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ASSESSMENT REPORT

Business Informatics (B.A.) at EPOKA University, Tirana, Albania

ACCREDITED 03/2022 – 09/2028
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Contents

1. EPOKA University

EPOKA University started its academic activities during the academic year 2007-2008 based on the Decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania No. 281/2008. It was established and is still owned by the Turgut Ozal Education Sh.a. In 2012, its legal status was changed from "School of Higher Education" [Shkollë e Lartë] to that of a "University".

In order to ensure full compliance with the provisions of the Law No. 80/2015 "On Higher Education and Scientific Research in HEIs in the Republic of Albania", a new statute has been adopted by the competent bodies of EPOKA in 2016 and has been approved based on the Ordinance of the Minister of Education and Sports No. 146, dated 31-03-2017.

Since the establishment of the first private HEI in Albania in 2001, all private HEIs and the study programmes they offer have been subject to national accreditation. In 2016-2017, all public and private HEIs in Albania were subject to the institutional review carried out by the Albanian Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (ASCAL) in co-operation with QAA (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Gloucester/UK).[1]

The mission of EPOKA University is by its own account to be an innovative and influential teaching and research institution, serving to fundamental human values through the production, dissemination and development of knowledge at an international level as well as to contribute to the improvement of the life quality of society based on national and regional needs. In this context, EPOKA University aims at raising well-prepared, productive and competent individuals with a research-oriented spirit, who possess professional ethics and social sensitiveness and are also open towards national and global challenges.

EPOKA offers in total 33 study programmes: 11 programmes in the first cycle (Bachelor); 16 in the second cycle (8 Master of Science programmes, 6 Professional Master programmes and 2 integrated second cycle programmes); and 6 programmes in the third cycle (PhD). EPOKA focuses on economics and finance (12 study programmes), information and telecommunication technology (8), architecture (3), civil engineering (5), and political science and law (5). The programmes are currently provided by three faculties: the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering, the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences and the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences.

Department of Business Administration (BUS)

The Department of Business Administration (BUS) is responsible for the implementation as well as the internal quality assurance of the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)". Together with the Department of Banking and Finance and the Department of Economics it makes the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences.

The department promotes, plans, coordinates, develops, organises and manages all teaching and scientific research activity. It consists of at least ten members, employed as full-time academic staff of whom seven are with scientific degrees and academic titles. The managing authority is the Head of Department. The department engages by its own account in systematic programme improvements through curriculum updates and revision based on the local and international developments and needs.

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[1] The report on the institutional review of EPOKA University is online available at https://www.as-cal.al/media/documents/rvj/IAL_16_61.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021)

According to the self-evaluation report, the mission of the Department of Business Administration is quality education to develop business capabilities through holistic teaching methods by cultivating a sense of intellectualism, togetherness, and inclusive leadership. The final output is educating early professionals for co-creating value among market actors, in terms of employability, continuous improvement, and business system sustainability. The department's core objective is to qualify new future employees and managers with a strong background in the various disciplines of business administration by underlying a systems and constructivist perspective.

Table 1 shows an overview of key data on the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences:

Responsible academic unit/faculty	Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
Number of study programmes	14
Undergraduate	6
Graduate	5
Postgraduate	3 Doctorate (PhD) programmes
Number of students in the faculty	1,358
Undergraduate	1,141
Graduate	206
Postgraduate	11
Part-time students	0
Full-time academic staff in faculty	heads: 23 / FTE 23
Part-time academic staff (faculty level, heads and FTE)	heads: 2 / FTE 0.67
Administrative and technical staff (faculty level)	3
1st year students (faculty level)	412
Graduates (faculty level)	1,823
Drop-out rate (faculty level)	15.38%
Floor space (m²)	14,352 square metre in total
Media in university library (books, journals, digital media)	About 25,000 printed books, access to more than 2,000 academic journals via JSTOR[2] (full membership)
Faculty budget	1,915,513 EUR (academic year 2019-2020)

Tab. 1: Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences
(Source: EPOKA University Dec. 2020)

[2] https://jstor.org (accessed 17 December 2021)

2. The accreditation procedure

The assessment procedure was carried out as informed peer review on the basis of the self-evaluation report provided by EPOKA University. Due to the pandemic, the site visit was made by only one member of the expert panel while the others participated online in the meetings. Following the visit, the experts prepared their report (this document), which formed the basis for the **evalag** Accreditation Committee's decision.

The procedure itself applies the fitness for purpose approach which assesses to what extent a programme complies with the **evalag** criteria for programme accreditation.[3] These are formulated in coherence with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).[4]

The criteria focus, first of all, on the profile of the programme and its curriculum. Furthermore, the criteria cover all aspects of the implementation of a study programme, its quality assurance and its resources. With regard to the criteria of programme profile and curriculum, **evalag** also assesses if the programme meets academic standards that are accepted in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).[5]

The following six criteria are applied:

- Programme profile
- Curriculum
- Student assessment
- Organisation of the study programme
- Resources
- Quality assurance

The experts express the extent of compliance of the criteria with the following assessments: "passed", "passed subject to conditions", "suspension of the accreditation procedure" or "failed". Depending on the degree to which a programme meets the criteria, the programme may be accredited, accredited with conditions or not accredited.

As a first step of the procedure and in preparation for the site visit, EPOKA University provided a self-evaluation report based on guidelines from **evalag**. At the same time **evalag** formed an international expert panel consisting of four experts including one student expert:

Academic experts:

- Prof. Dr. Thomas Barton, Professor of Informatics, Head of the programme "Business Informatics" (M.Sc.), University of Applied Sciences Worms, Germany
- Prof. Dr. Michael Clasen, Professor of Business Informatics, Dean of Studies of the Department of Business Information Systems, Hanover University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Germany

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[3] https://www.evalag.de/fileadmin/dateien/pdf/akk_international/standards_kriterien/prog_acc_process_criteria_171201.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021)

[4] https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021)

[5] The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is a group of 48 countries that cooperate to achieve comparable and compatible higher education systems throughout Europe. Member countries of the EHEA follow the directives of the so-called Bologna Process to achieve these goals.

- Prof. Dipl.-Volksw. Franz Nees, Professor of Information Systems for Banks, Dean of the Faculty of Informatics and Business Informatics, Karlsruhe University of Applied Sciences, Germany

Expert from professional practice:

- Miryam Chaabouni, software developer at CRX Markets AG, Munich, Germany

Student expert:

- Christopher Bohlens, student of Business Development (M.Sc.), Leuphana University Lüneburg, Germany, nominated by the QA pool of European Students' Union (ESU)

All experts declared to be free of any conflict of interest.

From **evalag**'s side, Georg Seppmann coordinated and carried out the project with Galina Novikova as back office in Mannheim.

The site visit (annex) took place from 16 to 18 November 2021 at EPOKA University, with Prof. Clasen and G. Seppmann being on site in Tirana. The rest of the panel participated online[6].

During the site, visit the expert panel had discussions with the leadership of the university and the faculty, academic and administrative staff and students, alumni and employers. Selected university facilities (seminar rooms, lecture hall, library, cafeteria) were visited and the visit was transmitted by video to the panel members who were connected online.

After the site visit the expert panel produced the assessment report which was submitted to the university for correction of potential factual errors on 25 January 2022. On 21 February 2022, EPOKA University confirmed no factual objections to the report.

The experts thank for the opportunity for additional questions and the open discussion on site, esp. Dr. Esmir Demaj and his colleagues from EPOKA University for their excellent and highly professional support on the technical preparation of the meetings, during the site visit, and afterwards.

The following assessment report is structured along the six assessment criteria, which form the basis for the decision about the **evalag** international programme accreditation. After a short description of the criterion, each chapter starts with a presentation of the current status regarding the criterion which is based on the information from the self-assessment report of the university as well as the information acquired during the site visit. On this basis, the expert panel assesses the criterion. Finally, the experts provide their recommendations for further improvement.

3. Programme assessment

3.1 Programme profile

The profile and objectives of a study programme is an essential criterion for the assessment. The experts have to evaluate, whether the objectives of the programme are

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[6] For this purpose, ZOOM was used as technical platform, based on a contract between **evalag** and ZOOM for commissioned data processing in order to ensure that the conferences are carried out in conformity with European data protection law. Only authorised persons had access to the meeting sessions, no discussions during these video conferences were recorded.

in line with the profile and the strategic goals of the institution. Further, they assess if the intended learning outcomes of the programme are well defined, publicly accessible and whether they correspond to the type and level of qualification provided by the programme. They also consider whether the intended learning outcomes are based on academic or professional requirements (standards), public needs and the demands of the labour market, and if they contribute to the employability of the graduates. The experts have to evaluate the programme's relation to research (procurement of scientific methods in theory and practice, research-based teaching). The experts assess whether the profile and objectives of the programme comply with internationally accepted standards. The experts consider the international dimension of the programme and verify whether the qualification of the academic staff is adequate in terms of the profile and the objectives of the programme.

Current status

Programme profile and objectives

The study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" is a three-year full-time programme. Successful graduates receive a Bachelor's degree. Table 2 shows some statistical information on the programme:

Name of study programme	Business Informatics
Founding year	Academic year 2011/2012
Final degree	Bachelor in Business Informatics
Duration of study	3 years
Credits (ECTS or other system)	180 ECTS credits
Capacity per semester/study year	150 students per year
Number of students (actual semester)	379
Full-time	379
Part-time	0
Number of graduates (from the beginning)	250
1st year students (actual semester)	134
% international students	0.79%
Drop-out rate (actual semester)	3.73% (in 2020 134 students registered, 5 of them terminated their studies)
Drop-out rate (average in last 5 semesters)	8.11% calculated from 2018-2019
Full-time academic staff in the programme	Heads 20 / FTE 20
Part-time academic staff in the programme	Heads 5 / FTE 1.66

Tab. 2: Data on the study programme

According to the self-evaluation report, the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" combines computer science and informatics knowledge with administrative sciences and organizational skills in order to fulfil the professional needs in both public

and private sector. A new generation of workers shall be qualified, able to properly plan, to analyse, to design and to implement better optimized software solutions for different daily problems in businesses and general economy. The programme is built around a group of technical courses that introduce students to the basic tools of management science, economic theory and a core of computer science courses.

The programme combines three important aspects: technology, business and society. The skills taught are described as follows: the graduates should be able

- to process and manage information within organizations;

- to analyse a business problem and provide a software solution for it;

- to analyse, plan, design and develop different information systems;

- to develop necessary plans and strategies for the use of information technology;

- to plan and control with managerial skills the organizational resources such as: human resources, materials, and machines;

- to analyse data to define proper business strategies;

- to plan and provide a proper business analysis through statistical data by estimating the risks.

The programme aims to prepare qualified professionals for the current and future labour market to serve and meet the market needs in the best possible way, explicitly including working towards Albania's integration into Western structures.

The graduates may continue their studies in Master of Science or Professional Master study programmes at EPOKA University or other universities, even abroad but most switch directly into occupation.

Learning outcomes

The objectives and learning outcomes of each course are described in the course syllabus. All course descriptions are available online.[7]

At the end of the three years' study, graduates have obtained general as well as specialist knowledge and skills for their later professional activity.

Relation to academic and professional requirements and public needs

According to the self-evaluation report and the interviews with the university management, the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" was designed and implemented in accordance with the country's economic development and labour market needs under the "Albanian National Strategy for Development and Integration 2014-2020"[8] as well as international practices.

