businesses, YCSBS equips various professionals and entrepreneurs with the needed social business principles to tackle these pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges.¹⁹¹

EPOKA University encourages collaboration among in-house researchers and other institutions. There is an ever-increasing number of bilateral agreements with other universities and applications for research funds¹⁹². EPOKA already participates in various international programs such as Western Balkan Fund, Visegrad+, COST Actions, Erasmus+ program, Horizon 2020 projects etc (**See Annex No.156 List of Research Projects 2017-2020**)¹⁹³.

Faculties and Departments, in close cooperation with the Vice-Rector for International Relations and the International Relations Office, strive to raise the visibility of EPOKA University among international academic networks by promoting the university's international image as a center of

¹⁸⁸ <http://ces.epoka.edu.al>

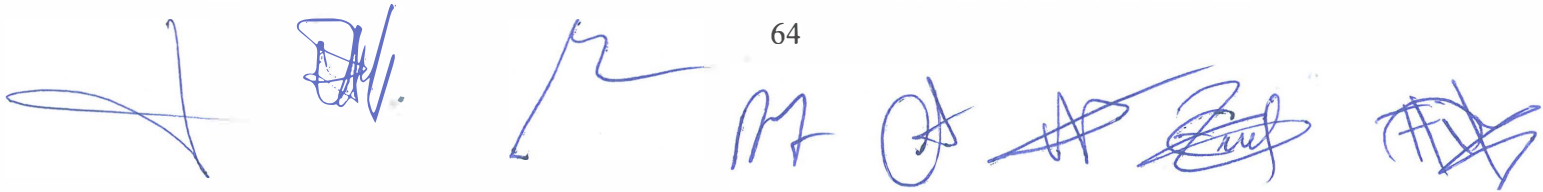
¹⁸⁹ <http://epoka.edu.al/corda/home.html>

¹⁹⁰ See Directive “On the Yunus Centre on Social Business and Sustainability”, Article 5, available at <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive%20%E2%80%99CON%20the%20Yunus%20Centre%20on%20Social%20Business%20and%20Sustainability%E2%80%99C.pdf>

¹⁹¹ <http://ycsbs.epoka.edu.al>

¹⁹² See Partner Universities at <http://iro.epoka.edu.al/cat-partner-universities-1061.html>; and <http://iro.epoka.edu.al/home-erasmus-programme-1151-1638.html>

¹⁹³ See Annex; List of Research Projects 2017-2020. During 2017-2020 EPOKA has participated in 25 COST projects, 7 Erasmus+, 1 Horizon 2020 and numerous other international and national research projects.



excellence in teaching and research. The institution has cooperation relationships with different actors from the public and private sphere for conducting scientific research, national and international projects, and for student internships.

Institution concentrates on scientific research internationalization

(Chapter II Standard I.3)

“Internationalization” represents a strategic objective of EPOKA University. In this context, EPOKA University is one of the most active universities in Albania that cooperates with EU universities through the Erasmus+ Program and other frameworks. This is in the context of research and projects aiming to support actions in the field of Education, Training, Youth and Sports, and also in terms of staff and student exchange. EPOKA University is currently a partner institution in several Erasmus+ KA 2 Capacity Building projects and one Horizon 2020 project. EPOKA maintains a scientific research database that includes information for all staff scientific work and their participation is followed in terms of the impact of scientific research on internationalization.

According to the University Strategic Plan, EPOKA University is committed to the internationalization of research by collecting and disseminating information to the research units, laboratories and the library. EPOKA University places high importance on the improvement and promotion of the academic staff, publications in international peer reviewed journals, indexing and international projects. The scientific research and participation in projects of the academic staff is strongly encouraged and rewarded ¹⁹⁴. EPOKA has shown strong commitment to participate in EU funded research projects and other international projects, and has been engaged in a considerable number of projects between 2017-2020 (See Annex No.156 List of Research Projects 2017-2020, and Annex No.187 Table: Successful Projects during 2017-2020).

EPOKA University has regularly organized workshops, national and international conferences at its premises¹⁹⁵. Since 2017, EPOKA has organized 7 international conferences. EPOKA’s staff members participate in many research activities. Increasing the participation in such events is part of the strategic goals and policies of EPOKA University, specifically Goal 7 of the Institutional Framework Strategy for 2018-2022 which aims to increase ‘the quality and quantity of research and project development’ among academic and administrative staff members (See Annex No.28 Framework Strategy, 2018-2022)¹⁹⁶.

EPOKA has consistently broadened its partnership network. EPOKA University has signed 52 partnership agreements with other higher education institutions from many different countries based on various frameworks like MoU agreements, Erasmus+ KA1, and Erasmus+ KA2¹⁹⁷.

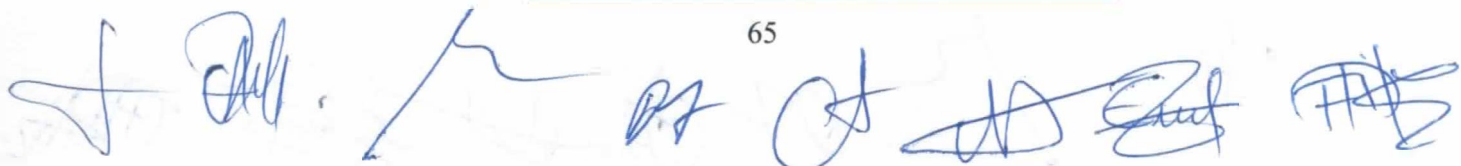
To further increase the dissemination and visibility of research findings, EPOKA organizes several meetings when faculty members are able to present their research. Achievements and participation of

¹⁹⁴ See Goal 4.1.2 of the EPOKA University Framework Strategy 2018-2022.

¹⁹⁵ See website: <http://conf.epoka.edu.al/>

¹⁹⁶ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%2012%2019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf

¹⁹⁷ See list of partner universities <http://iro.epoka.edu.al/cat-partner-universities-1061.html>



EPOKA's academic staff in research events, and publications with high impact factor, PhD dissertation defenses, and new titles are reported regularly across all mediums of the institution¹⁹⁸.

EPOKA's staff members have a good record of publications in international journals (**See Annex No.129 List of Publications_2016-2020**). A continuous increase in the number of scientific publications and research by the academic staff of EPOKA University has been reported¹⁹⁹. There has been an increasing number of high-quality research papers published in peer-reviewed journals indexed in Clarivate's Web of Science (SCIE/SSCI/AHCI) and Elsevier's Scopus, and books published by prestigious international publishing houses highly ranked by SENSE. The list of publications is on the website of the faculties and the departments²⁰⁰. Since 2017, EPOKA's staff have published 158 research papers as high-impact journal articles.

Institution determines priority areas of scientific research (Chapter II Standard I.4)

Research areas and research priorities are determined by faculty members at departmental and faculty level. The research areas are published on each department's website and consider the interests of both individual researchers and of the department. The fields of existing research groups relate to the objectives of the study programs offered. However in all cases, research areas are established in compliance with; 1. The European Research Area (ERA)²⁰¹ priorities for excellence in research.; 2. The provisions of the Law no. 80/2015 "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education in the Republic of Albania (**See Annex No.152 Law 80/2015 "On higher education and scientific research in higher education institutions in the Republic of Albania"**)²⁰²; 3. The National Strategy on Science, Technology and Innovation, 2017-2022 (DCM No. 710, dated 01.12.2017) (**See Annex No.153 National Strategy for Science, Technology and Information**)²⁰³; 4. Institutional Framework Strategy 2018-2022 of EPOKA University(**See Annex No.28 Framework Strategy, 2018-2022**)²⁰⁴.

EPOKA University has a policy in place to support innovations and inventions, stipulated in the Directive "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications", Article 4 and 5. EPOKA University has also issued a formal statement through the "Staff Guide" booklet addressing the issue of copyright ownership (**See Annex No.49 Staff Guide**)²⁰⁵.

EPOKA also encourages scientific debate, and open discussion in priority areas of scientific research, to its faculty members by organizing open lectures with renowned researchers, open forums with

¹⁹⁸ For some examples see 1. <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-congratulations-to-ms-migena-ceyhan-on-her-phd-dissertation-defense-5471.html>, 2. <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-faculty-with-impact-research-ecosystem-at-epoka-dr-maaruf-ali-publishes-in-high-ranking-indexed-journal-5465.html>, 3. <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-our-master-graduate-ms-polikseni-bano-and-assoc-prof-dr-sokol-dervishi-of-the-architecture-department-publish-in-high-ranking-indexed-journal-5468.html>, 4. <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-high-ranking-indexed-journal-publication-in-research-excellence-at-epoka-university-5406.html>

¹⁹⁹ <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-scientific-research-excellence-at-epoka-university-4927.html>

²⁰⁰ FEAS: <http://feas.epoka.edu.al/home-journal-articles-442-558.html>; FAE: <http://fae.epoka.edu.al/cat-research-647.html>.

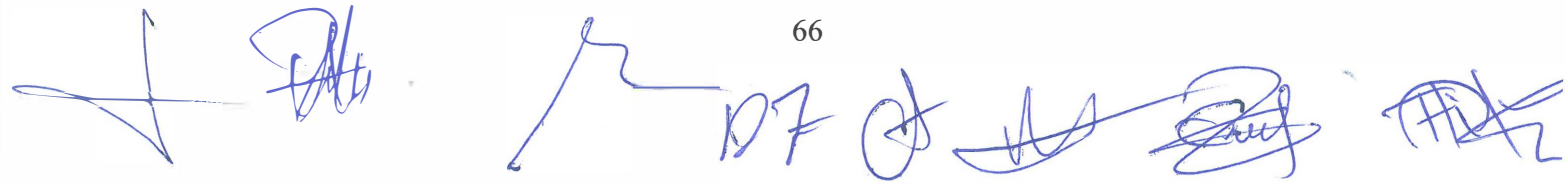
²⁰¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/era_en

²⁰² http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/links/Ligi_80_2015_22_07_2015.pdf

²⁰³ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/links/VKM%20Nr.%20710,%20dt%2001.12.2017,%20Strategjia%20Kombetare%20per%20shkencen.pdf>

²⁰⁴ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%2012%2019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf

²⁰⁵ See Staff Guide, Chapter 6, Article 6.18 University Policy on Copyrights p. 75



Albanian public figures, ceremonial meetings which promote book publications and other events of this nature²⁰⁶.

Institution applies scientific research priorities (Chapter II Standard I.5)

As stipulated in the Statute of EPOKA University, Faculties and Departments are aware of their responsibilities and they have clear objectives to realize and monitor all the teaching and scientific research processes. This is also reflected in the provisions of the University and departments' strategic plans as well as in the evaluation reports such as this one.

EPOKA University uses evaluation methodologies that help to assess and further improve the implementation of priorities set by it. All the required information is included in various action plans, timelines, department annual reports, institutional annual reports, institutional self-evaluation reports, internal audits on procedures, and in published assessment results (eg; annual review of research activities of each academic staff member conducted by the Decanate, later compensated financially based Article No. 5 of the Directive "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications).

For transparency reasons, all the internal evaluation and external evaluation reports of all the study cycles are published on the website of the PCQA²⁰⁷, which are a proof of the transparent procedures followed by the institution for implementing priorities set by it.

Recruitment of qualified academic staff is an important point of the strategic plan of EPOKA University. The recruitment of qualified academic staff is based on their research skills as assessed by the Regulation "On Staff Recruitment" ", Article 11, where emphasis has been given to indicators based on research output (publications, presentations, editing, references, completed research projects and awards in research) (See Annex No.43 Regulation "On Staff Recruitment")²⁰⁸.

Based on its needs, each department requests from the Human Resource Office the initiation of the recruitment process for the vacant positions. The Scientific Committee of each department decides on the specific weight to be assigned to the assessment of the academic performance of the candidate according to the classification index set out in Article 11, paragraph 5 of this regulation and to the score received by the candidate at the open lecture delivered in front of faculty and students.

Based on the score of the open lecture, if the candidate is successful, the Scientific Committee transmits its evaluation to the Rectorate through the Dean. Based on the proposal of the Rectorate, the Administrative Board of the institution approves the recruitment or appointment of the successful candidate to the vacant job position, who will contribute to the teaching process and scientific research in accordance with strategic goals of institutional development of EPOKA University.

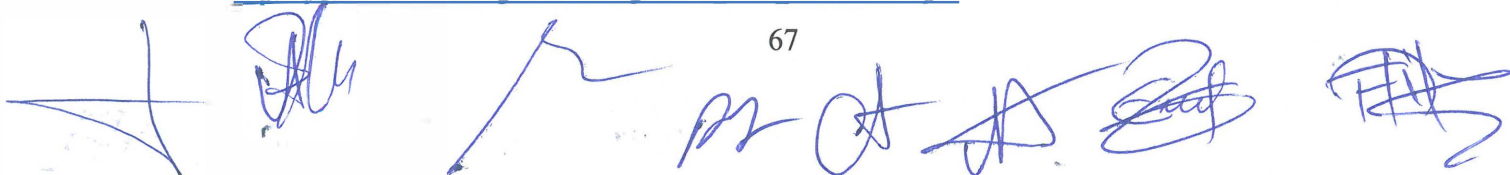
Institution provides continuity in the scientific research field (Chapter II Standard I.6)

EPOKA has set its priority research fields. Priority areas are in engineering (IT, electronics, civil engineering), design (architecture), business (management, banking, finance), law and social sciences (political sciences and international relations). The scientific research priorities are also part of the

²⁰⁶ <http://dos.epoka.edu.al/news-and-announcements.html>

²⁰⁷ See Reports at <http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/>

²⁰⁸ [http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/Regulation Staff Recruitment.pdf](http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/Regulation%20Staff%20Recruitment.pdf)



mission of EPOKA University and the research strategy (see for instance Statute, Article 3, paragraph 3)²⁰⁹.

The strategic research objectives in the Institutional Framework Strategy 2018-2022 (Chapter 4, Goals 1.1-1.4), explicitly stipulate measurable indicators which have been developed considering EPOKA's financial and human resources capacities²¹⁰. Research and project development activities are focused in those areas that efficiently utilize the human resource capacities of the university and are integrated with the research strategies at the departmental level.

Research activities involve national and international research organizations and have a strong interdisciplinary element. Project development comprises both national and European areas of interest and cooperation partners²¹¹. EPOKA's strategic goals are to increase cooperation with research institutions in the national and international context.

Research and projects have been given an important place in the Institutional Framework Strategy for 2018-2022 where EPOKA University commits to further support financially and administratively academic staff to increase research opportunities and the number of applications in national and international research projects which are initiated by the local agencies like the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation (NASRI) or international agencies like Western Balkans Fund, Visegrad, European Commission etc.

As stipulated in the said framework strategy, research activities are to be oriented towards the needs of a variety of stakeholders, especially those in the local economy and the Albanian public administration. EPOKA's staff members have cooperated with local agencies like NASRI²¹² and have applied in the calls they have opened for application.

PhD students select their research topics by taking into consideration the research areas of the department and the capacities of EPOKA University²¹³. The topics of their research are hence integrated into the research groups of the department and this allows PhD students to conduct research and publish together with their supervisors²¹⁴. The institution provides academic training and workshops to PhD students and promotes research at the highest level in third cycle studies.

For the purpose of integrating PhD study programs with respective departmental scientific research groups, EPOKA University financially supports internal Research Projects of PhD students under the "Guideline for Research Projects" where PhD students request support to conduct field studies needed for their doctoral thesis (See **Annex No.154 Guideline for Research Projects**)²¹⁵.

²⁰⁹ See Article 3, the Mission of EPOKA University, Paragraph 2 (p.3) <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/legal-acts/statute-of-epoka-university.pdf>

²¹⁰ See Area 2 - Resourcing.

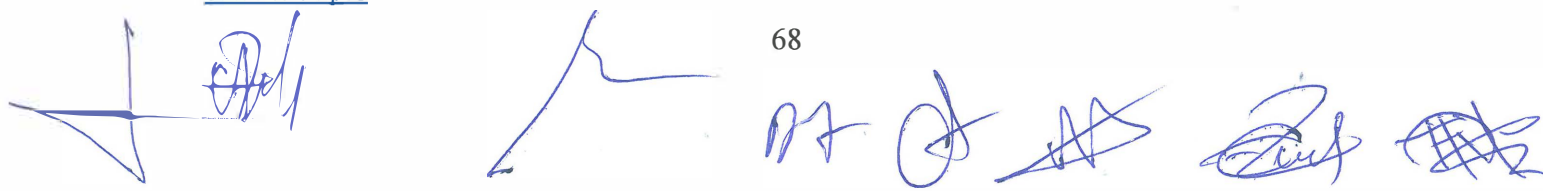
²¹¹ See Projects at <https://projects.epoka.edu.al/>

²¹² See a meeting with NASRI at EPOKA (December 12, 2018). Retrieval from: <http://projects.epoka.edu.al/news-info-session-albanian-national-agency-for-scientific-research-and-innovation-akkshi-nasri-held-an-info-session-with-epoka-university-academic-staff-4383.html>

²¹³ See Organization of PhD Study Program in all departments, ex; <http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-organization-of-the-study-program-2172-2594.html>

²¹⁴ See for example the Internal Evaluation Report for the Accreditation of PhD. in Economics (**Annex No.157**) <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/0B0mnzrXaGg0OWXJ2WTBJQIFTRFk>

²¹⁵ See Internal Research Projects at <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/Common%20Guidelines%20for%20Scientific%20Research%20Proposal%20Submission.pdf>



In this context, EPOKA University has encouraged young researchers, especially PhD students, to get involved in research projects. So far, the Research and Projects Office has opened 3 Calls²¹⁶ for Applications for Research Projects, where dozens of projects have been and are still being financially supported²¹⁷.

EPOKA University has been involved in the development of national research policies and national higher education policy both at institutional and individual levels through its academic staff members. It has regularly provided feedback to the Ministry of Education when developing its policies and it has been involved at the individual level in many drafting processes for the development of sectoral strategies (e.g. Assoc. Prof. Dr. M.N in water energy; Assoc. Prof. Dr. S.D, in urban physics and human ecology; Dr. D.I, in the national research strategy 2017-2021; Assoc. Prof. Dr. Xh.H, in the National Higher Education Strategy 2021-2026).

The research related strategic goals presented in its institutional Framework Strategy for 2018-2022 address some of the priorities set out in the National Strategy on Science, Technology and Innovation 2017-2022 (See **Annex No.153 National Strategy for Science, Technology and Information**)²¹⁸. Three out of the six National Priority Areas of Scientific Research, Technology and Innovation (See **Annex No.158 Priority Areas of Scientific Research, Technology and Innovation**)²¹⁹ include research fields in which academic staff members of EPOKA University have applied for and have been engaged in terms of research and projects - in Social Sciences and Albanology, Information Systems and Technology, and the Water and Energy Sector.

One of EPOKA's strategic goals is to increase the number of foreign academic staff and researchers, and their integration and adaptation within EPOKA's institutional culture is of foremost importance for staff retention. As a result, EPOKA University possesses a highly qualified full-time academic and research staff, 29% of whom are foreign as of September 2020, while employee turnover is very low. The foreign staff come from different countries like the USA, UK, Russia, France, Italy, Germany, France, North Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, and Pakistan.

EPOKA encourages the mobility of its academic personnel engaged in research at both the national and international level and supports financially and logistically their participation in international activities. Furthermore, international scholars find EPOKA University a welcoming environment that enables them to socialize and enhance their professional experience. Foreign academic staff are invited every semester as guest lectures or researchers to promote quality in research and internationalization of study programs. The number of academic staff welcomed at EPOKA for research or teaching has been 47 since 2017 (See **Annex No.155 List of Student and Staff Mobilities**).

EPOKA also provides financial and logistical support for the organization of international seminars and scientific conferences²²⁰, which are consistent with EPOKA's research policy envisioned in the Institutional Framework Strategy 2018-2022 (See **Annex No.28 Framework Strategy 2018-2022**)²²¹

²¹⁶ See <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-3rd-call-for-internal-scientific-research-projects-4566.html>

²¹⁷ See Research Projects at <http://projects.epoka.edu.al/>

²¹⁸ See

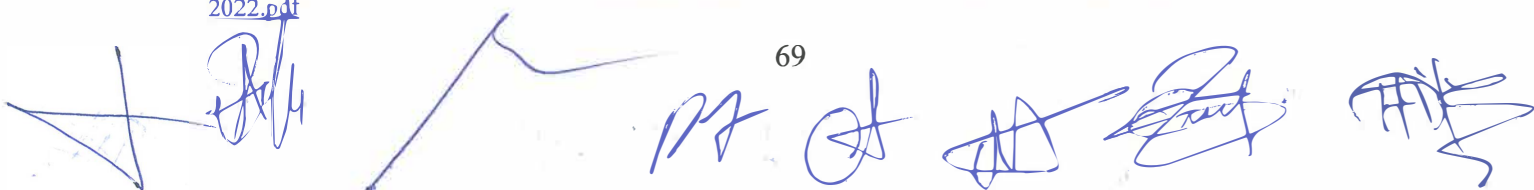
<http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/links/VKM%20Nr.%20710,%20dt%2001.12.2017,%20Strategjia%20Kombetare%20per%20shkencen.pdf>

²¹⁹ http://nasri.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/vendim.nr_2-dt.11.05.2018.pdf

²²⁰ See <http://conf.epoka.edu.al/>

²²¹ See Area B. Research and Projects, Goal 7 in the Framework Strategy 2018-2022 at

http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%2012%2019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf



and its regulation “On Scientific Research” (See **Annex No.55 Regulation on Scientific Research**)²²², Regulation “On Publications” (See **Annex No.159 Regulation on Publications**)²²³, and Directive “On the Promotion of Scientific Publication”(See **Annex No.41 Directive “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications”**)²²⁴.

Institution publicizes the outcomes in scientific research fields (Chapter II Standard I.7)

EPOKA University organizes²²⁵ and co-organizes²²⁶ conferences and scientific activities at a national and international level, which is another important dimension of the research policy of EPOKA University. EPOKA University also offers financial support for the participation of academic staff in conferences and scientific activities, organized inside and outside the country.

Newly employed academic staff members have the right to use the support for participation in scientific activities for the first three years of employment. At the end of this period, the concerned academic staff members who apply for financial support to participate in international conferences and other related scientific events should have published an article belonging to the A1 category (See **Annex No.41 Directive “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications”**)²²⁷ during the three academic years prior to the date of the submission of the application to benefit from the said financial support.

EPOKA University has established three functional research centers, the Centre for European Studies (CES), the Centre of Research and Design in Architecture (CORDA), and the Yunus Center for Social Business and Sustainability (YCSBS). All three centers are engaged actively in organizing various seminars and other scientific activities as well as supporting the organization of international level conferences²²⁸.

EPOKA University supports the publication of research outcomes by having a regulatory framework on publication activities (EU-DIR-004-EN/2009 “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications”²²⁹ and EU-REG-013-EN/2007 “Regulation on Publications”²³⁰) and by hosting a digital repository²³¹. Alongside their original publication destination (peer-reviewed journals, books, proceedings), research outcomes are presented in the department’s website and uploaded at EPOKA’s digital repository too. The University encourages all members of academic staff to be active in research by providing financial support. At the end of each academic year, all scientific publications published by the academic staff members are evaluated by a special jury on the basis of the criteria set out in the EPOKA University regulation “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications”²³².