EPOKA University monitors graduate employability and periodically gathers statistics on graduates' employment. These statistics are analysed and combined to a report showing the main indicators and the position of the graduates in the job market.

Besides, surveys among alumni and employers are regularly conducted, focused on the effectiveness of the programme, the applicability and practicality of the knowledge,

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[7] https://eis.epoka.edu.al/curricula/90/program (accessed 17 December 2021).

[8] https://shtetiweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/NSDI_2014-2020_version_June-2013.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

skills and competencies gained. Especially from the respondent employers EPOKA University expects authentic feedback on the performance of EPOKA graduates in the job market and suggestions on what could be improved in the curriculum.

Students are provided with information on job opportunities during their studies and even after graduation through continuous communication with the EPOKA Career Planning and Alumni Office (CPAO). Internships as well as an annually organised career fair serves to connect students and potential employers.[9]

Relation between study and research

According to the self-evaluation report as well as the interview sessions during the site visit, EPOKA University tries to integrate research into teaching and learning processes. All lecturers of the study programme are advised to include student projects in the syllabus when suitable for the course.

Most recent developments in research and industry fields are monitored and brought into periodical updating of course content and curricula revision.

In their final year of studies students with high average score[10] can chose a graduation project. Graduation projects are designed along a research question and cover topics in business disciplines (such as management, marketing, accounting and finance) as well as in the field of informatics. Each project has a formal supervisor. Regular group meetings focus on exchange of results and on discussion of methodologies appropriate for the respective research question.

The faculty also regularly organises international conferences and motivates both the academic staff and students to present their research in these conferences, thus to increase individual problem-solving, research, analytical, and presentation skills.

International dimension

All courses of the study programme are taught in English, thus intending to make the programme competitive in the market as well as offering the possibility of up-to-date literature and teaching materials.

One of the priorities of EPOKA University is the international dimension in both education and research. It has signed several bilateral agreements with universities as well as non-educational institutions both nationally and internationally. The university also aims at increasing the number of international students.

The university's internationalization process is in the responsibility of the International Relations Office (IRO), a subdivision of the Rector's Office. IRO fosters and ensures the implementation of the university's international policy in accordance with strategic objectives and guidelines set out by the Rector's Office and in consultation with its faculty partners. IRO supports international coordination with other institutions, occasionally represents the university abroad and promotes the university's international image as a global centre of excellence in teaching and research.

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[9] Due to the pandemic, the career fairs in 2020 and 2021 were held as online events, each attended by more than 50 national and international companies that held group discussions with students and then with each of them personally.

[10] Grade point average of 3.00 or higher.

Students and staff are encouraged to join exchange and mobility programmes under the regulation on student exchange. Several partnership agreements with universities from abroad exist.

Staff qualification (see also criterion 5)

The staff engaged in the programme come from different countries and have proven extensive experience and good academic practice in their respective fields. EPOKA University provides a staff guide for its staff which is regularly updated. [11]

All teachers are advised to publish. A list of publications is annually delivered to the rectorate.

Staff recruitment is done according to the regulation "On Staff Recruitment" of EPOKA University. The recruitment takes place via a complex selection process with clear objectives and criteria.

Assessment

Programme profile and objectives

During their site visit the experts experienced the department presenting itself as a modern educational institution which offers quality education in business information technology on an international level. All representatives the experts could talk to have internalized the university mission as an innovative and influential teaching and research institution which contributes to the development of Albanian society.

The experts highlight how convincing and committed staff, students and alumni presented themselves in the interviews. The large number of alumni who joined the online meeting on the second day of the site visit from all over the world, regardless of the time differences, was impressive.

According to the view of the expert panel, the objectives of the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" are fully in line with the profile and the strategic goals of EPOKA University.

Learning outcomes and relation to academic and professional requirements and public needs

The programme's intended learning outcomes are well defined, regularly updated and accessible online. According to the expert panel, they fully correspond to the type and level of qualification provided by the programme. The learning outcomes and the programme itself are in line with international academic and professional requirements (standards). The two different tracks of the graduation – exam or project/thesis – seemed unusual to the panel. The experts doubt whether graduates without a formal thesis can follow up with a Master's study programme (at least not in Germany). However, graduates also seem to be aware of this. Formally and against the background of Albanian higher education law, there is nothing wrong with these two graduation options.

The Annual Job Fair as well as internships during the study serve to bring students and employers into contact with each other. The experts emphasize that the university was able to maintain these services even during the pandemic.

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[11] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/staff_guide.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

The programme considers public needs and the demands of the labour market, regular surveys among alumni and employers are carried out and later analysed for programme improvement.

Relation between study and research

The expert panel appreciates that the university makes efforts to connect teaching and research by supporting the integration of project work into the curriculum. Scientific methods in theory and practice are provided. From the very first semester, students are introduced in research methods. In the view of the expert panel, research is subject to an extent to be expected from a Bachelor's programme.

Students with high average scores complete their studies with a project thesis that meets the standard of scientific work.

International dimension

The experts appreciate the international orientation of the university in general and how the IRO supports and promotes international exchange.

The experts emphasize the international character of the study programme, e.g., the full programme taught in English, the international staff, the link to international companies in Albania and overseas, the partnership agreements with universities from abroad.

International standards in teaching are also generally met. The same applies to online teaching, which has been successfully expanded due to the pandemic.

Staff qualification (see also criterion 5)

In the view of the expert panel, the qualification of the teaching staff is adequate in terms of the profile and the objectives of the programme. The relation between full-time and half-time staff is also appropriate. The experts note that teaching is carried out by dynamic and motivated lecturers with obviously high methodological competences. Some of them have international working, educational and research experience which is appreciated by the expert panel.

The experts recognise that there are explicit criteria for staff recruitment and that the recruitment process itself is well developed and transparent.

Obviously, a variety of teaching methods is used. Online teaching methods are highly developed. The experts appreciate that the university has set on its agenda the permanent improvement of teaching methods and active involvement of students in the teaching and learning process.

Areas for improvement

According to the experts' opinion, there seems to be a good connection between the university and the labour market, e.g., through common events and internships, which could be maintained during the pandemic in particular.

The annual alumni surveys constantly provide new insights into the needs of the labour market, which are internally analysed and then incorporated into the further development of the programme. However, this development is taking place without the formal involvement of external actors (e.g., an advisory board). However, a dynamic subject like business informatics could only gain from such an advisory board.

The university should also take up international trends more strongly in the further development of the subject: According to the expert panel, business informatics as a discipline has already developed independently internationally beyond its original economic and information technology content, which is not yet reflected in the present study programme. More attention should be paid to topics like Enterprise Resource Planning and Integrated Information Systems, Business Process Management, Business Process Automation, and Information System Planning (to name but a few and without claiming to be exhaustive).[12]

Recommendations

The international trends in business informatics and its further development towards more independence as academic discipline should be taken more into account.

The integration of research into teaching should be strengthened: Concrete research projects should also be assigned to Bachelor's students in order to make teaching lively and, overall, to promote young academics in addition to the perspective of professional application of the subject.

The university and the department should expand and facilitate the mobility programmes for incoming and outgoing students (e.g., ERASMUS+) and further staff exchange.

3.2 Curriculum

The second criterion concerns the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning methods. The expert panel evaluates, whether the curriculum of the programme is adequately structured to achieve the intended learning outcomes and whether the curriculum provides the necessary knowledge and methodological expertise of the relevant discipline(s). The experts also evaluate the organisation of the learning process, especially if there are appropriate student-centred teaching and learning methods, if students are encouraged to take an active role in creating the learning process and whether the diversity of students and their needs are taken into account.

Current status

Programme structure

The study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" is a three-year full-time programme with 180 ECTS credits.[13] The total credits per semester and the respective workload can be summarized as follows:

- 1 academic year has 60 ECTS

- 1 academic year has 32 teaching weeks in auditorium, including the exam weeks

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[12] The experts would like to refer to the German Informatics Society (Gesellschaft für Informatik) and their recommendation for the German-speaking region (D-AU-CH), cf. https://gi.de/fileadmin/GI/Hauptseite/Aktuelles/Meldungen/2017/Empfehlung-Wirtschaftsinformatik2017.pdf (accessed17 December 2021).

[13] EPOKA University uses the American credit system also, adjusted to converge with the Bologna system as required since the foundation by the Ministry of Education and Science.

- 1 semester has 16 teaching weeks in auditorium, including two mandatory exam weeks

- 1 ECTS = 25 hours of student work

- 1 lecture hour = 60 minutes

The curriculum comprises six semesters with compulsory courses as well as elective courses. In the first academic year, students take twelve compulsory courses, six in each semester while in the second and in the third year they also take elective courses. In overall, during the three academic years, students take thirty-two compulsory courses and four elective courses that they can select from the pool of elective courses opened by the department in each respective semester.

Tables 3 show the curriculum, distributed over the five years of studying.

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
BACHELOR PROGRAM IN BUSINESS INFORMATICS (3 YEARS)

First YEAR

First Semester

Code	Course Name	Course Type	Compulsory /Elective	Theory	Pract.	Lab.	Total	Epoka Credits	Lect.	Pract.	Lab.	Site W.	Other	Total	ECTS
ECO 101	Introduction to Economics I	A	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS 103	Introduction to Business	B	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
CEN 111	Introduction to Algorithms and Programming	B	Compulsory	3	0	2	5	4	48	0	32	70	0	150	6
CEN 103	Introduction to Computer Engineering	B	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	52	0	100	4
BUS 101	Math. for Economics and Business I	A	Compulsory	4	0	0	4	4	64	0	0	61	0	125	5
*ENG 107 *ENG 109	Core English Developing Reading and Writing Skills	D	Compulsory	4	0	0	4	4	64	0	0	61	0	125	5
	Semestral Total			20	0	2	22	21	320	0	32	384	14	750	30

* According to entry test APTIS proficiency level.

Second Semester

Code	Course Name	Course Type	Compulsory /Elective	Theory	Pract.	Lab.	Total	Epoka Credits	Lect.	Pract.	Lab.	Site W.	Other	Total	ECTS
ECO 102	Introduction To Economics II	A	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS 102	Math. For Economics and Business II	A	Compulsory	4	0	0	4	4	64	0	0	61	0	125	5
BUS 132	Introduction To Accounting	B	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
CEN 114	C and C ++ Programming	B	Compulsory	3	0	2	5	4	48	0	32	38	7	125	5
BUS 112	Management and Organization	B	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
*BUS 108 *ENG 109	Business English Developing Reading and Writing Skills	D	Compulsory	4	0	0	4	4	64	0	0	61	0	125	5
	Semestral Total			20	0	2	22	21	320	0	32	370	28	750	30

* According to entry test APTIS proficiency level.