²²² <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-scientific-research.pdf>

²²³ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-publications.pdf>

²²⁴ See Directive EU-DIR-004-EN “On the Promotion of Scientific Publications”, <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/03.pdf>, Article 1: “The objective of this directive is to define the methods and principles on the encouragement of the academic staff of EPOKA University to carry out publications and participate in scientific activities.”

²²⁵ See <http://conf.epoka.edu.al/>

²²⁶ See ex; <http://eco.epoka.edu.al/news-4th-international-virtual-conference-on-economics-and-development-ajiced-2020-5423.html>

²²⁷ See Article 5 <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/Directive On the Promotion of Scientific Publications.pdf>

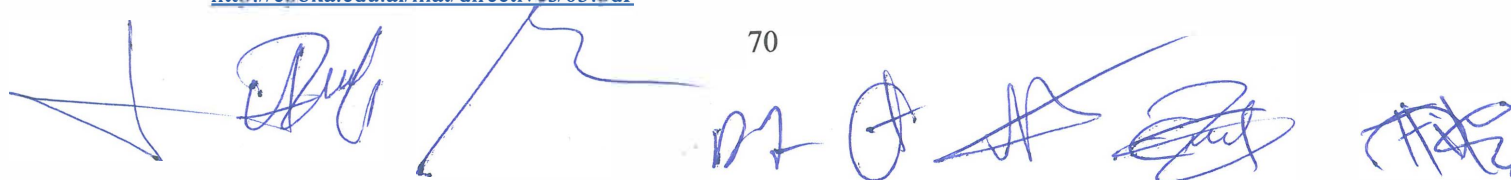
²²⁸ See list of conferences hosted by CES <http://ces.epoka.edu.al/home-conferences-2057-1371.html>

²²⁹ See <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/03.pdf>

²³⁰ See <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-scientific-research.pdf>

²³¹ <http://dspace.epoka.edu.al>

²³² <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/03.pdf>



To promote its scientific research policy and contribution to the academia EPOKA University publishes two academic journals, the Journal of European Social Research²³³ and the International Journal of Applied Statistics and Economics in collaboration with Economic Society of Albania²³⁴.

Additionally, EPOKA University commits administrative, logistic, and financial support to academic staff members for their applications for internal and external projects at local, national and international levels as well as support for the successful implementation of the approved projects under the "Guideline for Research Projects"²³⁵. PhD students' field studies are financially supported too under the same guideline. Due to such a policy EPOKA University is involved in several national and international research projects²³⁶.

EPOKA University has achieved a continual and sustainable increase in research output, impact and international recognition aligned to the strategic goals stipulated in the institutional Framework Strategy for 2018-2022. According to the data retrieved from SCOPUS database, EPOKA University, even though still in its second decade of existence, is listed as the university with the highest scientific research output among non-public universities, and among the 5 best universities in Albania in research output²³⁷ (**See Annex No.173 Scopus Albania Affiliation**).

Institution pursues a policy of evaluation and transfer of outcomes in scientific research fields
(Chapter II Standard I.8)

The progress of scientific research outcomes is monitored at the departmental level and by the Research and Projects Office, which also ensures the coordination and the effective use of institutional resources. Each academic staff member is evaluated once a year for their contribution to scientific activity. At the end of each academic year, all scientific publications published by academic staff members are evaluated by an ad-hoc commission established by the Rector's Office on the basis of the criteria set out in the EPOKA University regulation "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications" (**See Annex No.41 Directive "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications"**).

Academic staff members of the University are encouraged to be involved in scientific research activities in accordance with their academic disciplines and professional skills and duties arising from the strategy of the University (**See Annex No.55 Regulation on Scientific Research**)²³⁸. EPOKA University strictly complies with the provisions of the Regulation "On ethics on research and publishing activities" adopted through the Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Science No. 105, dated 23.03.2012.

Based on the provisions of section 5.4 of the above-mentioned Regulation, all term papers, articles, Master of Science theses, Professional Master micro-theses as well as PhD dissertations prepared by students are subject to plagiarism testing prior to the granting of approval by the respective

²³³ <http://ejs.epoka.edu.al>

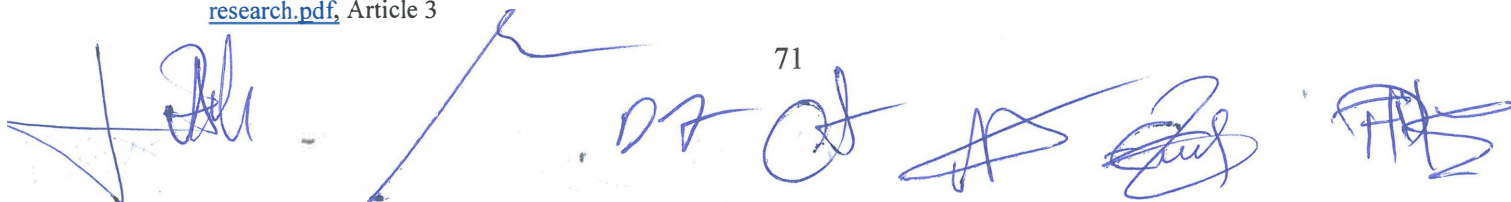
²³⁴ <http://esa.org.al/journal/>

²³⁵ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/Common%20Guidelines%20for%20Scientific%20Research%20Proposal%20Submission.pdf>

²³⁶ <http://projects.epoka.edu.al>

²³⁷ See **Annex No. 173 Scopus Albania Affiliation**, extracted from the Scopus Database with the keyword "albania" as a keyword.

²³⁸ See Regulation "On Scientific Research", <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-scientific-research.pdf>, Article 3



lecturer/supervisor. Plagiarism testing is carried out through a specialized software program (Turnitin) to which EPOKA University is subscribed.

Furthermore, in compliance with the provisions of Section 4.3.3 of the above-mentioned Regulation, EPOKA University publishes on its official website the PhD dissertations that have been defended by PhD candidates in front of the respective juries. At the same time, EPOKA University has explicitly envisaged in the Regulation “On PhD study programs” that the PhD degree is revocable at any time and under any circumstances where a case of plagiarism or data falsification is identified in the work carried out by the PhD candidate. Concerning ethical issues in research EPOKA follows the guidelines set out by the scientific community in Albania and the Ministry of Education (**See Annex No.160 Regulation for “Ethics on Research and Publishing Activities, MoES**). EPOKA University has also issued a formal statement through the “Staff Guide” booklet addressing the issue of intellectual property²³⁹.

EPOKA University encourages and financially supports young researchers to undertake personal initiatives in scientific research fields²⁴⁰.

EPOKA University collaborates with local and foreign business and economic enterprises. Collaboration with industry is part of the Strategic Plan. In order to initiate and support international projects, EPOKA University supports the relations between its departments and the industrial sector. Teams are composed of members from different institutions, focusing on projects from different disciplines. The main interest of EPOKA University in this context is to create the necessary conditions for technology transfer and constitute a useful resource to bring projects that can develop the industrial sector in the country²⁴¹.

EPOKA University hosts or co-hosts conferences and scientific activities at the national and international levels²⁴². In this domain, departments collaborate with the research centers at EPOKA to organize conferences, workshops, and other scientific activities periodically, which are reported annually (institution’s annual reports)²⁴³.

Further to the financial and administrative incentives offered to the academic staff to carry out publications and participate in scientific activities, a scientific research database is submitted annually to respective faculties. At the same time, it is recommended to all academic staff to establish and update Google Scholar and ResearchGate profiles public. A solid increase is reported in the number of scientific publications and research conducted by the academic staff of EPOKA University. The number of all scientific publications done by the academic staff during the 2017-2020 years is shown at **Annex No.188 entitled ‘Table: Number of Total Publications during the 2016-17 – 2019-20 academic years’**.

Furthermore, as shown through **Annex No.189 entitled ‘Table: List of High-impact publications during the 2016/17 – 2019/20 academic years’**, an increasing number of high-quality and high-impact papers published in peer-reviewed journals indexed in Clarivate’s Web of Science (SCIE/SSCI/AHCI)

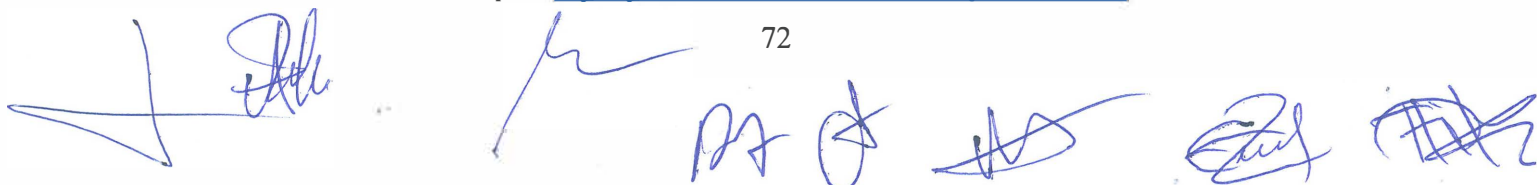
²³⁹ See Staff Guide, Chapter 6, Article 6.18 University Policy on Copyrights p. 75

²⁴⁰ See for example Research Projects of PhD students <http://projects.epoka.edu.al/home-research-projects-2nd-call-2673-2362.html>

²⁴¹ For a list of Non-Educational Partner Institutions see: <http://iro.epoka.edu.al/cat-partner-universities-1061.html>

²⁴² <http://conf.epoka.edu.al/>

²⁴³ See institutional annual reports <http://epoka.edu.al/home-staff-annual-reports-6-48.html>



and Elsevier's Scopus, as well as books published by prestigious publishing houses ranked in top categories by SENSE.

Conclusion and Judgement

In this area the Self-Evaluation Group concludes that EPOKA fully meets the national accreditation standards. EPOKA University ensures the implementation of study programs in appropriate circumstances. The study programs are subject to continuous improvement based on respective policies. EPOKA University systematically evaluates the quality of study programs, processes and services to achieve a high level of efficiency, effectiveness as well as student and stakeholder satisfaction.

EPOKA University provides sufficient capacity for the realization of practical professional development of students. The University makes available to students the necessary supporting literature for the respective study program.

EPOKA University has achieved a continual and sustainable increase in research output, impact and international recognition aligned to the strategic goals stipulated in the institutional Framework Strategy for 2018-2022. The three main strategic priorities that constitute the strategic goals of EPOKA University, stipulated in the Institutional Framework Strategy 2018-2022 are Teaching & Learning; Scientific Research & Projects; and Service to Society. In this context, regarding Scientific Research and Project implementation, EPOKA University has committed to provide opportunities to engage its staff in a wide range of research activities and other relevant project development areas.

EPOKA University remains a pioneer in encouraging scientific research and publications and accordingly has established a consolidated internal policy to promote and incentivize high-quality scientific research and publications of its academic staff by providing financial and infrastructural support which encourages all academic staff to be active in scientific research, engage in a growing number of projects, and participate in scientific activities as an important component of its strong academic and professional standards.

In conclusion, SEG affirms that *EPOKA has demonstrated that standards within this fourth area of evaluation are fully met.*

5 - EVALUATION AREA: STUDENTS AND THEIR SUPPORT**Institution pursues the correct policy for new students' entrance (Chapter I Standard III.1)**

EPOKA's short- and long-term admission strategies are set out in the Strategic Plan 2018-2022 (See **Annex No.28 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University 2018-2022, p. 15**), and the Annual Marketing Plan (See **Annex No.93 Marketing Policy of Study Programs**) which focuses heavily on activities related to student admission accompanied by the appropriate budget as well as the development strategies of departments.