Second YEAR

Third Semester

Code	Course Name	Course Type	Compulsory /Elective	Theory	Pract.	Lab.	Total	Epoka Credits	Lect.	Pract.	Lab.	Site W.	Other	Total	ECTS
BUS 201	Statistics I	A	Compulsory	4	0	0	4	4	64	0	0	61	0	125	5
LAW 203	Business Law	C	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
CEN 385	Computer Organization	B	Compulsory	3	0	2	5	4	48	0	32	45	0	125	5
CEN 213	Object Oriented Programing	B	Compulsory	3	0	2	5	4	48	0	32	45	0	125	5
BUS 205	Principles of Marketing	B	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS xxx	Elective BUS	C/D	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
	Semestral Total			19	0	4	23	21	304	0	64	361	21	750	30

Elective Courses

Code	Course Name	Course Type	Elective	Theory	Pract.	Lab.	Total	Epoka Credits	Lect.	Pract.	Lab.	Site W.	Other	Total	ECTS
BUS 231	Financial Accounting I	C	Elective	4	0	0	4	4	64	0	0	61	0	125	5
BUS 107	Essentials of Organizational Behaviour	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS 337	Total Quality Management	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS 359	Supply Chain Management	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
ECO 205	Microeconomics	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
FL 201	Turkish I	D	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
FL 203	German I	D	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
FL 205	Italian I	D	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
FL 207	French I	D	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5

Tab. 3: Curriculum

Fourth Semester

Code	Course Name	Course Type	Compulsory/Elective	Theory	Pract.	Lab.	Total	Epoka Credits	Lect.	Pract.	Lab.	Site W.	Other	Total	ECTS
BUS 202	Statistics II	A	Compulsory	4	0	0	4	4	64	0	0	61	0	125	5
BUS 226	Management Information Systems	B	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
CEN 252	Database Management Systems	B	Compulsory	2	0	2	4	3	32	0	32	61	0	125	5
CEN 222	Web Technologies	B	Compulsory	2	0	2	4	3	32	0	32	61	0	125	5
CEN 254	Data Structures	B	Compulsory	3	0	2	5	4	48	0	32	45	0	125	5
BUS xxx	Elective BUS	C/D	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
	Semestral Total			17	0	6	23	20	272	0	96	368	14	750	30

Elective Courses

Code	Course Name	Course Type	Elective	Theory	Pract.	Lab.	Total	Epoka Credits	Lect.	Pract.	Lab.	Site W.	Other	Total	ECTS
BUS 232	Financial Accounting II	C	Elective	4	0	0	4	4	64	0	0	61	0	125	5
BUS 358	Knowledge Management	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	80	22	150	6
BUS 114	Communication Skills	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
ECO 206	Macroeconomics	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
FL 202	Turkish II	D	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
FL 204	German II	D	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
FL 206	Italian II	D	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
FL 208	French II	D	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5

Third YEAR

Fifth Semester

Code	Course Name	Course Type	Compulsory/Elective	Theory	Pract.	Lab.	Total	Epoka Credits	Lect.	Pract.	Lab.	Site W.	Other	Total	ECTS
CEN 323	Web Programing	B	Compulsory	2	0	2	4	3	32	0	32	61	0	125	5
CEN 361	Computer Networks	B	Compulsory	2	0	2	4	3	32	0	32	61	0	125	5
BAF 233	Fundamentals of Corporate Finance	C	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS 321	Operations Management	A	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS 309	Professional Practice	D	Compulsory	0	6	0	6	3	0	96	0	22	7	125	5
BUS XXX	Elective BUS	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
	Semestral Total			13	6	4	23	18	208	96	64	354	28	750	30

Electives

Code	Course Name	Course Type	Elective	Theory	Pract.	Lab.	Total	Epoka Credits	Lect.	Pract.	Lab.	Site W.	Other	Total	ECTS
BUS 331	Cost Accounting	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS 335	Human Resources Management	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS 339	Innovation and Human Consciousness	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS 325	Social Media Marketing	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	70	7	125	5
BUS 351	Consumer Behavior	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	77	0	125	5
ECO 311	Econometrics I	C	Compulsory	4	0	0	4	4	64	0	0	61	0	125	5

Sixth Semester

Code	Course Name	Course Type	Compulsory/Elective	Theory	Pract.	Lab.	Total	Epoka Credits	Lect.	Pract.	Lab.	Site W.	Other	Total	ECTS
BUS 324	Operations Research	B	Compulsory	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	80	22	150	6
CEN 318	Operating Systems	B	Compulsory	3	0	1	4	4	48	0	16	80	6	150	6
CEN 302	Software Engineering	B	Compulsory	2	0	2	4	3	32	0	32	86	0	150	6
*BINF 302 *BINF 304	Graduation Project Final Comprehensive Exam	E	Compulsory	3	4	0	7	5	48	64	0	30	8	150	6
BUS XXX	Elective BUS	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	80	22	150	6
	Semestral Total			11	4	3	18	15	176	64	48	276	36	600	24

Electives

Code	Course Name	Course Type	Elective	Theory	Pract.	Lab.	Total	Epoka Credits	Lect.	Pract.	Lab.	Site W.	Other	Total	ECTS
BUS 336	Managerial Accounting	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	80	22	150	6
BUS 348	Customer Relationship Management	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	80	22	150	6
ECO 312	Econometrics II	C	Elective	4	0	0	4	4	64	0	0	61	25	150	6
BUS 354	Branding and Brand Management	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	80	22	150	6
BUS 356	Strategic Logistic Management	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	80	22	150	6
BUS 352	International Enterprises	C	Elective	3	0	0	3	3	48	0	0	80	22	150	6

Tab. 3: Curriculum (cont.)

Each course is categorized according to the formation activities from A to E course type based on the higher education legislation in Albania. The meaning of each category of formation activity is explained below:

- Basic courses: methodological preparation and general culture (A)

- Characterizing courses: preparation for scientific discipline (B)

- Interdisciplinary courses: sub-disciplines, profiles and group of elective courses (C)

- Complimentary courses: foreign languages, informatics knowledge, professional practice (D)

- Concluding requirements (courses required for graduation) (E)

Based on the curriculum, each student needs to complete courses of a total of 180 ECTS credits for the three academic years to graduate. When courses are opened, each lecturer appointed creates or updates the syllabus of their respective course. The syllabus includes all the information regarding the course, starting with the course description, objectives, course outline, textbook, teaching and learning methods, course learning outcomes, programme learning outcomes, course evaluation methods, and ECTS credits (allocated based on student workload). The course lecturer cannot change all the fields in the syllabus such as the course description or programme competences, which are subject to departmental consultation and approval.

Table 4 shows a sample syllabus.

EPOKA UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE INFORMATION Course Title: MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS							
Code	Course Type	Regular Semester	Theory	Practice	Lab	Credits	ECTS
BUS 226	B	4	3	0	0	3	5
Lecturer and Office Hours:	Idaver Sherifi A						
Second Lecturer(s):	NA						
Teaching Assistant(s) and Office Hours:	NA						
Language:	English						
Compulsory/Elective:	Compulsory						
Classroom and Meeting Time:	a						
Course Description:	Management Information System: The course aims to introduce basic information system concepts and understanding of the role of computer based information systems in business organizations. The focus will be on a sociotechnical approach Coverage will include; TPS, MIS, DSS, ERP, Electronic Commerce and Electronic Business, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Expert Systems (ES), Integration of DDS and ES, Executive Information Systems, Information Systems, Planning Information Engineering.						
Course Objectives:	This course provides an overview of information systems used in the business world. It presents an organizational view of how to use information technology to create competitive firms, manage global organizations, and provide useful products and services to customers. Coverage will include: TPS, MIS, DSS, ERP, Electronic Commerce and Electronic Business, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Expert Systems (ES), Executive Information Systems, etc. The strategic use of information systems, the development of information systems, and social and ethical issues involved with information systems.						

COURSE OUTLINE	
Week	Topics
1	Business Information Systems: An Overview
2	Information Systems, Organizations, and Strategy
3	Information Systems, Organizations, and Strategy / Case Study
4	Business Hardware
5	Business Software
6	Ethical and Social Issues in Information Systems
7	Mid term
8	Telecommunications, the Internet, and Wireless Technology
9	Web-Enabled Commerce
10	Web-Enabled Commerce / Case Study
11	E-commerce: Digital Markets, Digital Goods (1)
12	E-commerce: Digital Markets, Digital Goods (2) / Case Study
13	Blockchain and Cryptocurrency
14	Challenges of Global Information Systems

Tab. 4: Sample syllabus

Prerequisite(s):	No	
Textbook:	- Kenneth C. Laudon & Jane P. Laudon, Essentials of Management Information Systems, 13-th Edition, Pearson Prentice-Hall, 2014.- Effy Oz, Management Information Systems, Fourth International Student Edition, Thomson, 6th Edition, 2008 - James A. O'Brien, George Marakas, McGraw-Hill. Introduction to Information Systems 14/e, 2008. - James A. O'Brien, George Marakas, McGraw-Hill. Management Information Systems	
Other References:	- Laudon, K. & Laudon, J., Management Information Systems: Managing the Digital Firm, 9th ed. Prentice Hall. 2006 - David T. Bourgeois, Information Systems for Business and Beyond, Saylorr, 2014	
Laboratory Work:	No	
Computer Usage:	No	
Others:	No	

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

1	Understand types of MIS applications in organizations
2	Discuss the development of management information systems in organizations.
3	Select and design MIS systems appropriate to meet management requirements.
4	Critically evaluate MIS contributions to the strategic management of organizations

COURSE CONTRIBUTION TO... PROGRAM COMPETENCIES
(Blank : no contribution, 1: least contribution ... 5: highest contribution)

No	Program Competencies	Cont.
	BA BUS Program	
1	Identify activities, tasks, and skills in management, marketing, accounting, finance, and economics.	3
2	Apply key theories to practical problems within the global business context.	5
3	Demonstrate ethical, social, and legal responsibilities in organizations.	2
4	Develop an open minded-attitude through continuous learning and team-work.	3
5	Use technology to enable business growth and sustainability.	5
6	Analyze data to make effective decisions.	3
	BA BINF Program	
1	Identify activities, tasks, and skills in management, marketing, accounting, finance, and economics.	3
2	Apply key theories to practical problems within the global business context.	5
3	Demonstrate ethical, social, and legal responsibilities in organizations.	2
4	Develop an open minded-attitude through continuous learning and team-work.	3
5	Integrate different skills and approaches to be used in decision making and data management.	5
6	Combine computer skills with managerial skills, in the analysis of large amounts of data.	4
7	Provide solutions to complex information technology problems.	5
8	Recognize, analyze, and suggest various types of information-communication systems/services that are encountered in everyday life and in the business world.	5

COURSE EVALUATION METHOD

Method	Quantity	Percentage
Midterm Exam(s)	1	30
Presentation	1	5
Project	1	10
Final Exam	1	45
Other	1	10
	Total Percent:	100%

ECTS (ALLOCATED BASED ON STUDENT WORKLOAD)

Activities	Quantity	Duration(Hours)	Total Workload(Hours)
Course Duration (Including the exam week: 16x Total course hours)	16	3	48
Hours for off-the-classroom study (Pre-study, practice)	14	2	28
Mid-terms	1	14	14
Assignments			0
Final examination	1	20	20
Other	1	15	15
Total Work Load:			125
Total Work Load/25(h):			5
ECTS Credit of the Course:			5

Tab. 4: Sample syllabus (cont.)

Course learning outcomes are initially decided by the department, but the lecturer of the course can revise after approval by the Scientific Committee of the BUS department. Programme competencies detailed for each course are also defined by the department. Eight key competencies are listed[14]:

- Students identify activities, tasks, and skills in management, marketing, accounting, finance, and economics.