Implementation is regulated through the rules laid out in the Statute and the regulatory framework of the University (See **Annex No.13 Statute, Article 116-120**). The Admission Office²⁴⁴, whose development strategy is aligned with the marketing and financial strategies of the University, coordinates the admissions process, serving a diverse student population nationally, regionally and internationally, while ensuring the integrity of the admission process (See **Annex No.174 Work Procedures of the Admission Office**).

The admissions strategies aim to promote the image of EPOKA to the prospective students, incoming students, graduating students and alumni. Services offered through the Career Planning and Alumni Office are tailored to graduating students. Admissions criteria and requirements for all cycles of studies are published on the University website.²⁴⁵ Furthermore, detailed information on curricula for each study program is published on the main page of the EPOKA website.²⁴⁶ Each department posts and updates information on departmental websites about the study programs it provides and its specific curricula.

EPOKA University has a comprehensive scheme of merit-based scholarships for the highest-achieving students who enroll at the Bachelor and integrated second cycle study programs. These are based on the results of high school studies, the Matura Exam that is administered by the Republic of Albania, as well as SAT Exam results.²⁴⁷ Scholarships are also available to students who enroll in the Master's²⁴⁸ and PhD study programs offered by EPOKA.²⁴⁹ Scholarships are provided for the entire period of the normal duration of studies.

The Admission Office also organizes the Career Planning Program for high school seniors. Through the said program, seniors are invited to EPOKA campus where they learn detailed information about the University and its specific study programs (See **Annex No.94 Template of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors**).

Potential students are informed about admissions criteria and the requirements needed to enroll at EPOKA University. After obtaining general information from the Admission Office, applicants obtain more detailed information from relevant departmental lecturers for specific study programs (See **Annex No.97 Plan of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2019-2020**

²⁴⁴ Web presentation of the Admission Office: <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al>

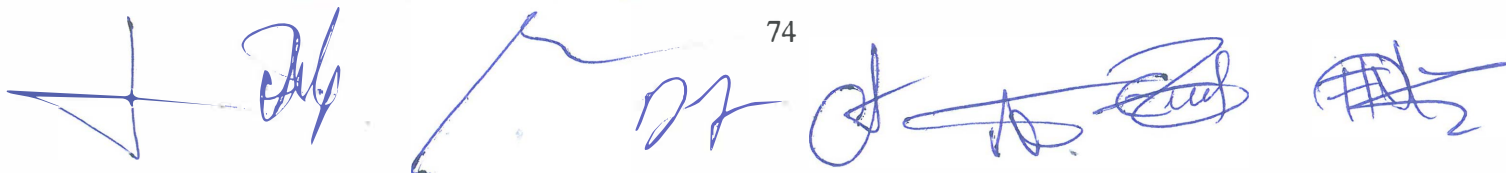
²⁴⁵ <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/home-admission-criteria-1923-1924.html>

²⁴⁶ <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula/21/program>

²⁴⁷ <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/home-bachelor-integrated-study-program-scholarship-2745-497.html>

²⁴⁸ <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/home-master-study-program-scholarship-2745-2746.html>

²⁴⁹ <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/home-phd-study-program-scholarship-2745-2747.html>



academic year and Annex No.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).

Due to the situation caused by Covid-19 during the 2020-2021 academic year, the Career Planning Program has been organized online. In coordination with the Regional Education Directorates/Offices, the Admission Office sent the links for participating high schools. The program was held March 1-31, 2021, with two online sessions taking place each day and a total of 44 high schools participating during this time (See **Annex No.99 Plan of the Online Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2020-2021 academic year**).

Every year, EPOKA University also participates in the Work and Study Fair, organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tirana, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, where prospective students are informed about the study programs that the university offers.²⁵⁰

For the conduct of the Career Planning Program, EPOKA collaborates with the Regional Education Directorates/Offices. At the beginning of the new academic year, a monthly calendar of programs is submitted for approval to the representatives of the Regional Education Directorate Offices. After visiting the principals of target high schools, the officers of the Admission Office prepare detailed schedules for interested candidates who want to visit EPOKA. High school seniors are invited to visit the EPOKA campus. EPOKA provides the transportation service and lunch for candidates (See **Annex No.94 Template of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors**). Through the web page of the Admission Office, candidates can also contact specialists to schedule the visit in the campus.²⁵¹

Information about admissions deadlines and about the Career Planning Program and its schedule, admissions criteria, and scholarship opportunities, are published on EPOKA's website. Printed brochures and other information leaflets are distributed as well (See **Annex No.50 Promotional Brochures and Leaflets**). The Admission Office publishes its contact details on the website and can be contacted all year around.²⁵²

EPOKA University admits to its programs local and international students based on the student quotas proposed by the Academic Senate, adopted by the Administrative Board, and approved by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth. All candidates wishing to enroll in one of the programs offered by EPOKA University need to fulfill the respective admissions criteria and follow the enrollment procedure. EPOKA's policies allow for a smooth integration of new students, in accordance with ESG, Standard 1.4. The policies are laid out in the annual Student Guide (See **Annex No.107 2020-2021 Student Guide**).

In order to assure a smooth integration of students into EPOKA campus life, every year new students participate in EPOKA's Welcome Program²⁵³ and Orientation Day²⁵⁴. During this event, students

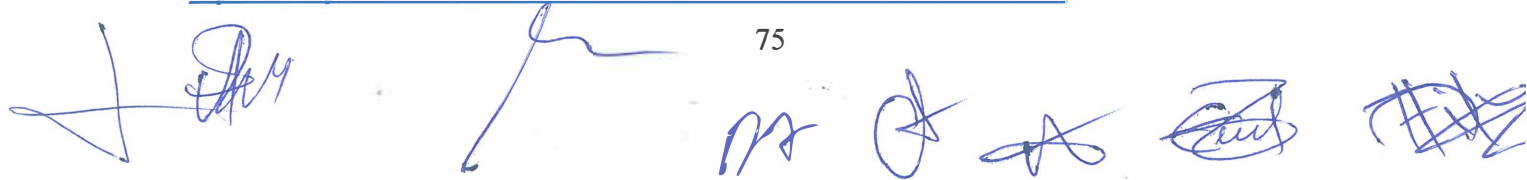
²⁵⁰ <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-epoka-university-participated-in-the-work-study-fair-organized-by-the-chamber-of-commerce-industry-of-tirana-5374.html>

²⁵¹ <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/cat-visit-connect-1568.html>

²⁵² See Visit & Connect <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/cat-visit-connect-1568.html>

²⁵³ <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-welcome-to-the-opening-ceremony-of-the-2019-2020-academic-year-at-EPOKA-university-4920.html>

²⁵⁴ For the Orientation Days for freshman students for the 2020-2021 academic year, see: <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-orientation-sessions-for-freshman-students-5390.html>



obtain information needed for their student life at the institution from EPOKA academic and administrative staff. Academic advisors also help students with their integration into University life

EPOKA has a low student-lecturer ratio at University level, meeting the state standards set out in this regard. The average student-to-lecturer ratio has been consistently lower than the national average. The national student to lecturer ratio in 2014 was a 22:1 average for all higher education institutions in the country and to 27:1 at public universities.²⁵⁵ EPOKA's ratios for the 2019-2020 academic year were respectively 20.40:1 for the fall semester and 18.60:1 for the spring semester (**See Annex No.190 Table: Lecturer-to-Student Ratio at University Level during the 2017/18-2019/20 academic years**).

Master of Science students at EPOKA University are eligible to be hired as Teaching Assistants (TA) and as such belong to the "part-time assisting academic staff" category. Their principal tasks are related to supporting course instructors during teaching time with integrative and practice-based activities, seminars and laboratories, communicating course materials to students, assisting the course instructor in taking the attendance signatures of the students, attending class lectures, and acting as invigilator during exams (**See Annex No.175 Job Description of Teaching Assistants**). The standard for the number of teaching assistants per 60 students is also fulfilled by EPOKA University.

Institution pursues an informing and communication policy with students and academic staff
(Chapter I Standard III.2)

EPOKA provides different advising and counseling options for students. There are walk-in visiting hours and email contacts²⁵⁶ for administrative affairs at the respective units of the University, and there is an academic advisor for each student. Student self-help groups and clubs may use EPOKA facilities for their discussions and gatherings. Students are also informed on a regular basis through the website and the annual Smart Student Guide (**See Annex No.107 2020-2021 Student Guide**)²⁵⁷.

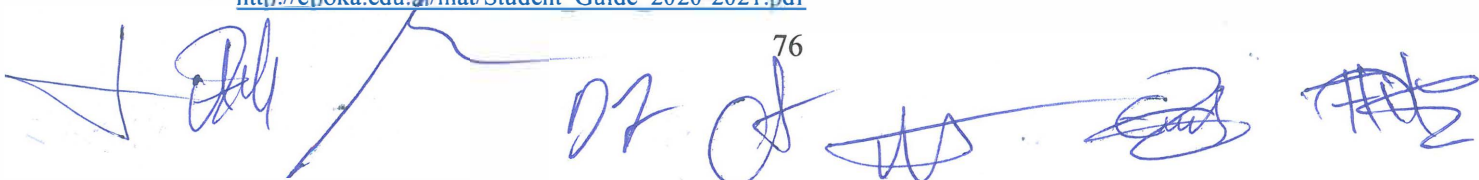
The official external communications of EPOKA University is carried out in compliance with the Media and Public Relations Procedure (**See Annex No.162 Media and Public Relations Office Procedures**). Newspapers, radio, television and social media serve as important sources of communication for University news, interviews, activities, conferences, forums etc. (**See Annex No.163 on External Communication Policy**).

EPOKA University possesses both written and electronic internal communication means through which staff members and students are regularly informed about the decisions of the managing bodies and authorities of the University, as well as on various notifications and announcements. Written correspondence and e-mail communication ensure the dissemination of the decisions, notifications, and announcements of managing bodies and authorities of the University. Through the study contract they sign at the moment of their enrollment at EPOKA, students are informed that they bear the responsibility to be informed about the announcements and decisions of the University governing bodies, authorities and units by regularly checking the institutional e-mail address allocated to them

²⁵⁵ See Commission for Higher Education and Research (2014) *Final Report for the Reforming of Albanian Higher Education and Science*. (Ed.) A. Gjonça. Ministry of Education and Science: Tirana.

²⁵⁶ Contact: dos@epoka.edu.al

²⁵⁷ http://epoka.edu.al/mat/Student_Guide_2020-2021.pdf



at the moment of enrollment at EPOKA University (**See Annex No.140 Template of the study contract, Section 5.7.**).

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

EPOKA holds personal files for each student, in full compliance with the national legislation on higher education and personal data protection.²⁵⁸ The file includes the study contract and all application documents such as English Proficiency Exam, Diploma of State Matura, Transcripts and copy of ID (**See Annex No.140 Template of the study contract**).

After graduating students withdraw their original documents, a copy of all the said documents remains within the institution. Besides the enrollment documents, the file also includes transcripts, and the diploma and diploma supplement of Bachelor/Master/PhD studies conducted at EPOKA University.

EPOKA provides students with an e-mail address in EPOKA's registered domain. EPOKA also keeps records of personal, physical and e-mail addresses of students, as well as their phone numbers. Contact data is requested once students enroll at EPOKA. Besides the Registrar's Office, this information is also provided to students' academic advisors. All staff members, whether employed full-time or part-time, sign the Confidentiality Declaration as an integral part of their employment contract, whereby they undertake not to use and not to transmit to unauthorized persons personal data or confidential information about or obtained from EPOKA University, unless explicitly authorized by EPOKA University, or required by law (**See Annex No.176 Template of the Staff Confidentiality Declaration**).