- Students apply key theories to practical problems within the global business context.

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[14] Cf. self-report p. 38.

- Students demonstrate ethical, social, and legal responsibilities in organizations.
- Students develop an open-minded attitude through continuous learning and teamwork.
- Students integrate different skills and approaches to be used in decision making and data management.
- Students combine computer skills with managerial skills, in the analysis of large amounts of data.
- Students provide solutions to complex information technology problems.
- Students recognize, analyse, and suggest various types of information-communication systems/services that are encountered in everyday life and in the business world.

Each lecturer evaluates the contribution that each respective course has for each of the competencies from zero to five (0-5). This also measures how each course within the curriculum contributes to achieving the intended learning outcomes of the study programme.

Curricula changes can be annually proposed in response to course feedback received from students and academic staff or changes and developments in the market. The changes follow a fixed procedure:

1. Proposal by the department supported by evidence for the need of change;
2. Approval by the Decanate[15];
3. Review by the Curricula Development Commission and Permanent Commission on Quality Assurance;
4. Adoption of the Academic Senate decision;
5. Implementation of approved changes.

Mechanisms for providing knowledge and application of scientific methods

The education process consists of lectures, projects, laboratory work (in case of using software), practice, seminars, presentations, and other similar works as described in each course syllabus. The weight of each evaluation method is listed in the syllabus of the respective course.

During the pandemic EPOKA University took decisive actions to continue the educational activities online by implementing the use of Google Classroom and Google Meet applications.

Different pedagogical methods – online as well as in classroom – are used to provide the students with a broad understanding of business informatics. The university education strategy seeks to foster students' critical and creative thinking through the use of interactive student-centred teaching, thus to encourage students not simply being reproducers of facts or knowledge, but rather being independent individuals who produce new information and use that knowledge in a productive manner.

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[15] The Decanate consists of the Dean, who is also the chair of the meeting, Deputy Dean in case there is any appointed member to that role, the Heads of Departments, the Directors of Scientific Research Centers, and the Administrator of the main unit. Cf. self-report p. 26.

Organisation of students' learning experience

As already described above, the department annually decides on curricula changes which are published before the new study year begins. During the course registration week, students can then select courses for the specific semester through their accounts in the EPOKA Interactive System (EIS) and get the approval of the academic advisor. Students are advised to select the courses they have previously failed with a grade of FD or FF, and those courses from previous semesters which they have not taken until then. The student, with his/her advisor's approval, may add and drop courses from one or more courses or register for other courses within two weeks following the beginning of each semester. Students who have not attended at least 60% of theoretical courses as well as applied and laboratory studies are not allowed to take the final exam of those courses.

Assessment

Programme structure

The expert panel assesses the curriculum as well structured and logical. The subjects and modules are well defined and cover the relevant content and competences to meet the programme's prescribed objectives and learning outcomes. In the experts' opinion, the course arrangement generally considers the competencies and skills later required in the professional occupation in different areas.

The study programme allows students to follow a well-arranged schedule in their studies. The students' workload in the programme is high but – according to the students whom the expert group could talk to – it is manageable. The course plan with many lectures in the evening takes into consideration students who are working.

Mechanisms for providing knowledge and application of scientific methods

Different types of traditional as well as innovative teaching methods (e.g., e-learning) are adopted in accordance with the intended learning outcomes. The experts appreciate the obvious flexibility, the high proportion of self-study and the consultation offers by the highly motivated and experienced staff. During the site visit, students reported a policy of open doors of staff which would make it easy to solve difficulties and problems directly and easy.

The experts especially appreciate the self-image of the teachers to be more learning supporters than instructors. Appropriate student-centred teaching and learning methods are used and continuously developed, students are also encouraged to take an active role in creating the learning process. The integration of smaller projects and group work in the individual study modules imparts methodological competence. According to the interviews, even the diversity of students and their needs are taken into account.

The switch to e-learning during the lockdown was successful.

Organisation of students' learning experience

By learning in small groups and in direct contact to teachers the university makes great efforts to enhance a successful learning experience of their students.

All students whom the experts were able to interview expressed their satisfaction with the study environment, the familiar campus atmosphere and EPOKA University as a whole.

Areas for improvement

In general, the study of business informatics is based on the three pillars of (1) business informatics core areas, (2) computer science and (3) business administration. This is also reflected in the Bachelor's programme offered at EPOKA University. The study programme appears mature overall; this view is confirmed by the statements of former students and employers who employ both interns from EPOKA University and graduates. Nevertheless, the experts recommend keeping an eye on the further development of the subject and adjust the lectures' and lab works' content to the latest version of the software or technology used.

The relationship of the three main pillars forming the subject to each other should also be critically reflected on again and again and aligned with new requirements. This would contribute to a stronger profile of the subject within the university.

The path of internships already started by the university should be further improved with a clear structure as well as a uniform, institutionalized approach for all students that safeguards the professional standards of the practical transfer, and with supervision/monitoring.

If the Bachelor's thesis/project work is chosen as the form of graduation, the weighting should be adjusted accordingly. 6 ECTS do not appear to be sufficient against the background of the scientific requirements. One solution would be to combine it with a corresponding elective so that 12 credits could be awarded at the end. Graduates would then also be better prepared for further scientific development.

Recommendations

The curriculum should be reviewed against more recent developments, by keeping the course and labs content up-to-date with the latest versions of the used technology or software.

All three pillars of business informatics should be equally considered in order to also raise the profile of the subject within the university.

In order to strengthen the scientific claim of the possible thesis/project, the credit allocation should be reviewed (increase to 12 ECTS through electives in direct connection with the thesis/project).

3.3 Student assessment

The third criterion focuses on the organisation of student assessments. The expert panel has to evaluate how the assessment of intended learning outcomes is organised and whether the amount and requirements of assessments are adequate. They also have to decide whether the requirements of the thesis reflect the level of the degree.

Overall, it is assessed whether the assessment criteria are transparent and used in a consistent way. It is also evaluated if the staff undertaking assessments is adequately qualified. Last not least it should be verified if examination regulations exist and that they provide clear and fair regulations for student absence, illness and other mitigating conditions.

Current status

Organisation of assessment

The main types of assessment at EPOKA University are

- written examinations;
- oral examinations;
- take-home examinations;
- projects;
- juries and
- presentations.

The assessment procedures are regulated by the regulation "On Undergraduate Studies and Examinations"[16] and the guideline "On Examinations".[17] Following these regulations, the university and the Dean of the faculty are responsible for the successful completion of the examination period, for ensuring exam integrity and helping students, departments and invigilators to undertake their respective roles.

In this context, the university …

1. … establishes and shares clear policies and methods concerning examinations;
2. … posts "silence zone" posters in the vicinity of exam rooms;
3. … provides students with clear information about exam locations, time, and duration before the exam weeks;
4. … makes utmost effort to ensure that examination rooms are equipped with supportive environments that …
   a. … are quiet and free from unnecessary and unreasonable disturbance;
   b. … are suitable in terms of temperature, workspaces, cleanliness, and configuration;
   c. … provide enough space that ensures the quality and integrity of the exam by avoiding overcrowding.
5. … makes every effort to …
   a. … arrange exams as possible for every student across the available time period;
   b. … ensure that students of the same cohort will not be required to enter more than two exams in one calendar day.
   c. take all necessary measures to prevent the disruption of examinations.

Regarding the conduct of the examination, the faculty is responsible for the integrity of exams held under its supervision. The faculty is specifically responsible …

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[16] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/undergraduate-education-and-examination.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

[17] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/Guideline%20%E2%80%9COn%20Examinations%E2%80%9C.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

1. … to set up examination guidelines specific to subject areas and sharing them with all academic staff members and students (e.g., by including this information in the orientation of academic staff members and in handbooks);

2. … to circulate and implement effective strategies for maintaining examination integrity in overcrowded situations;

3. … to announce the exam schedule at least two weeks in advance and adjust the schedule in case of schedule conflicts;

4. … to provide at least one invigilator per 30 students and, wherever possible, at least two invigilators for one exam room;

5. … to bring to the attention of the Dean if the academic unit cannot provide enough invigilators. This has to be done before the examination period commences. If the Dean is unable to resolve such a shortfall, s/he will bring the issue to the attention of the university's designated exam coordinator.

6. … to ensure that all invigilators are familiar with the university's guideline "On Examinations".

7. … for all matters related to examination papers: their accuracy; conformity with stated course management policies; ensuring that well before the exam students know the exam format, duration, and permitted aids/resources; the printing of sufficient numbers of exam papers; the security of exam papers until the exam time; and ensuring that exam papers are available and accessible on the day of exam.

Written exams are under surveillance of invigilators who are academic staff members of departments assigned on proposal of the department and decision of the Dean's Office. Invigilators have clear responsibilities and tasks, e.g., to check the right start and end of an examination, to explain the rules to students, to prevent inappropriate actions or cheating, etc.

After the Albanian Government call on the closure of all the educational institutions in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, EPOKA University has taken decisive actions to continue the educational activities online. Since the pandemic situation continued during the examination period as well, EPOKA University published a guideline on "The Modalities concerning the Conduct of the Midterm Exams of the Spring Semester 2019-2020". This guideline has also been used for the Final Exams period and for the following academic year (2020-2021) with some modifications. This guideline included the ways on how to properly conduct the exams online and the types of exams that could be selected by the course instructors. While EPOKA University made changes on the modalities of the examination during the pandemic, it has not made changes to the grading system for the assessment of students.

Amount and requirements of assessments

Each course must be finished with a grade. The final grade of a course includes all the studies (mid-term exams, quizzes, land studies, practices, assignments, projects, workshops, seminars, attendance, laboratory studies, etc.) within a semester with respect to such course, together with the result of the final examination. Academic staff members inform their respective students in the course syllabus whether a final examination is required or whether a project or other assessment format will be used instead.

Students may (with approval by their advisor) withdraw from one or more courses or register for other courses within two weeks following the beginning of each semester.

Students who have not attended at least 60% of theoretical courses as well as applied and laboratory studies are not allowed to take the final exam of those courses.

Mid-term and final examinations are completed within a scheduled examination period. Students should participate in the examinations within the period provided in the Academic Calendar according to the dates and time scheduled and announced prior to the examination weeks.

Besides the regular final examination period, resit and additional examination are organised as well in each faculty. The resit exam is an examination arranged immediately after the final exam for students with low grades. All students can enter resit exams organised at the end of the fall and spring semesters. There is no limitation concerning the number of resit exams a student may take from among the courses in which the student is registered that semester. Resit exams are administered for courses taken during the fall and spring semesters; they are not administered for courses taken during the summer semester. Students who pass the resit exam will receive at most a CC grade (=the minimum pass mark), and that grade will be considered as the final grade for the respective course. The grades of students that have registered to enter the resit exams but do not attend the resit exam shall remain the same as the final grade taken during respective semester.

Requirements of the final assessment

In their sixth semester, students of "Business Informatics (B.A.)" register for five courses, of which one is either the graduation project or the final comprehensive exam. Students, having a grade point average (GPA) of 3.00 out of 4.00 or higher, have the opportunity to choose between both, students with a GPA of less than 3.00 must take the final comprehensive exam.