EPOKA University uses Google Apps for education services, and all students and staff members are provided with an email address under the "epoka.edu.al" domain which is a Google account. Besides official communications, which is conducted through this email address, this account can be used for authentication to other online systems offered by university (**See Guidelines on the Use of EPOKA Interactive System: Annex No.68 EIS Guideline Role for students**).

Google Classroom, which represents a more interactive service offered by Google as part of Google Apps for education in order to access, coordinate and organize course materials on the cloud, is available to all students and teaching staff. By using Google Classroom, course materials can be integrated with other Google services where assigned users can collaborate. Education Information System²⁵⁹ (EIS) is also an EPOKA website containing information related to study programs, curriculum, course evaluation, grades and course syllabi. Students and instructors can access this service using the provided account.

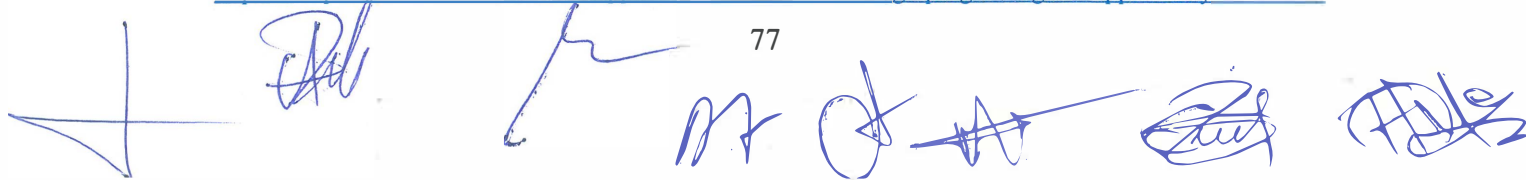
Institution pursues a policy orientation and mentoring of students (Chapter I Standard III.3)

The International Relations Office provides information regarding Student Exchange programs, Study Abroad Opportunities²⁶⁰ and the organization of the higher education system according to the Bologna Standards.

²⁵⁸ <http://epoka.edu.al/privacy-policy.html>

²⁵⁹ <http://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula/84/program>

²⁶⁰ <http://iro.epoka.edu.al/news-call-for-applications-erasmus-exchange-programs-grant-opportunity-5275.html>



For each class, there is an academic advisor²⁶¹ who also helps students in the progression of their student life. The advisor of the study program also regularly shares information with regard to employment opportunities. Students also benefit from services offered by EPOKA's units such as the Career Planning and Alumni Office²⁶² which assists students in finding suitable career opportunities and the Dean of Students Office²⁶³ which helps oversee student clubs activities.

Open forums (See Annex No.165 Examples of announcements of students on the open forums) with experts from different fields and organizations are organized frequently. Career fairs²⁶⁴ are organized each year at the EPOKA campus to orient the students about employment opportunities.

Study programs enable the progressive adaptation of students within the discipline and the institution. The first year of all study programs consists of introductory courses in the discipline.²⁶⁵ Student advisors also assist students to organize their educational plan according to their skills and interests, especially with respect to choosing compulsory and elective courses.

At EPOKA, students are consistently informed about academic achievements and events per e-mail, through brochures (*Student Guide*), self-service terminals and large display screens that are present in the widely-used parts of the buildings. As stated above, at the enrollment stage, all students are provided with the Student Guide which contains all the necessary information students need to know and to follow during their academic life from the start and until graduation. The Registrar's Office also sends out regular information to students, including decisions of the Rectorate, the Academic Senate, and other managing authorities and decision-making bodies of EPOKA. It reminds students about important deadlines and it also sends other relevant announcements to students.

Students at EPOKA are guided and advised throughout their academic career and across all program cycles by staying in contact directly with their personal academic advisors and the Registrar's Office as well as by referring to the Student Guide. In the admissions phase, academic advisors provide students career counseling and guide them to the best fit programs, according to their interests and skills. However, if students wish to experiment or change their study programs, they may easily switch to another program. The Directive "On Student Transfer"²⁶⁶ explains and regulates the process of credit transfer (See Annex No.105 on Directive on Student Transfer).

Institution pursues a supporting policy for specific social categories (Chapter I Standard III.4)

EPOKA University is committed to ensuring that all students with disabilities receive education in a supportive environment that values diversity, inclusion, and participation. All units use inclusive practices and reasonable adjustments to carry out changes in procedures or environments to remove any disabling effects or barriers to participation. In compliance with the regulations in force, EPOKA University guarantees accessibility, at all levels, in order to facilitate the full participation of students with disabilities in the University life (See Annex No.166 Policy on Students with Disabilities).

²⁶¹ For example, for a list of academic advisors at the Department of Business Administration see:

<http://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-academic-advisors-1894-2064.html>

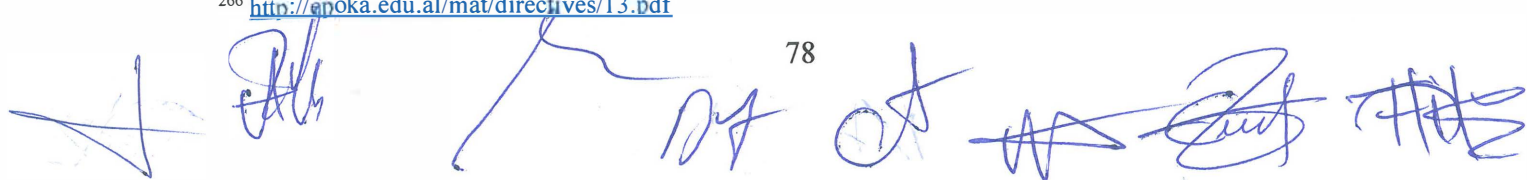
²⁶² <http://cpao.epoka.edu.al/cat-about-cpao-1453.html>

²⁶³ <http://dos.epoka.edu.al/>

²⁶⁴ <http://cpao.epoka.edu.al/home-sixth-career-fair-2019-1593-2658.html>

²⁶⁵ See for instance the curriculum of the Bachelor in Political Science and International Relations at <http://ejs.epoka.edu.al/curricula/71/program>. The first year has 45 credits of introductory courses out of 60 ECTS.

²⁶⁶ <http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/13.pdf>



EPOKA's buildings are also constructed in full compliance with the legal requirements set out for this particular group.²⁶⁷

With regard to the communities of the Roma and Balkan Egyptians, EPOKA University has regularly offered scholarship opportunities²⁶⁸ for students belonging to these communities, initially based on the requests channeled through the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. As of the 2017-2018 academic year, its scholarship program has been expanded to also include students from these communities as a regular policy of the University (**See Annex No.177 Decision of the Higher Board No. 07, dated 11.01.2017**).

Students with other merits besides academic achievement who benefit from scholarships²⁶⁹ or support programs at EPOKA University may belong to the following categories: sportsmen with very high results in their respective Olympic sports category in Albania, orphan children of officers of the State Police killed in the line of duty, orphan students coming from low-income families, and high-achieving students graduated from the high schools of the Municipality of Vora, which is the local government unit where the campus of EPOKA University is located (**See Annex No.161 Vora Municipality Scholarships**).

Programs at the graduate level are scheduled according to the availability of students who are employed on a full-time basis. Otherwise, there are no part-time programs offered by EPOKA either at the undergraduate or graduate level.

Institution provides basic literature and support for students (Chapter I Standard III.5)

EPOKA has a student-based registry with data also at the Registrar's Office, the responsible unit for student records. EPOKA possesses all documents related to academic activity of the student, both in soft and hard copies, including the base register, the register of academic achievements (grades) of students, as well as the register of the issued diplomas (**See Annex No.13 Statute, Article 119**).

All exams, projects and other assessment reports are submitted to the respective departments, and at the end of each academic year, they are sent to the Registrar's Office to be stored for one year and later sent to EPOKA's institutional archive (**See Annex No.178 Work Procedures of the Registrar's Office**).

The necessary supporting literature for relevant study programs is provided at the University Library, which is rich in resources of all study fields.²⁷⁰ Lecturers make sure that the required literature is also found at the library or is made available to students in a digital format.

The EPOKA Library has a collection of about 25.000 printed books which are also digitally catalogued. Through its subscription to the JSTOR online library, EPOKA Library also provides access to its students and staff members to more than 12 million academic journal articles, books, and primary sources in 75 disciplines.²⁷¹

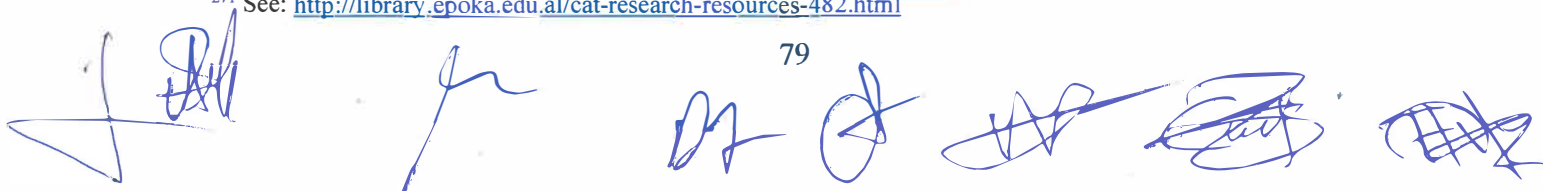
²⁶⁷ It has elevators and ramps in accordance with the Law No.199/1995 "Për lehtësitë që u krijohen invalidëve në ndërtimet publike." [On facilities that are created for people with disabilities in public buildings.]

²⁶⁸ <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/home-bachelor-integrated-study-program-scholarship-2745-497.html>

²⁶⁹ <http://admissions.epoka.edu.al/home-bachelor-integrated-study-program-scholarship-2745-497.html>

²⁷⁰ For the EPOKA Library Digital Catalogue see <http://lib.epoka.edu.al>

²⁷¹ See: <http://library.epoka.edu.al/cat-research-resources-482.html>



The EPOKA Library has increased its inventory every year because each semester lecturers may fill out a request form for the books they need for their teaching course, which are then made available by the library (**See Annex No.179 Sample on the purchase of books by the Library based on the request by a Department**). EPOKA allocates an appropriate budget for book purchases which is set according to the estimated needs of each Department (**See Annex No.86 Titles of Books added in recent four years**).

The EPOKA Library offers multidisciplinary literature to its students.²⁷² Students may find books for each course offered at EPOKA from all relevant disciplines. In the EPOKA library, students may also find fiction and non-fiction literature in several languages.

The working hours of EPOKA Library are from Monday to Friday, from 08:30 to 16:30 hours, and the hours are published on the website of the university²⁷³.

Upon enrollment at EPOKA University, students are provided with the Student ID Card. With enrollment, each student is also automatically registered in the database of EPOKA Library. Students use their student ID cards to access the literature provided by the institution (**See Annex No.180 Sample of the EPOKA Student ID Card**). The personal login information provided by the librarian may be used in the online library catalogue to access literature and borrow from the library.²⁷⁴

Institution offers first-cycle students support through university services to facilitate their progress

(Chapter I Standard III.6)

EPOKA University assists students to register for courses during the course registration periods and add-and-drop weeks which are approved by the academic advisors each semester. Students are informed through different sources (website, brochures and meetings) about required and elective courses at the undergraduate and graduate level programs, the rules and regulations for examinations, and about other rules pertaining to their respective departments. Mentorship also provides information regarding Student Exchange programs, Study Abroad Opportunities and European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). In addition to career counseling, the Dean of Students Office provides counselling to students on accommodation, and financial opportunities and it also deals with the health issues of students (**See Annex No.181 Work Procedures of the Dean of Students Office**).

The EPOKA Library is a self-service system and students are taught to familiarize themselves with the research literature during courses on academic writing and empirical research methods. Students are assisted by the librarian on how to find relevant materials for their courses or leisure (**See Annex No.78 Directive "On Library"**).