The graduation project is supervised and covers topics both in the business disciplines such as management, marketing, accounting and finance, and the field of informatics fields of study, specified after continuous consultations of the students with their supervisors. The academic staff members assigned as supervisors use several approaches for the supervision of the graduation projects. Every supervisor organises group and individual meetings with the students, meetings which are primarily introduced in the syllabus of the graduation project. During the group meetings, the supervisor explains and highlights general information and methodologies regarding the research and writing of the projects, while in the individual meetings the supervisor bases every advice on the topic of the student's research. At the end of the semester, the supervisor evaluates each graduation project based on the respective student's presentation performance, their periodical meetings, and their final work submitted referring to the contribution of each of them in the final grade as specified on the syllabus.

The final comprehensive exam consists of seventy questions selected from a pool of questions according to areas/profile with the respective number of questions provided as shown in table 5.

Profile	Number of questions in exam
Economics	6
Statistics & Econometrics	12
General Business	12
Accounting & Finance	6
Operations Management	6
Management Information	6

Systems & Marketing	
Computer Engineering	22
TOTAL	**70**

Tab. 5: Final comprehensive exam distribution of questions by areas/ profiles

Assessment criteria

During the course registration week, students select their courses. The course lecturer will then present the assessment criteria to the students and will post it on the electronic EPOKA Interactive System (EIS).

Table 6 shows the forms of control of knowledge. Each course lecturer will make the percentage weighting to the sections and present it to the students.

Bachelor in Business informatics		
Forms of control		***Percentage in the overall assessment of the student***
a.	Attendance and active participation	Specified in the respective syllabus
b.	Fulfilment of obligation (lab, course assignments, projects)	Specified in the respective syllabus
c.	Quizzes throughout the semester	Specified in the respective syllabus
d.	Midterm exam	Specified in the respective syllabus
e.	Final exam	Specified in the respective syllabus
	In total	**100%**

Table 6: Forms of control of knowledge (Source: Self-evaluation report)

A student passing a course with CC and above is considered as successful. The grades DD or DC are considered probationary grades; however, in such cases there is no need to repeat the courses unless the student needs to bring the GPA above 2.00.

Table 7 shows grade calculation and description.

Grade	Coefficient	*Points	Albanian Grade System	Description
AA	4.00	90-100	10	EXCELLENT
BA	3.50	85-89	9	EXCELLENT
BB	3.00	80-84	8	SUCCESS
CB	2.50	75-79	8	SUCCESS
CC	2.00	70-74	7	SUCCESS
DC	1.50	65-69	6	ON PROBATION
DD	1.00	60-64	5	ON PROBATION
FD	0.50	50-59	4	FAIL
FF	0.00	00-49	0	FAIL
NA	0.00	00-00	0	FAIL

*Out of 100 points

Table 7: Grade calculation and description (Source: Self-evaluation report)

Grades not included in the averages are the following: I - Incomplete, S - Satisfactory, T - Transfer, U - Unsatisfactory, P - Progressive, EX – Exempt, NI – Not Included, NA – Not Attended

Students who earn FD and FF in a course are considered as unsuccessful. Those students who have attended all the courses required in the curriculum of the study programme and have a maximum of two unsuccessful courses as well as students that have completed all the courses successfully but do not reach the required GPA of two (2.00) for graduation need to attend the additional examinations that are held after the resit exams period. Additional examinations are given for courses from which students have received an FF, FD, DD and DC at the end of the relevant semester. In order to meet graduation requirements, a student is permitted to exercise the right to take additional exams at most three times during his/her education without any additional fee.

A student may object to the result of an examination by completing and submitting a grade appeal request to the Registrar's Office within five days following the announcement of the exam grades. The objection is assessed by the relevant lecturer in terms of material mistakes. The request is finalized by the relevant Dean's Office upon a proposal by the department offering the course.

Assessment qualification of staff

At EPOKA University, examination practice is regular subject of quality control performed by the Exam Board. This board is composed of a chairperson and at least one representative from each faculty. The members of the Exam Board are appointed by the deans of respective faculties.

At faculty level, for each study programme the Dean's Office assigns an expert who assesses the quality of examinations on a random basis: at least one mid-term exam, one final exam and one resit exam are selected per semester, together with at least two additional exams per study programme.

The results of this assessment are discussed with the course instructors and measures are planned to improve the assessment skills of staff.

Each faculty prepares a report regarding the number of examinations being conducted during the mid-term and the final exam period, the forms of examinations, the grade distribution and the assessment results and deliver it to the Exam Board. The Exam Board assesses the quality of examinations based on the reports submitted by faculties.

Exams have to meet the following criteria:

- Design in accordance with the course objectives;
- Materials delivered during lectures are reflected in the exam;
- Clearly and unambiguously formulated questions;
- Clearly and unambiguously formulated evaluation criteria;
- Mostly equal distribution of the weight of questions;
- The percentage of the exam was stated in the course syllabus at the beginning of course;
- The course instructor had identified the students' mistakes in the exam paper in written form;
- The students are able to complete the exam within the given period of time;
- For multiple-choice questions, several groups of exams are provided.

In case the alternative forms of examination such as take-home, jury, oral exams or projects are applied, the faculty should set up the evaluation guidelines specific to subject areas and provide the report according to them.

Assessment

Organisation of assessment

The assessment system is transparent, clear and diversified. Responsibilities are clear to lecturers as well as to students.

Amount and requirements of assessments

The amount and requirements of assessments with regard to the intended learning outcomes are adequate. They are fully in line with international practice.

A sufficient range of assessment methods and tasks is used. The experts studied the Exam Board Report on the examinations during the academic years 2018/19 and 2019/2020 which shows how the university continuously monitors and reflects on the examination system. The experts were not entirely sure whether the content of the tests would correspond exactly to the required level of performance in all cases.

Requirements of the final assessment

The final assessment alternatives (either graduation project/ thesis or comprehensive exam)are clearly described, and all requirements are clearly defined. Each form of assessment reflects the qualification level that is awarded. Nevertheless, the experts emphasize the importance of a thesis in view of further Master studies, as it imparts scientific competences in addition to the application knowledge and competences more labour market oriented.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria are exactly defined, and they are transparent for students as well as for staff. The students whom the experts talked to were well aware of the assessment criteria, they know what is expected and they know whom to contact in the case of problems or questions. The student-centred learning approach provides nearly optimal preparation to assessments.

Assessment qualification of staff

According to the interviews made during the site visit, the staff undertaking the assessments is adequately qualified. The Exam Board is able to control the whole process and – in case of detected weaknesses – take countermeasures.

Examination regulations and regulations for student absence, illness, etc.

All examination regulations are available online. There are clear and objective regulations for student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances.

Recommendations

The university and the department should continue to monitor the assessment system and practice and offer further need based training for staff on a regular basis.

The thesis/graduation project should be promoted more strongly to students as the final exam that best prepares them for a future academic career.

The experiences with online examinations should be made known outside the university.

3.4 Organisation of the study programme

Furthermore, the implementation of the programme has to be evaluated. The expert panel assess the appropriateness of entry qualifications and the regulations for the recognition of qualifications (i.e., Lisbon Convention). It has to be reviewed whether the organisation of the study process allows the programme to be carried out in such a way that the intended learning outcomes will be achieved and whether the organisation of the study process also takes the diversity of students and their needs into account. It is evaluated how the implementation of the programme is managed (roles and responsibilities) and even whether the workload of the programme is adequate with respect to the necessity to reach the intended learning outcomes in the scheduled time frame. The organisation of the student life cycle (i.e., all (organisational) relationships between the student and the institution from enrolment to graduation) is also part of this criterion. The experts check whether the care services and student advisory services are suitable and – in case of a cooperation with internal and external partners – how the cooperation is organised.

Current status

Entry qualifications

The admission to the Bachelor programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" (as to any other study programme) is possible for any candidate who has successfully completed high school and meets the cumulative grade point average (CGPA) criterion determined each year by a decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania. According to the Law No. 80/2015 for Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education in the Republic of Albania, the registration process at the HEIs is done through an online portal that is monitored by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth. In a timeslot set by the ministry all students must apply through the online portal by choosing the HEI and the study program they want. After this online application, the university announces the winning list of candidates according to predefined quotas and criteria. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth announces the dates where students can officially register at the HEIs with the required documents.

The university has specified the admission criteria for the "Business Informatics (B.A.)" programme, related with the minimum CGPA showing the level of the student during high school as well as the level of English proficiency as all the teaching and learning process is conducted in English. These criteria are as follows:

- A minimum CGPA of 7 out of 10 for the students who have completed their High School. According to Law No. 69/2021, in the pre-university education system in Albania, grading ranges from 4 to 10 and the lowest passing grade is 5 (five).

- English proficiency level of B1 according to the CEFR in one of the following exams:
  a. Cambridge
  b. IELTS
  c. TOEFL Internet-based Test (IBT)
  d. TOEFL Paper-based Test (PBT)
  e. TOEIC
  f. GESE
  g. APTIS

Those students who have completed their high school studies in schools where teaching is conducted entirely in English are exempted from the obligation of submitting an English proficiency proof document. After the final registration of the students and depending on the number of students registered, the department divides them into groups of an average 60 students per group.

Regulations for the recognition of qualifications

Students who have been enrolled in another HEI in "Business Informatics (B.A.)" or other related study programmes and have taken specific courses at those institutions can transfer to EPOKA University. The admission of transfer students is done according to the university directive "On Student Transfer"[18] that determines the procedures and principles of the transfer applications made within the institution and from other institutions. Students who wish to transfer must submit the following documents:

1. Completed application form to be obtained at the Admission Office

2. Course description of the respective study programme and syllabi

3. Grades certificate/transcript of records which contains the list of courses and their respective grades and credits

The assessment and course recognition are done through analysing the course content and the suitability to the EPOKA curriculum. Credits earned in another undergraduate programme may be accepted through the proposal of the department and the final approval of the Faculty Administrative Board up to a maximum of 2/3 of taken credits (excluding thesis, graduation project or similar assignments).

Qualifications acquired professionally before the start of studies are not taken into account.

Organisation of the study process

Students enrolled in the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" are assigned an academic advisor in the beginning of each academic year who follows the student performance and is in a direct contact with the students throughout the study period until graduation. The main responsibility of the academic advisor is related to the course selection and approval in each semester guiding the students especially during the selection of elective courses, repeating courses, add/drop week, making sure that the students have attended and completed the required number of courses (with a total of 180 ECTS) before graduation and issues that have to do with their academic performance. Advisors also try to help students when they have different issues regarding other academic or administrative units by consulting with them and by guiding or directing them to the respective units for the solution of each specific issue.

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[18] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/13.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

Management of the study programme

The responsibility for the implementation and the management of the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" lies with the Department of Business Administration. The department coordinates and supervises the lectures in consultation with the faculty and the other university units. The managing authority is the Head of Department. The department is also responsible for quality assurance and regular curriculum updates.

Student workload

The allocation of credits at EPOKA University for a study programme or educational component is carried out according to the estimated student workload needed to achieve the defined learning outcomes. A semester of study at EPOKA University has 16 weeks (14 weeks of lectures and 2 weeks of final exams). Weekly teaching load including lectures, seminars, exercises and labs are within the range of 20 (twenty) to 25 (twenty-five) hours. The distribution of load for the courses is clearly determined in the syllabus of each course. According to the national legal framework, a credit (ECTS) corresponds to 25 working hours of a student and the average amount of work completed during one year of studies for a student is 60 (sixty) ECTS or 1,500 (one thousand and five hundred) hours of student working hours, which includes hours at the auditorium and the independent working hours. Students attending the "Business Informatics (B.A.)" programme are assigned courses per each semester of a total of 30 ECTS.