The Career Planning and Alumni Office at EPOKA University organizes Mentorship Programs for students facing difficulties with the course requirements. The Office engages senior students as

²⁷² In the digital catalogue, books are categorized into topics and disciplines (e.g. political science, architecture, electronics etc.) See <http://lib.epoka.edu.al/>

²⁷³ <http://library.epoka.edu.al/>

²⁷⁴ <http://lib.epoka.edu.al/cgi-bin/koha/opac-main.pl>

tutors.²⁷⁵ Students may also organize additional learning activities through their associations (See **Annex No.142 Directive “On Student Clubs”**).

Institution encourages students' participation in institutional life (Chapter I Standard III.7)

Students are actively involved in the institutional life of EPOKA University. Based on the Statute of EPOKA University, students are directly represented in the following decision-making and other bodies at EPOKA University through their elected representatives:

- Pursuant to Article 15, point 4 of the Statute of EPOKA University, the President and First Vice-President of the Student Council are members of the Academic Senate. The organization and functions of the Academic Senate are stipulated in Articles 15-16 of the Statute of EPOKA University.
- Pursuant to Article 29, point 2 of the Statute of EPOKA University, the Vice-President of the Students Council on ethics issues is a member of the Ethics Board. The organization and functions of the Ethics Board are stipulated in Articles 29-30 of the Statute of EPOKA University.
- Pursuant to Article 35, point 8 of the Statute of EPOKA University, the Vice-President of the Student Council on quality assurance issues is a member of the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance. The organization and functions of the Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance are stipulated in Article 35 of the Statute of EPOKA University.
- Pursuant to Article 34, point 2 of the Statute of EPOKA University, two students elected by the Student Council are members of the Permanent Commission on Student Relations. The organization and functions of the Permanent Commission on Student Relations are stipulated in Article 34 of the Statute of EPOKA University (**See Annex No.13 Statute**).

The modalities on the election of the members of the Student Council, as well as its organization and functioning, are stipulated in Article 118 of the Statute of EPOKA University as well as the Statute of the Student Council (**See Annex No.167 Statute of the Student Council**).

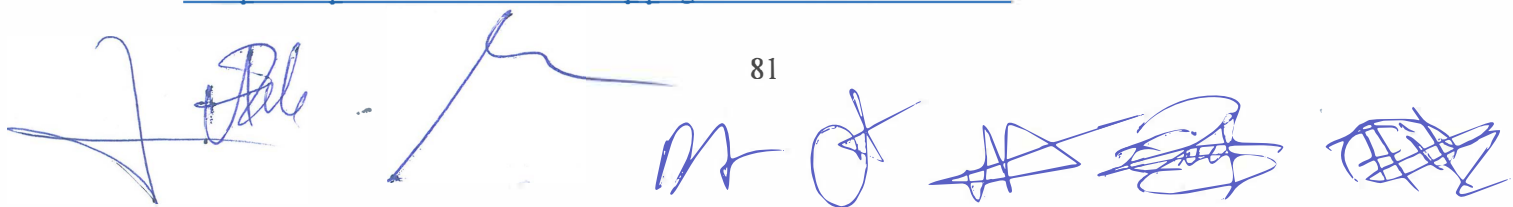
Through representation in the Academic Senate, Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance and Ethics Board as well as the active participation of student representatives in the meetings of these bodies, involvement is ensured of student representatives in decision-making on issues pertaining to the academic process, and thus making the academic process transparent and productive for students with easily verifiable and measurable results.

Through the membership of the elected student representatives in the Permanent Commission on Student Relations as well as the active participation of student representatives in the meetings of this Commission, involvement of student representatives in providing recommendations to the Academic Senate on issues pertaining to student activities, including extracurricular activities carried out by student clubs, campus life and services offered to students, conduct of internships by students, relations with alumni as well as functioning of the Student Council, is assured as meaningful and productive.

Furthermore, the Dean and Vice-Dean of Students are members of the Rectorate, the critical collegial executive body of EPOKA University (**See Annex No.13 Statute, Article 22**).

The Student Council of EPOKA University operates in compliance with the provisions of the Statute of the Student Council (**See Annex No.167 Statute of the Student Council**). It expresses opinions

²⁷⁵ <http://dos.epoka.edu.al/event-mentorship-program-2019-2020-100-5073.html>



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

EPOKA also supports students by financing and providing the necessary infrastructure for their activities. In order to arrange for EPOKA's support, students have to submit a formal request to the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students is responsible for the maintenance of relations between students and the institution. The office takes special care to support the students, having as its main mission orienting, advising and protecting the rights of the students and student clubs. The Dean of Students provides students with the support, resources, and referrals they need to succeed at the university.

The Student Clubs and Activities Office, as part of the Dean of Students Office, supports students concerning the organization and conduct of extracurricular activities. For every activity that students' clubs arrange, they make an official request to Dean of Students concerning their needs (**See Annex No.58 Students Activities Request for Approval Form**).

Furthermore, the Career Planning and Alumni Office (CPAO) operates under the Dean of Students Office. This Office orients the students in their professional education and facilitates their employment by acting as a bridge between the University and the business world. The CPAO also arranges and organizes seminars, courses and conferences to prepare students accordingly. By cooperating with public institutions and private companies, both Albanian and international, the CPAO assists students in obtaining internships in the labor market according to their respective qualifications and skills. Internship programs offer benefits by providing many opportunities to develop the necessary skills such as teamwork, coordination, communication and self-confidence.

The Dean of Students Office is in continuous communication with students and receives specific student requests on a daily basis. These requests are submitted through an official form (**See Annex No.59 Student Request Form**) and are duly recorded by the Dean of Students Office. If the request is related to an administrative issue, it is evaluated by the Dean of Students, the University Administrator or other administrative units that operate under the Administrator.

For academic issues, the request is delivered to the respective departments, Faculties or the Rector's Office. After the evaluation of these requests, the Dean of Students Office informs the concerned students via e-mail with regard to the decision on the request. The Dean of Students Office received and processed 557 students' requests in 2017, 677 in 2018, 525 in 2019 and 376 in 2020.

Aiming at improving service quality, the Dean of Students Office conducts the Student Satisfaction Survey (**See Annex No.84 Template of the Student Satisfaction Survey**). This survey is an effort to obtain feedback from undergraduate students across the University in a systematic way. The findings of this survey are reported across the University in order to provide data that can be used to enhance the EPOKA experience for all students.

Institution pursues a supportive policy to assure cultural and sports quality of student life
(Chapter I Standard III.8)

EPOKA's policies encourage students to lead a socially active life by ensuring their active participation in extracurricular scientific, social, cultural and sports programs (**See Annex No.142**

Directive on Students Clubs, Article 1). There are currently 22 active student clubs representing the interests of students in various areas (See **Annex No.60 List of Student Clubs**).

Students can be members of more than one club and some of them have leading positions in clubs. The main goal of student clubs is to increase the number of students participating in different extracurricular activities and thereby increasing their network and social life. In this context, the Dean of Students Office, in cooperation with student clubs, organizes numerous different activities (See **Annex No.12 Dean of Students Annual Activity Report 2019-2020 Academic Year**) such as open forums, workshops or training programs. EPOKA University also provides certificates for participants and organizers (See **Annex No.168 Sample of Certificate**).

Students of EPOKA University are also conferred different awards in many other cultural or educational competitions held outside the institution. Furthermore, distinguished experts in the areas of engineering, art, history, business administration etc. are invited by student clubs to deliver open lectures throughout the academic year, thus ensuring that students at EPOKA University experience an active social and educational life on campus²⁷⁶ (See also **Annex No.61 List of Activities organized by students clubs**).

The Dean of Students Office also promotes the participation of students in cultural activities held outside the campus by continuously informing them about the most recent competitions and related events through email and social media. It is worth mentioning by way of example that the Art and Culture Student Club aims at encouraging student participation in various cultural activities. This club also organizes Open Forums where people from different areas of art and culture²⁷⁷ stimulate students to lead a rich and rewarding cultural life.

EPOKA also supports the engagement of students in sports activities. EPOKA University has its own men's football team and women's volleyball team which compete in their respective championships. Furthermore, talented students at EPOKA have represented Albania in some of the most important international sports competitions.²⁷⁸

EPOKA provides direct and indirect medical care services through a general practitioner on campus to both students and staff members who are employed full-time and are present at the campus of the University throughout the day.

Institution helps in students' employment (Chapter I Standard III.9)

EPOKA University has a tracking program to track graduate employment, which is managed by the Career Planning and Alumni Office under the Dean of Students Office. The data is published in EPOKA's Annual Reports (See **Annex No.38 Annual Report 2019-2020, p. 39-41**). By comparison with national statistics, there is a very high employment rate among EPOKA graduates. For the 2018-2019 cohort, this figure stood at 87.4%.

²⁷⁶ For the Annual Reports of the Dean of Student Office during 2017-2020, see the following links:

<http://dos.epoka.edu.al/home-annual-report-2017-2018-2833-2834.html>

<http://dos.epoka.edu.al/home-annual-report-2018-2019-2833-2835.html>

<http://dos.epoka.edu.al/home-annual-report-2019-2020-2833-2836.html>

²⁷⁷ <http://epoka.edu.al/event-film-production-and-art-in-albania-106-4306.html>

²⁷⁸ <https://www.the-sports.org/valdet-allaraj-taekwondo-spf582211.html>



The Career Planning and Alumni Office shares with newly graduated students - 6 to 12 months after graduation - an Alumni Form (**See Annex No.169 Alumni Form**) where graduates fill out their employment data. After receiving the data, the Office creates a separate database for each department and study program. Data received from the graduates include their job position, company, city and country of residence. These data has been kept in a database for all graduates as far back as the first graduating cohort of 2010-2011 and the data constantly updated.

Based on the above-mentioned data, the Career Planning and Alumni Office generates statistics on the employment of graduates (**See Annex No.170 on Update Alumni Record 2018-2019 Academic Year**). These data are also updated on this institutional web page²⁷⁹. Graduates who have not been able to update their employment data are also contacted via email and social networks (Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn). The Career Planning and Alumni Office has also created a network for graduates in social networks such as "EPOKA Alumni Network". This channel serves as another communication bridge for announcing employment opportunities as well as other related activities and events.

EPOKA University offers a wide variety of study programs. The number of cooperation agreements is large, offering numerous employment opportunities. Career and employment counseling services are offered to students before and after graduation through the Career Planning and Alumni Office that operates under the Dean of the Students Office. EPOKA University has signed cooperation agreements with over 45 companies, while it cooperates with over 110 other companies for vacancies and internship opportunities. The Career Planning and Alumni Office, in cooperation with the respective department and program academic advisor, maintain the database of employed students as well as their job placements.

The Career Planning and Alumni Office organizes activities such as Open Forums, Information Sessions, Company Visits²⁸⁰, and other events such as the Career Fair to further advance the employment opportunities of students and graduates.

The Career Fair is an annual activity at EPOKA University. The event is attended by over 65 companies operating in the local market and abroad. It provides numerous opportunities for University students and graduates to be interviewed for vacant job positions as well as for internship programs.²⁸¹

Given the ongoing communication that the Career Planning and Alumni Office maintains with companies, it receives numerous job opportunity notices for various study programs. These announcements are disseminated to graduates via e-mail and social media like LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. These announcements are also published on the Career Planning and Alumni Office website (<http://cpao.epoka.edu.al/>).

In addition, EPOKA University also organizes numerous activities such as Information Sessions, where different companies are invited to campus to present their employment opportunities to students and graduates²⁸².