In the first academic year during the 1st and 2nd semesters students should take six courses per semester which are all compulsory including basic, introductory and complementary courses. In the second academic year during the 3rd and 4th semesters as well as in the third academic year during the 5th semester students should take six courses per semester of which one course per semester is elective and the others are compulsory.

In the 6th semester, which is also the final semester, students should take five courses of which four are compulsory (including the Graduation Project or Final Comprehensive Exam) and one course is elective. Students who have a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.00 (out of 4.00) by the end of 5th semester can select between the graduation project and the final comprehensive exam. On the other hand, those students who have a cumulative grade point average of less than 3.00 (out of 4.00) by the end of 5th semester are not eligible to take the graduation project but instead have to take the final comprehensive exam.

Organisation of the student life cycle

At the beginning of each academic year, freshman students attend the orientation week which is organised under the coordination of the Dean of Students. The main mission of the orientation week is to ensure and present the freshmen students with general information about their study programmes, departments, faculties, Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office, Registrar's Office, International Relations Office, and Dean of Students. The Department of Business Administration likewise organises welcome and motivational speeches by a lecturer and an alumni representative and provides students general information about the study programme as well as introduces the lecturers, academic advisors and other supporting staff to the freshmen students registered in this study programme.

During the orientation week the Department Coordinator provides all the freshmen students with a copy of the Student Guide[19] showing all the rules, regulations, rights and responsibilities and gives general information about each unit of the University as well as detailed information on issues that students need to know throughout their study period. The Department Coordinator provides students with timely and relevant information regarding the academic issues based on the academic calendar throughout the study period until graduation. The Department Coordinator also provides the students with course syllabuses and course descriptions when they need to transfer to another institution or when they apply for another level of study after graduation.

Student support system

The Dean of Student Office is in continuous communication with the students and handles all requests from students, either on administrative or academic issues, and forwards them to the appropriate authorities (administrative units, faculties, Rector's Office). It is strict policy at EPOKA University that all requests are processed and the results and decisions made are transmitted promptly.

Apart from the coursework, student life in the campus is enriched by different artistic, cultural, sports, academic and social activities organised throughout an academic year. The Student Clubs and Activities Office organises these extracurricular activities under the coordination of the Dean of Students.

These activities give the students an opportunity for practical application of their knowledge acquired and the disclosure of their talents. Students can become part of any student club based on their interests and more than 60% of the students at EPOKA University are members of at least one student club. The extracurricular activities are being held in the form of workshops, open forums & open lectures, trainings & seminars, conferences, site visits, company visits, study visits, tournaments, competitions, fests and trips both locally and internationally.

The Student Clubs and Activities Office organises a "clubs festivity" at the beginning of each academic year to promote the student clubs to the freshmen and higher classes. All announcements regarding different activities are done via e-mail and all the news regarding the activities are lunched on the EPOKA University website as well as clubs' Facebook and Instagram pages.

EPOKA University Student Council is the most important student institution of the university. It is an independent organisation of the students which does not perform any economic or politic activity. The Student Council is composed of student representatives elected democratically in order to send the students' voice to the University Administration and to contribute to the educational activities at the University. The fundamental objective of the Student Council is to ensure both the academic development of students and their social and personal growth. The Student Council ensures that the opinions and suggestions of the student community are transmitted to the decision-making bodies of EPOKA University.

The Dean of Students assigns one member of the University Administration as the EPOKA University Student Council Advisor who assists in organising the Student Council meetings, proposes and recommends initiatives, reports on activities efficiency of Student Council and opens the official call for the elections.

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[19] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/Student_Guide_2020-2021.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

Cooperation with internal and external partners

The study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" lives from the cooperation of various departments: Lectures and courses are offered by lecturers from the Department of Business Administration, the Department of Computer Engineering and the Department of Banking and Finance.

According to the self-evaluation report and the interview sessions on site, EPOKA University tries to be close to the students' community starting prior to admission through the Admissions Office, during the studies through different units engaged in the teaching and learning process and continuing also after graduation through the Career Planning and Alumni Office (CPAO). The Admissions Office organises career planning sessions for high school seniors, which is in the form of a half-day programme in which high school seniors are invited at EPOKA campus where they can obtain detailed information on the university and specific study programmes and meet with lecturers from the study programmes and other students.

The CPAO later helps students to find internships. Besides, regular public events with employers and representatives from practice are organised.

In the international context, EPOKA University collaborates with about 50 universities worldwide and about 30 non-educational institutions (e.g., Confederation of Albanian Industries, British Council Albania, ProCredit Bank etc.).

Assessment

Entry qualifications

In the view of the experts, the entry qualification and regulations are appropriate and transparent. All information can be found on the university website.

Regulations for the recognition of qualifications

Prior qualifications from other universities are recognized. Corresponding regulations and a clear and transparent procedure exist. Recognition of prior professional work practice is not intended. The experts think that a strategy of a formal recognition could raise the attractiveness of the Bachelor programme and strengthen the university on the long term, even in international competition.

Organisation of the study process and management of the study programme

According to the expert panel, the study process is well organised and clear. The roles, obligations and responsibilities in the management are clearly defined and appropriately structured, people involved the experts could talk to are highly motivated and professional. Besides, the university has established methods and means for student involvement, both in giving feedback and in decision-making.

Student workload

Having heard the students, the expert panel believes that the workload of the programmes is manageable. From the discussions with students and the responsible teaching staff, it became clear that the university strives to keep the student workload feasible. In particular, courses in the evening are convenient for students who often have to work to finance their studies. However, there is no systematic monitoring of the student workload.

Organisation of the student life cycle

The experts note that there is excellent communication between students and teachers: learning groups are by and large small, there seem to be lots of formal as well as informal contacts between teachers and students. The interviewed students were very positive regarding good organisation and atmosphere of the study process.

Student support system

According to the interviews during the site visit, university care services and student advisory services are highly developed and both known and favoured by the students. Web information and communication services offered by the university play an important role and are frequently used.

Cooperation with external and internal partners

The internal cooperation with the other departments involved seems to function well. Besides, contacts to external partners exists: Some are personal contacts of individual teachers but the university (through the CPAO) makes also efforts to intensify the connection to professional practice. There is no doubt for the experts that out of these activities students receive various opportunities, from internships to later starting points for their professional career.

Areas for improvement

Further internationalisation should be expanded through mobility windows for both incoming and outgoing students. Further cooperation with other universities, especially at programme level, would be desirable.

In the long term, the proportion of internships should be increased – the study programme would benefit from this.

Recommendations and conditions

The minimum duration of the internship must be increased to at least two months).

A mobility window should be set up explicitly for a bachelor project, an exchange semester, or an internship which could also take place abroad. This could be accomplished for example by increasing the workload in the first and second year and reduce it in the third year.

3.5 Resources

Central to the criterion "resources" is whether there are appropriate resource endowment and deployment in the involved faculties. The experts evaluate the existence of sustainable funding and financial management, whether the staff is adequately qualified and sufficient to ensure the intended learning outcomes and which strategies and processes for staff recruiting and staff development are used. The experts examine if the amount and quality of facilities and equipment (library, laboratories, teaching rooms, IT equipment, etc.) allow the provision of the programme and if the resources are adequate to reach the programme's objectives.

Current status

Financial management and funding

EPOKA University operates under Turgut Ozal Education Sh.a, and the management and coordination of the financial issues are done by the General Directorate of the Turgut Ozal Education Sh.a in cooperation with the Finance Office of EPOKA University. Turgut Ozal Education Sh.a is audited annually by an external audit firm, and the detailed audit reports are available at the Finance Office of EPOKA University. Based on the official financial reports, EPOKA University has a positive annual balance and financial stability which guarantees the financial stability and the sustainability of the teaching, research and learning process.

The main sources of finance for EPOKA University are the tuition fees from the students. The annual tuition fee for the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" is 2,500 EUR. Merit-based scholarships exist to reduce the costs of individual students. The experts noticed that nearly all students they could talk to during the site-visit got such a reduction.

Staff

Full-time as well as part-time academics are engaged in the study programme. Table 8 shows the teaching load for the academic year 2019-2020.

	2019-2020 Fall		2019-2020 Spring	
	Full Time	Part-Time	Full Time	Part-Time
Number of Lecturers	16	5	16	9
Teaching Load (weekly hours)	113	20	99	33
Percentage of Load (%)	85%	15%	75%	25%

Table 8: Teaching Load (Source: Self-evaluation report)

The ratio of full-time and part-time academic staff members contributing in teaching in the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" for the Fall Semester was 16/5, meaning 85% of staff were full-time and 15% of staff part-time while for the Spring Semester was 16/9 meaning 75% full-time and 25% part-time. 30% of the academic staff engaged in "Business Informatics (B.A.)" are international academic staff coming from various countries.

The policy of EPOKA University is to attract qualified staff with a clear scientific profile, scientific degrees and titles and a long experience in their respective fields as defined in the institutional development strategy as published in the "EPOKA University FRAMEWORK STRATEGY 2018-2022"[20] and in the strategic plan of the Department of Business Administration.[21] To meet the needs for academic staff with titles and sci-

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[20] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/2018%2012%2019_Framework%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%202018-2022.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

[21] https://bus.epoka.edu.al/home-strategic-plan-1894-1796.html?lang=EN&dpid=2&t=strategic-plan&catid=1894&menuid=1796 (accessed 17 December 2021).

entific degrees, the recruitment of local and foreign professionals with academic experience is combined. The university gives incentives to help staff development especially in research activities based on the directive "On the Promotion of Scientific Publications"[22] and the directive "On Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement".[23] The scientific research and projects at EPOKA University are regulated by the regulation "On Scientific Research"[24] and the guideline "For Research Projects".[25]

An important body coordinating the scientific research at EPOKA University is the Research and Projects Office (RPO). It is an administrative office reporting to the Rector concerning the coordination, consultancy, administration and follow-up of all activities related to research and projects. The RPO coordinates all academic and administrative units of the university in terms of research and projects, all in close cooperation with the Rector, research centres and faculties. It provides support for obtaining sponsored research funds and managing sponsored programme activities as well as serves and guides the university on all aspects of sponsored programmes administration by providing pre and post award services, training and information to research administration and funding.

Staff recruiting process

Staff recruitment is done according to the regulation "On Staff Recruitment".[26] Each department sets some specific quotas on their staff needs for the next academic year and justifies such requests based on the course load and distribution of course hours for both semesters. Departments submit their request to the Dean's Office meeting for acceptance and after that the requests are sent to the Rectorate for approval. The Administrative Board of the University gives the final decision on the approved quotas of the human resources to be hired for the next academic year. Based on the human resources needs which are requested by all departments and are approved by the decision of the Administrative Board, the respective base unit submits the request to Human Resources Office (HRO) the request for the initiation of the recruitment process. The HRO announces the type (full- or part-time) and job description of the vacant position as well as all the other criteria needed to be fulfilled by the candidate to apply for a vacant position which requires the scientific title of Master of Science or equivalent degree, Doctor, Associate Professor and Professor. The duration of the announcement for the vacant position is at least 15 days. At the same time, application procedures and deadlines are clearly notified in the vacancy announcement.