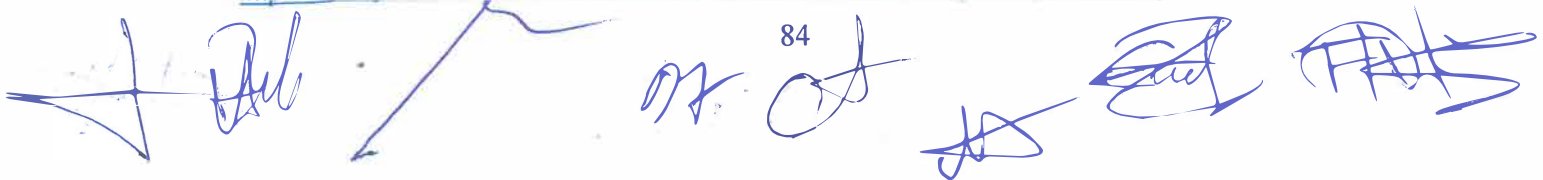
As stated previously, EPOKA's staff is committed to helping students to find gainful employment. Departments continue to update the curriculum in order to enhance chances for employability and to

²⁷⁹ <http://cpao.epoka.edu.al/home-alumni-statistics-2019-1457-2813.html>

²⁸⁰ <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-student-company-visits-raiffeisen-bank-3354.html>

²⁸¹ <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-7th-career-fair-online-edition-5300.html>

²⁸² <http://www.epoka.edu.al/news-seasonal-employment-for-students-in-germany-4447.html>



meet the labor market requirements. Departments assist students with internship programs and teach soft-skills and other relevant skills for a successful career. EPOKA has strengthened its ties and collaboration with industry. Over the years, moreover, the University has continued to seek to attract professionals to its teaching staff for this same purpose of helping students succeed.

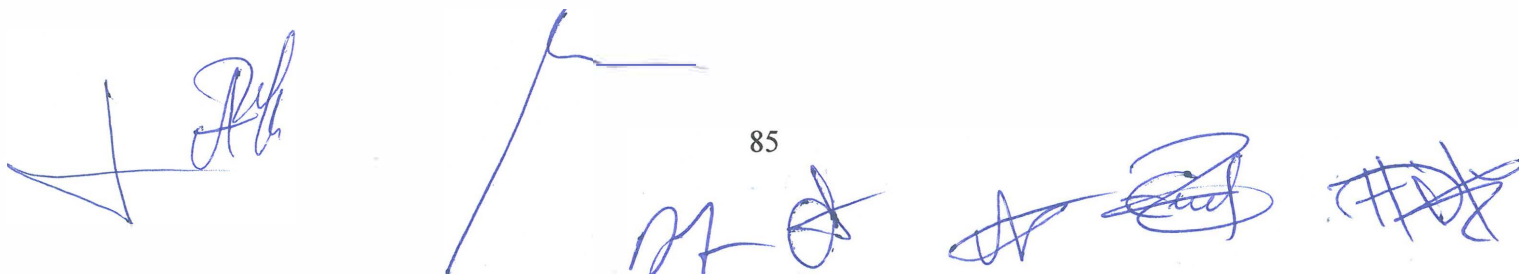
Conclusion and Judgement

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

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

Additionally, in compliance with the national standards and those of the ESG (e.g. 1.6 on learning resources and student support) EPOKA shows that it does consider the special needs of international students and students with disabilities.

Furthermore, EPOKA maintains comprehensive databases and efficiently and effectively processes information on student progression and success that is subsequently fed into the decision-making process in order to continuously improve EPOKA's study programs.



6. SUMMARY (OVERALL) CONCLUSION AND JUDGEMENTS

The Self-Evaluation Group began its work in late 2020, collecting documents and data from across the University's administrative and academic units. The SEG carried out the task of developing this report within the established timelines set out by ASCAL and with the professionalism, integrity, impartiality, and full transparency required of such a task.

As the Self-Evaluation Report indicates, EPOKA University has successfully implemented concrete responses to the three recommendations of ASCAL from the previous report in 2017.

EPOKA University has also documented its implementation of an effective Covid-19 strategic plan which resulted in a fairly seamless transition to online instruction during the spring of 2020, in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education.

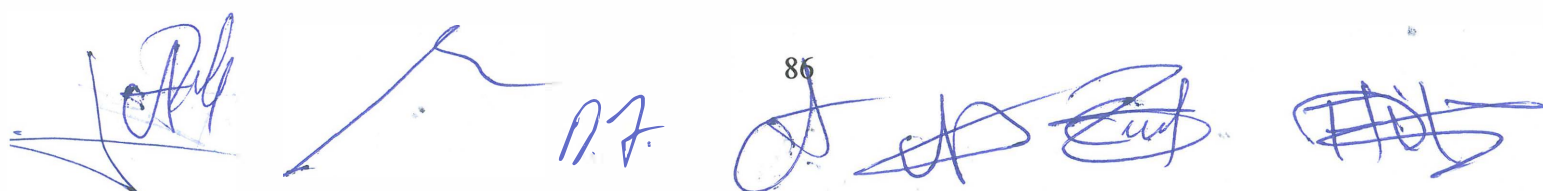
After a review of EPOKA University's organization and management structures, the SEG concludes that EPOKA's organization and management standards are in full compliance with the legal framework and the directives set forth by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, the University's standards and best practices are fully in line with standards and guidelines established for European higher education institutions concerning structures, processes, policies, and practices. They are also in congruence with the mission of the university.

In the first area under review, EPOKA's management and organizational structures, the Self-Evaluation Review found that the University demonstrated accountability, transparency, and openness, qualities that are set forth in the University's Statute. The University's administrative structures are organized to provide efficiency, while decisions are evidence-based with institutional and environmental inputs. Additionally, EPOKA's Strategic Development Plan clearly sets out specific goals, objectives and indicators that help EPOKA support its mission. The University's policies and guidelines help maintain a transparent environment for faculty, staff, students and other relevant stakeholders. This includes updating new procedures, information, and activities on a day-to-day basis via the University website, social media and by other means. EPOKA's reliable network of partner stakeholders allows the University to implement its strategy and fulfill its higher education mission.

Suggestions included widening the role of the Board of Ethics and enhancing the budgeting plan to accommodate increased enrollment. A budgeting model allowing for bottom-up decision-making might be warranted.

In the second area under review, EPOKA's use of resources, Self-Evaluation Report concludes that EPOKA has put into place best practices in the area of management or resources. Human resources demonstrate transparency and effectiveness, with specific integration and assessment policies successfully put into place. In the area of financial management, the SER illustrated that the financial policies, budgeting processes, and financial accountability measures in place fit the University's mission, goals and objectives.

As a private for-profit institution, EPOKA has seen an ever-improving financial position as it gradually moves away from being subsidized and supported by its parent company. This is demonstrated by the more effective policies in place that regulate the use and preservation of assets, coupled with a management process that is sustained by a more accurate information system. The University also meets national standards and those of ESG in providing appropriate funding and accessible learning resources

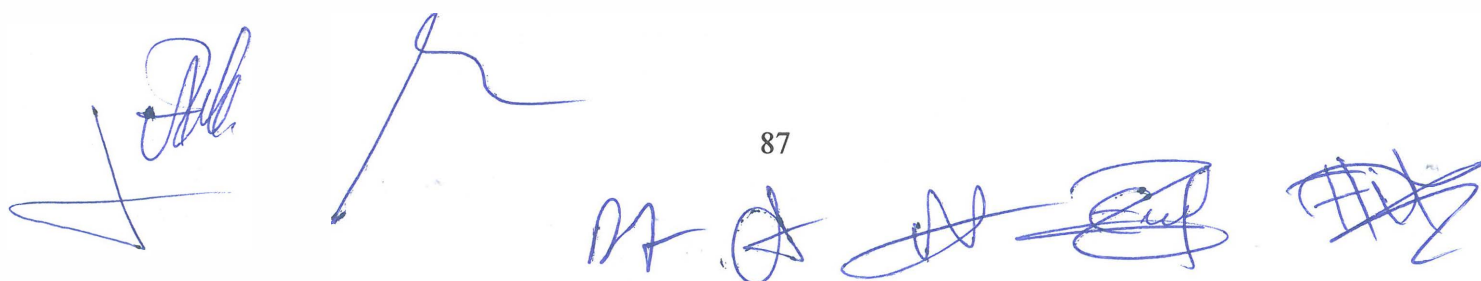


to EPOKA students. Finally, record-keeping processes are in compliance with national standards and those of ESG.

In the third area of curriculum and study programs, EPOKA demonstrated that the curriculum and study programs are fully aligned with the University's mission, its Strategic Development Plan, and the Albanian government directives. The University also meets national accreditation standards and ESG standards. In the specific area of content and employability, the report demonstrated that programs are designed in accordance with the national regulatory framework. Study programs are subject to continuous improvement, programs enable mobility, and future employability and professional practice opportunities help student development. Finally, the programs in place ensure that the qualifications issued meet the program objectives.

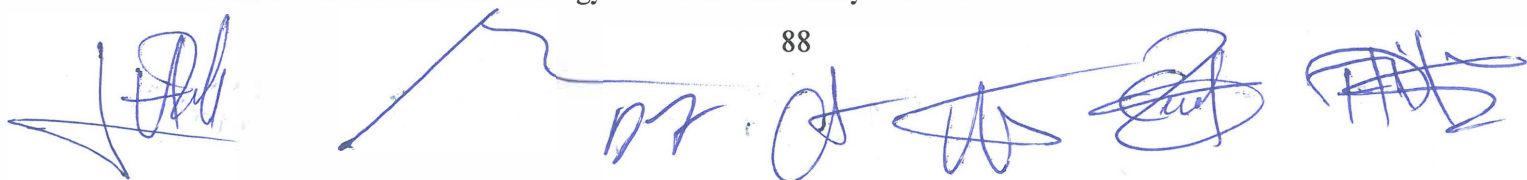
In the fifth area of research output, impact and international research recognition, University achievements align with the strategic goals of the Framework Strategy of 2018-2022 to produce high quality research. EPOKA is committed to providing opportunities for staff to engage in a wide range of research activities and other relevant project areas. EPOKA has produced valuable scientific research and publications and has established an internal policy to promote and incentivize high quality scientific research by its academic staff through financial and infrastructure support. EPOKA encourages all staff to be active in scientific research, to engage in multiple projects, and to participate in scientific activities as a component of establishing high academic and professional standards.

In sum, based on the above evidence submitted in the Self-Evaluation Report, the Self-Evaluation Group concludes that EPOKA University has fully met the State quality standards of accreditation of higher education institutions in the Republic of Albania.