The same procedure is applied by the institution for recruiting the new part-time staff members.

Eligible candidates must submit an online or hard copy file containing their CV, last achieved degree/title, full version of published articles and other certificates or qualifications. The applications are assessed in advance by a jury composed of three members appointed by the Administrative Board of the concerned faculty which assesses the appropriateness of applications to the vacant position and prepares a report for

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[22] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/03.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

[23] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/directives/directive_on_the_academic_evaluation_and_quality_improvement_board.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

[24] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/regulation-on-scientific-research.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

[25] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/guidelines/Common%20Guidelines%20for%20Scientific%20Research%20Proposal%20Submission.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

[26] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/regulations/Regulation_Staff%20Recruitment.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

each candidate. Skype interviews and trial lectures via Skype are an integral part of the application process.

After the selection process, the Dean's Office makes the decision, which is then administratively implemented in the rule by the Rectorate and Administrative Board.

Facilities

EPOKA University is located on the Tirana-Rinas Road, on the 12th kilometre. The campus extends over a total area of 67,000 square metres. The 2019-2020 academic year is being conducted regularly on the premises of two buildings with a total area of 14,352 square metres. All the premises and facilities of the EPOKA campus are available for teaching activities. The classes of the Bachelor programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" are mostly held in the E-Building of the campus. The institution provides an efficient management and continuous control for the achievement of standards and implementation of educational policies designed for the realization of this study programme based on the department requirements.

The E-Building has 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.

In September 2013, the construction of A-Building the "Cultural Social Object of EPOKA University" was completed. In addition to classrooms, there are plenty of recreational facilities for students such as cafeterias, libraries, internet cafés, facilities for the Student Council and student clubs, and sports facilities.

EPOKA University has a conference hall with an area of 128 square metres and a capacity of 99 persons. The conference hall is mainly used for social, cultural and various national and international conferences. The hall is equipped with central heating-cooling system, video projector, sound system and two cabins for simultaneous translation.

On the premises of the A-building there is a conference hall with a surface of about 400 square metres and a capacity of 300 persons under construction.

In the E- Building of the EPOKA campus there are eight classrooms, four auditoriums, a conference room and three computer laboratories. There are two internet rooms as it is reflected in the table above, but the university offers wireless internet throughout the campus buildings.

IT equipment

The classroom computers and the computers located in the laboratories contain all the necessary software, programmes and packages needed: Windows, MS Office, Adobe Reader, SPSS, E-Views 9, STATA, etc. The Information and Communications Technologies Coordinating Office continuously maintains the laboratories and other computers located in classrooms, offices and library. It adds or removes specific hardware and software according to the requirements of the teaching staff.

The Information and Communication Technologies Coordinating Office (ICTCO) coordinates the use of ICT services for studying, teaching and administrative issues: EPOKA University offers a Learning Management System (LMS) based on Moodle to students and instructors. Besides, several Google services (webmail, Google classroom) are supported as well as DSpace (an open-source repository software). EPOKA University is the only university who has digital repository in Albania.

To avoid plagiarism, the online-programme Turnitin[27] is used university-wide. The IC-TCO manages the users and trains the staff on how to use Turnitin.

All students and staff are provided with identification smart cards. The Smart Card is put as an e-ID application at three buildings, two PC labs, one Electronics Lab, and campus gate entry turnstiles and barriers. The e-wallet application is active for staff but has not yet been lunched for students.

EPOKA University has a subscription to Microsoft programmes which is called Dream Spark. It supports technical education by providing access to Microsoft software for learning, teaching, and research purposes. EPOKA University also provides Office 365 accounts to all staff and students which includes all office applications for free.

Library

The EPOKA University Library, which is located on the first floor of A-Building on the Rinas Campus, was founded to support the education and research activities of the university by providing and organising the needed documents and resources.

With its 100-seating capacity, the EPOKA University Library has 400 square metres of area for use. The University Library is composed of entrance, book and reading hall. In the entrance, there is a check out desk. The periodicals, including the exhibition of new arrivals, are also shelved in this section. The reading hall is equipped for students to study and to do research.

EPOKA University is a member of Balkan Libraries Union which was founded on 29 July 2009 with the participation of 10 institutions from 6 Balkan countries. The EPOKA University Library collection is enriched by purchases and donations. The books to buy are chosen in accordance with the needs and requests of the students, administrative and academic staff. The library has a total of about 7,500 printed books.

The library uses the library automation system KOHA, an open-source integrated library system. It is web-based, users can check the books online and reserve them via the web. EPOKA University has full membership in JSTOR,[28] a shared digital library created in 1995 that includes more than 2,000 academic journals. JSTOR was founded to help libraries and academic publishers transition their activities from print to digital operations, to expand access to scholarly content around the world and to preserve it for future generations. Every member of EPOKA staff can have access to JSTOR's collections by browsing for the needed content and can download several articles periodically.

All EPOKA University students, including Bachelor students and the university academic and administrative personnel are members of the library. They can borrow library materials in accordance with the rules. Researchers coming from outside the university are allowed to use and copy the materials in the library.

Assessment

Financial management and funding

From the submitted documents as well as the interviews with members of the financial management the experts got the impression that the study programme is professionally managed and is sustainable.

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[27] https://www.turnitin.com/ (accessed 17 December 2021).

[28] https://www.jstor.org/ (accessed 17 December 2021).

The financial endowment of the study programme seems to be appropriate.

The experts were, however, surprised by the large number of full or partial scholarships. In the eyes of the experts, it might be risky to fund such a big part of study places. Nevertheless, the expert panel appreciates the sense of social responsibility that can be seen in the scholarship number.

Staff and staff recruiting process

The staff involved in the study programme is, according to the expert panel, appropriate to provide high quality education to students and to develop research. The administrative staff makes a very professional and competent impression. Altogether, the experts appreciated the dynamic and motivated staff members, both academic and administrative.

According to the experts, number and qualification of academic staff (full-time and part-time) are adequate to ensure the intended learning outcomes. The experts appreciate the university strategy to improve the teaching skills of staff.

The recruitment process is transparent and appropriate even to find good staff from abroad. The experts appreciate that online interviews and lectures have their part in the procedure and that existing staff is involved in the process.

Facilities

The facilities of the university are appropriate for sustaining the teaching and the research activities. The equipment the experts saw during the site visit was all modern and up-to-date.

All the equipment, which the experts saw during the site visit (partly on site, partly through camera observation), allows a high quality of teaching.

The experts noticed that access to the internet via eduroam is not available on the whole campus. This is a limitation for foreign exchange not only for international guests who may have difficulties with internet access on EPOKA campus but also for own travelling scientists who may experience the same abroad.

Library

The library provides access to relevant literature and journals. The experts appreciate the high level of digitisation in the library and the bright and open atmosphere. The actual number of work places in the library and on campus appear to be sufficient (with exception of the somewhat few socket outlets in public areas).

Recommendations

Access possibility to internet via Education Roaming (eduroam) should be established, both for international guests and for own personnel.

The number of socket outlets in public areas should be increased.

The university should expand its IT support for students to include personal laptops as well as support financially weaker students in purchasing equipment.

3.6 Quality assurance

The criterion "quality assurance" focuses on the internal and external mechanisms used by the institution to monitor and improve the quality of the study programme: how the study programme is designed and implemented and how its improvement is organised.

The experts evaluate the existing quality assurance concept of the programme and what kind of quality assurance processes and instruments are implemented, which indicators are used for monitoring the achievement of the programme's objectives and how the institution and the persons responsible for the programme collect, analyse and use relevant information about their activities. Moreover, the experts examine whether quality assurance is used regularly, systematically and effectively for quality enhancement and if quality feedback loops are closed. It is also evaluated how stakeholders (students, teachers, administration, employers) are involved in quality assurance and whether relevant programme information for students and prospective students is provided.

Current status

Quality assurance concept of EPOKA University

The main responsibility for internal quality assurance lies with the institution. The Academic Senate of EPOKA University – the highest body of academic self-government – evaluates, guarantees and is responsible for the quality assurance in the institution, in accordance with the standards set by the Albanian Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth. It has established an internal quality assurance system, consisting of four units:

- the Permanent Commission of Quality Assurance (PCQA)
- the Internal Quality Assurance Office (IQAO)
- the Exam Board
- the Curricula Development Commission

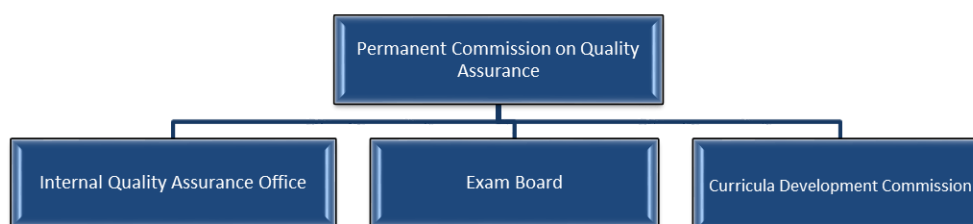Table 9 shows the four QA units at EPOKA University.

Table 9: Organisational structure of the internal quality assurance system

The Permanent Commission of Quality Assurance (PCQA) consists of at least eight members, including a chairman, a member of the full-time academic staff from any main unit with at least the scientific degree "Doctor" and without leading to high-level duties, at least two members of the administrative staff, a student representative (generally the vice president on quality assurance issues from the Student Council), a representative of the graduates of EPOKA University, as well as an external expert with a

distinguished experience in quality assurance issues, who are elected by the Academic Senate, for a period of two years, eligible for reappointment. The number of the members of the PCQA is defined by the Academic Senate. The Deputy Chairman of the Student Council for quality assurance issues is also member of the PCQA.

The PCQA is responsible:

- for developing policies, procedures and acts for internal quality assurance, which are approved by the Academic Senate;

- for developing standards for quality assurance in accordance with the Quality Code, approved by the Academic Senate;

- to oversee the implementation of policies, procedures and standards for quality assurance in the university;

- for conducting the periodic evaluation of results of the educational activities and scientific research, monitoring and coordination of activities undertaken within the academic and administrative evaluation, to improve quality through evaluation reports, periodic inspection and monitoring of improvement of quality in the university;

- after each evaluation, to report to the Academic Senate the results and relevant proposals;

- for planning and coordinating of the implementation of the internal and external evaluation procedures of the university, as well as study programmes, in accordance with the applicable legal framework, state quality standards, regulations, guidelines, university policies and procedures;

- to organise training for continual professional development of staff;

- to prepare the strategy for quality assurance and make action plans for the implementation of this strategy.

The IQAO reports to the PCQA and implements the decisions taken by the Commission. The Competences of the IQAO are as follows:

- periodically assesses the results of teaching and scientific research activities in the main units of the University, in accordance with the quality standards;

- conducts exploratory studies to evaluate student employment and effectiveness of the programmes offered by the University;

- at the end of each semester, before the exam season, organises the student questionnaire on the quality of teaching subjects for each study programme;

- performs other tasks assigned by the PCQA;

- the IQAO has access to all records of the institution;

The Exam Board acts as an independent mechanism for checking exam paper questions and the grading of the exams to ensure appropriate coverage of the curriculum and the quality and fairness of grading.