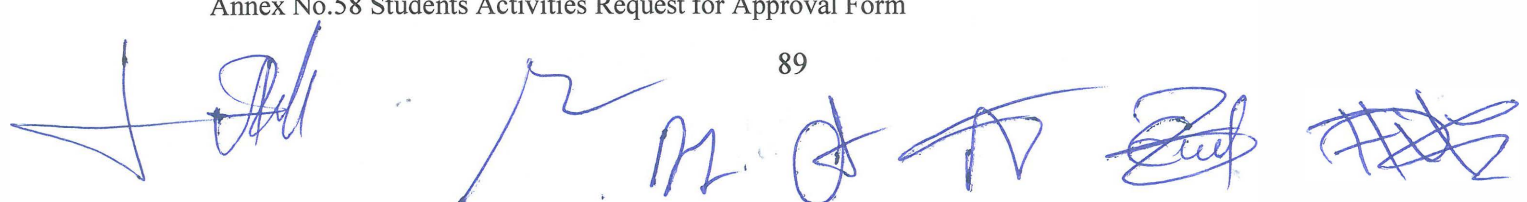


D. LIST OF SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

- Annex No.1 Correspondence and EPOKA University Institutional Review Action Plan
- Annex No.2 Directive “On the Functioning of the Exam Board”
- Annex No.3 Guideline “On Examinations”
- Annex No.4 Exam Assessment Form
- Annex No.5 Examination Period Assessment Form
- Annex No.6 Weekly Report on the Conduct of Remote teaching in the Context of Covid-19 Crisis
- Annex No.7 Follow-up to the Review of the COVID-19 Surveys completed by students, academic staff and administrative staff
- Annex No.8 How to Set-up the Distance Learning Platforms
- Annex No.9 Guideline on the conduct of teaching and other activities during the 2020-2021 fall semester
- Annex No.10 Action Plan “On the organizational and administrative measures for the resuming of on-the-campus teaching and other educational activities”
- Annex No.11 Guideline “On the modalities concerning the conduct of the Final Exams and Resit Exams of the 2020-2021 fall semester”
- Annex No.12 Dean of Students Annual Activity Report 2019-2020 Academic Year
- Annex No.13 Statute of EPOKA University
- Annex No.14 Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Sports No. 146, dated 31.03.2017
- Annex. No.15 List of internal legal acts in force
- Annex No.16 Decision No. 02, dated 14.12.2016 of the Academic Senate
- Annex No.17 Decision No. 11, dated 11.01.2017 of the Higher Board of EPOKA University
- Annex No.18 List of study programs offered by EPOKA University
- Annex No.19 Sample - Decisions of the Academic Senate Meeting No. 02, dated 06.05.2020
- Annex No.20 Code of Ethics
- Annex No.21 Table for HR and Infrastructure needs_2017 01 30
- Annex No.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
- Annex No.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”
- Annex No.24 Sample Decision of the Rectorate No. 5 dated 04.02.2020
- Annex No.25 Sample - Decisions of the Administrative Board Meeting No. 06, dated 11.11.2020
- Annex No.26 Sample Agenda of the Meeting of Rectorate No.20 dated 16.06.2020
- Annex No.27 Final Evaluation Report of the Strategic Plan 2013-2017
- Annex No.28 Framework Strategy of EPOKA University 2018-2022



- Annex No.29 Sample Academic Unit - Economics Department - Strategic Plan 2018-2022
- Annex No.30 Sample Administrative Unit International Relations Office - Strategic Plan for Internationalization 2018-2022
- Annex No.31 Regulation on the Center for European Studies
- Annex No.32 Regulation on Center of Research and Design in Architecture
- Annex No.33 Academic Offer according to ISCED
- Annex No.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
- Annex No.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
- Annex No.36 INSTAT Student ne arsimin e larte sipas fushave te studimit
- Annex No.37 Sample - Report on the market study for the opening of the Bachelor Program in Software Engineering
- Annex No.38 Annual Report 2019-2020
- Annex No.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
- Annex No.40 Regulation "On Student Exchange"
- Annex No.41 Directive "Promotion of Scientific Publications"
- Annex No.42 Organizational Scheme of EPOKA University_EN & Sq
- Annex No.43 Regulation of EPOKA University "On Staff Recruitment"
- Annex No.44 Sample of Job vacancy Description
- Annex No.45 Emails sent to be Jobs.ac.uk, AKADEUS and Duapune
- Annex No.46 Directive "On Academic and Administrative Assessment and Quality Improvement"
- Annex No.47 Regulation "On the Organization and Functioning of the Permanent Commission on the Conferring of the PhD Scientific Degree
- Annex No.48 Sample of the individual employment contract for "Academic Staff", "Administrative Staff", "Adjunct Academic Staff", "Laboratory Assistants" and "Teaching Assistant"
- Annex No.49 Staff Guide
- Annex No.50 Promotional Brochures and Leaflets
- Annex No.51 Plan of Career Planning program for High School Students
- Annex No.52 List of Training Activities for Staff
- Annex No.53 List of Institutional Cooperation
- Annex No.54 List of staff members who have participated in exchange programs
- Annex No.55 Regulation "On Scientific Research"
- Annex No.56 Sample Decision on the approval of requesting financial support
- Annex No.57 Directive "On Teaching Load"
- Annex No.58 Students Activities Request for Approval Form



Annex No.59 Student Request Form

Annex No.60 List of Students Clubs

Annex No.61 List of activities organized by students clubs

Annex No.62 Regulation "On the Discipline of the Managing, Academic and Administrative Staff"

Annex No.63 Decision for the Approval of the HR and Infrastructure needs 2020-2021

Annex No.64 Decision for the approval of the Event and Activities Calendar for the 2020-2021 Academic Year

Annex No.65 Law No. 9228/2004, For Accounting and Financial Statements

Annex No.66 SKK - National Accounting and Reporting Standard

Annex No.67 EIS Guideline Role for lecturers

Annex No.68 EIS Guideline Role for students

Annex No.69 Information and Communication Technology Services

Annex No.70 ICTCO Strategic Plan 2018-2022

Annex No.71 List of licenses of software programs

Annex No.72 Certificate of Property

Annex. No.73 Master Plan of EPOKA University

Annex No.74 Directive of EPOKA University "On Purchases"

Annex No.75 Infrastructure in Function of Study Programs

Annex No.76 Depositing of the Trademark EIS

Annex No.77 Certificate of Trademark for the Registration of EIS

Annex No.78 Directive "On the Library"

Annex No. 79 Law No. 10138, dated 11.05.2009 "On the Public Health"

Annex No. 80 Law No. 152/2015, dated 21.12.2015 "On the Service of Fire Safety and Rescue"

Annex No.81 Parking area

Annex No.82 Recreation spaces

Annex No.83 Report of the MoESY on the Verification of the Capacities 2020-2021

Annex No.84 Template of the Student Satisfaction Survey

Annex No.85 Photos of recreational spaces

Annex No.86 Titles of the Books added in recent four years

Annex No. 87 Library Services

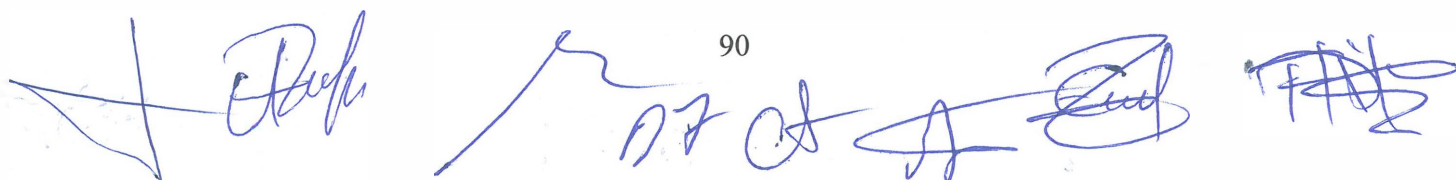
Annex No.88 Structural Project of EPOKA University

Annex No.89 Project on fire protection system and Safety at workplace of EPOKA University

Annex No. 90 Act on Fire Protection and Safety of EPOKA University

Annex No. 91 Contract with TRAJF shpk;

Annex No.92 Training of Staff on Fire Protection & Evacuation, Photos



Annex No.93 Marketing policy of study programs

Annex No.94 Template of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors

Annex No.95 Plan of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2018-2019 academic year;

Annex No.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;

Annex No.97 Plan of the Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2019-2020 academic year;

Annex No.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;

Annex No.99 Plan of the Online Career Planning Program for High School Seniors for the 2020-2021 academic year

Annex No.100 Decision of the Academic Senate and Administrative Board on the establishment of the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences

Annex No.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

Annex No.102 Regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations"

Annex No.103 Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Programs"

Annex No.104 Regulation "On PhD Study Programs"

Annex No.105 Directive "On Student Transfer"

Annex No.106 Policy on the Continuous Improvement of Study Programs

Annex No.107 2020-2021 Student Guide

Annex No.108 Annual Report of the Department of Economics for the 2019-2020 academic year

Annex No.109 Certificates of training programs

Annex No.110 Curriculum Change Proposal Form

Annex No.111 Track Record of the Curriculum Change Proposal Form

Annex No.112 Example of the conduct and approval of curricula changes in a study program

Annex No.113 Guideline "On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Bachelor and Integrated Second Cycle Study Programs"

Annex No.114 Guideline "On the Conduct of Professional Practice at Professional Master Study Programs"

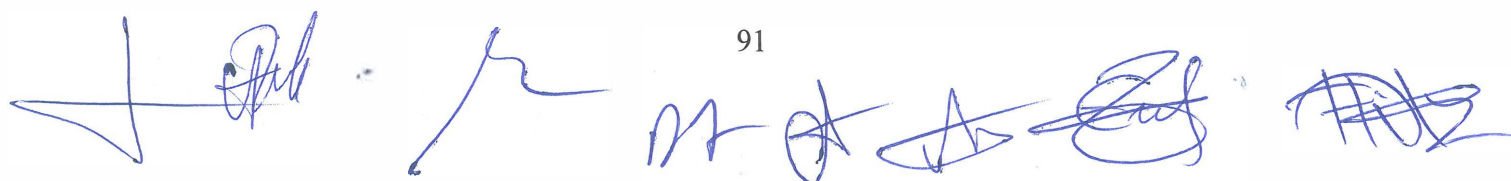
Annex No. 115 List of Academic Staff during 2017-2021

Annex No.116 Diploma Template

Annex No.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

Annex No.118 Table of the Albanian Qualifications Framework

Annex No.119 Student Transcript



Annex No.120 Quality Assurance Handbook

Annex No.121 Company Satisfaction Survey

Annex No.122 Academic capacities of EPOKA University

Annex No.123 Form on the Request for the Payment of Extra Hours to Lecturers

Annex No.124 Additional teaching load payment from the budget of EPOKA University for the 2017-2021 period

Annex No.125 Program of the Orientation Session for the 2020-2021 academic year

Annex No.126 Decisions of the Senate_Organization of the Graduation Project and Final Comprehensive Exam (FCE)

Annex No.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

Annex No.128 The Graduate Outcomes in the Labor Market: Ten Years of Achievements

Annex No.129 List of Publications of Academic Staff Members during the 2016-2020 period

Annex No.130 Course Appointment Documents of the 2019-2020 academic year.

Annex No.131 Regulation "On Second Cycle Study Program in Political Sciences and International Relations"

Annex No.132 Regulation "On Master of Science Study Program in Architecture"

Annex No.133 Regulation "On the Master of Science Study Program in Civil Engineering"

Annex No.134 Information on the conduct of professional practice at the Department of Computer Engineering

Annex No.135 List of cooperation agreements between EPOKA University and third parties

Annex No.136 List of experts/professionals engaged in teaching at Master programs.

Annex No.137 Course syllabus template

Annex No.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

Annex No.139 Template of EPOKA's Letter of Performance

Annex No.140 Template of the Study Contract

Annex No.141 Participation by students in exchange programs

Annex No.142 Directive "On Student Clubs"

Annex No.143 Curricula of study programs pertaining to three cycles of studies at the three Faculties

Annex No.144 Directive "On the Graduation Work of Undergraduate Programs"

Annex No.145 Decision of the Rectorate of EPOKA University No. 01, dated 02.07.2019

Annex No.146 Decision of the Rectorate of EPOKA University No. 04, dated 05.11.2019

Annex No.147 Exam Anonymity Process

Annex No.148 Annex Regulation "On the Organization and the Functioning of the PCQA"

Annex No.149 List of Sponsored Conference Participations 2016-2020

Annex No.150 Example of Documents on Training Activities

Annex No.151 Template of Academic Staff Satisfaction Survey Form

Annex No.152 Law 80/2015 “On higher education and scientific research in higher education institutions in the Republic of Albania”

Annex No.153 National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation

Annex No.154 Guideline for Research Projects

Annex No.155 List of Student and Staff Mobilities_2017-2020

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