The Curricula Development Commission reviews and approves or disapproves all proposals for curricula changes. Requested changes may be proposed by the department and sent to the respective Dean's Office. If the Dean recommends implementing the change, the proposed change is submitted to the Curricula Development Commission

which will provide feedback to the requesting department with any changes or suggestions. If the minutes reflect approval with no changes, the minutes are sent to the PCQA. The PCQA will then review the proposed curriculum with input from Curricula Development Commission and send the proposal on curriculum change to the Academic Senate for final approval.

Each department is also responsible for the efficient and effective functioning of the respective study programmes as well as the internal quality assurance of the respective study programmes. Assisted by the PCQA and the IQAO, the departments develop their action plans for the continuous improvement of their study programmes.

Quality assurance processes and instruments

Each organisational level at the EPOKA University (university, faculty, research centres, department and administrative units) is subject to the Plan, Do, Check and Act (PDCA) cycle to ensure quality improvement at each of these organisational levels.

The most important quality circle at EPOKA University is the five-year Strategic Plan cycle. Each unit develops its own strategic plan in alignment with university goals with assistance of the PCQA and Internal Quality Assurance Unit. Regular assessment and evaluation of all units is carried out using measurable outcomes of strategic planning goals and objectives. The measurable outcomes comprise internal targets, which university leadership agreed with academic or administrative units. The results contribute in defining improvement action. These actions result in further improvement of the study programmes as well as administrative and support services.

The following instruments are regularly used

1. Instructor/course evaluation questionnaires for students, done at the end of each academic semester, one month before the final exam period. The result will show the average evaluation for every course lecturer as an overall result and the result for each component of the survey. The results of the surveys are forwarded to the Rector's Office by the Registrar's Office, which is responsible to activate the survey in the system and closes it before the finalization of the grades in the system. Afterwards the Rector's Office sends the result to the respective departments, which are responsible for the preparation of evaluation reports. Finally, the evaluation reports of the departments are forwarded to the PCQA, which performs analysis and provides recommendations to the Rector in the context of teaching improvement.

2. Surveys among alumni are carried out by the Carrier Planning and Alumni Office (CPAO) on regular basis for all EPOKA University graduates and then the results are filtered according to each study programme and provided to the respective study programmes. The CPAO administers the questionnaire to find out the effectiveness of a program and about the applicability and practicality of the knowledge, skills and competencies gained. The graduates also give recommendations on what could be improved in the study program based on the challenges they face in the job market. The evaluation results are analysed and assessed by the responsible program coordinator/head of department for further improvement.

3. Feedback Questionnaires for Employers: The CPAO also organises another periodical survey for employers of EPOKA University graduates. Through this survey they try to obtain authentic feedback on the performance of EPOKA graduates in the job market. They also provide additional comments on what could be improved in the curriculum of the study programme as well as other skills that EPOKA University students and the prospective graduates must

need in order to be competitive and to have a good performance in the market.

4. The Head of Department and the Dean of the Faculty make <u>classroom visits</u> to teaching sessions and observe the class teaching of an instructor based on students' feedback. If problems are identified, appropriate remedial actions are taken. After each visit, the observers should fill out a teaching evaluation form and this assessment is discussed with the instructor for later improvements.

5. On regular basis, the university <u>evaluates the student support services through a questionnaire</u> prepared by the Dean of Students and the feedback received from students serves as an input for further improvements for student support services, such as library services, information technology and other resources.

6. All study programs offered by EPOKA University are subject to <u>internal and external evaluation</u> (review) prior to their accreditation. It should be noted that EPOKA University periodically and in accordance with the time-table of accreditation of the university and of its study programmes, drafts self-assessment reports, in conformity with the provision of the Albanian legislation on the higher education and in accordance with the instructions received from AS-CAL. Copies of these reports are available at the Rector's Office and IQAO as well as publicly at the website of EPOKA University.

All units, instruments and processes of quality assurance are published online.[29]

Quality indicators

The University reviews the performance of the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" based on the EPOKA University policy "On Continuous Improvement of Study Programs"[30] referring to the department assessment database that comprises performance indicators on teaching, research and responsiveness to society, department annual report and any additional department strategic measures. Data on student assessment results, failure rates and resit tests are considered as well as the survey results out of the conducted surveys among students, alumni and employers.

Feedback surveys use scale from 1 (lowest rating) to 4 (highest rating).

Involvement of stakeholders

Lecturers are members in different organisation units of the internal quality assurance system such as PCQA, Exam Board and Curricula Development Commission. Students are also actively involved: the Deputy Chairman of the Student Council for quality assurance issues is also member of the PCQA. Administrative staff, external experts and alumni representatives are members of the PCQA, too.

In the framework of the first and periodic accreditation of the institution and the study programmes students, lecturers, administrative staff are involved during the preparation of the corresponding self-assessment reports. Current students` feedback as well as alumni feedback obtained through the respective questionnaires is used as an input for the improvement of the study programme. At the same time student feedback for

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[29] http://aeqi.epoka.edu.al/ (accessed 17 December 2021).
[30] http://epoka.edu.al/mat/policy/Policy%20on%20Continuous%20Improvement%20of%20Study%20Program.pdf (accessed 17 December 2021).

the supporting services is also used as an input for improving and assisting academic units such as library, information technology and other services.

Assessment

Quality assurance concept of EPOKA University

The expert panel observed a functioning quality assurance system on the basis of formalised processes. The quality assurance concept seems to be appropriate to assure that the learning outcomes of the study programme are achieved and students graduate. Since the drop-out rate is low the system seems to work.

According to the experts, effectiveness, regularity and systematic character of the quality assurance system cannot be denied. The monitoring system has obviously effects on improving the quality of teaching.

The situation is different when it comes to a genuine and continuous monitoring of the student workload: the university should improve this in order to live up to its own claim of being student-centred.

Quality assurance processes and instruments

The university monitors its processes by collecting and analysing data widely and constantly. The anonymity of collected data seems to be assured.

Quality indicators

The experts believe that the collected statistical data on students' performance together with the survey results form a reliable basis for the assessment of the programme and give hints on weaknesses needs for improvement.

Involvement of stakeholders

Stakeholders (students, teachers, administration, employers) are involved in quality assurance. The experts appreciate that external partners are also part of the quality assurance processes.

After reviewing the documents and from the discussions, especially with the students, it is not entirely clear to the experts whether the feedback loops are really closed: For example,

- if the results of the course evaluation are regularly discussed in all courses;

- if teaching performance and student evaluation results are brought together and discussed between students and teachers;

- if changes and improvements are made on the basis of experience in the semester and also communicated to the students;

- if the students actually know what happens to their evaluation results.

The university should still work on these aspects.

Recommendations and conditions

The student workload must be monitored systematically and continuously.

EPOKA University should further elaborate the good existing quality assurance concept, especially into closing the feedback loops with students.

4. Final Assessment

Overall assessment

The expert panel confirms that the study programme „Business Informatics (B.A.)" shows a clearly defined profile, fully in line with the profile and the strategic goals of EPOKA University. The programme considers both scientific and societal national and international practice and is also regularly updated and revised. The objectives as well as the learning outcomes are described in detail, all concise, clear and aligned with content, and they correspond to the level of awarded qualification.

During the site visit and the online meetings the experts experienced the department presenting itself as a modern educational institution which offers quality education in business informatics on an international level. All representatives the experts could talk to have internalized the university mission as an innovative and influential teaching and research institution which contributes to the improvement of Albanian society.

At EPOKA University, there is a stable connection between teaching and research: Scientific methods in theory and practice are provided. From the very first semester, students are introduced in research methods. In the view of the expert panel, research is subject to an extent to be expected from a Bachelor programme. However, more project work could definitely be offered.

The experts emphasize the international character of the study programme, e.g., the full programme taught in English, the international staff, the link to international companies in Albania, the partnership agreements with universities from abroad. International standards in teaching are generally met. The experts appreciate the international orientation of the university in general and how international exchange is promoted. However, this could be further strengthened through additional mobility windows in the study programme.

In the view of the expert panel, the qualification of the teaching staff is adequate in terms of the profile and the objectives of the programme. The relation between full-time and half-time staff is also appropriate. However, the proportion of staff assigned exclusively to business informatics could be increased. According to the experts, business informatics could become a real flagship for the university, provided that staffing is expanded accordingly.

The experts note that teaching is carried out by dynamic and motivated lecturers. Some of them have international working and educational experience which is appreciated by the expert panel. The experts recognise that there are explicit criteria for staff recruitment and that the recruitment process itself is well developed and transparent.

There seems to be a good connection between the university and the labour market, e.g., through common events and internships.

The curriculum and the study process are clearly structured and appropriate to reach the intended learning outcomes. The students' workload in the programme seems to be appropriate. However, systematic monitoring does not take place. The course plan with many lectures in the evening takes into consideration students who are working.

Internships are integrated into the programme, but should be expanded and better structured by increasing the minimum duration and allocating specific time windows.

The experts appreciate that EPOKA University has already adopted a uniform, institutionalized approach to internships for all students that safeguards the professional standards of the practical transfer.

Students are offered several support services. The roles and responsibilities in the management are clearly and appropriately structured, staff involved are highly motivated and professional. The experts especially appreciate the self-image of the teachers to be more learning supporters than instructors. Students expressed their satisfaction with the study environment in the programme and at EPOKA University as a whole. They strongly appreciate the good learning atmosphere and that the staff is always open to consultation and help.

All examination regulations are available online. There are clear and objective regulations for student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances.

The expert panel appreciates the organisation and transparency of assessment in the programme. A wide range of assessment tasks is used, defined assessment criteria exist and are transparent for students as well as for staff. In the view of the experts, the amount and requirements of assessments with regard to the intended learning outcomes are appropriate. They are fully in line with international practice. According to the experts, the staff undertaking the assessments is also adequately qualified.

The online examinations carried out during the pandemic should be expanded and, above all, the experiences with them should be presented to a broader public.

The experts note that there is excellent communication between students and teachers: learning groups are small, there seem to be many formal as well as in-formal contacts between teachers and students. The transition to online teaching and learning during the pandemic can be seen as exemplary.

The facilities of the university are appropriate for sustaining sufficient teaching and research activities. The technical equipment, which the experts saw during the site visit, allows high quality of teaching. The library provides access to relevant literature and journals. The experts appreciate the high level of digitalisation in the library and the bright and open atmosphere.

The expert panel observed a functioning quality assurance system on the basis of formalised processes. The quality assurance concept seems to be appropriate to assure that the learning outcomes of the study programme are achieved and students graduate. Since the drop-out rate is low the system seems to work adequately.

According to the experts, effectiveness, regularity and systematic character of the quality assurance system cannot be denied. The monitoring system has obviously effects on improving the quality of teaching. However, the student workload must be monitored, too.

Overall, the expert panel assesses the study programme „Business Informatics (B.A.)" as solid. The academic standards of the study programme are met.

Results of the assessment

Assessment grades

No	Assessment criteria	Assessment
1	Programme profile	A
2	Curriculum	A
3	Student assessment	A

4	Organisation of the study programme	B
	C 1 The minimum duration of the internship must be increased to at least two months.	
5	Resources	A
6	Quality assurance	B
	C 2 The student workload must be monitored systematically and continuously.	

Assessment levels

Level	Assessment	Description
A	**Passed.**	The programme fulfils or exceeds all criteria. All activities are in line with the profile and objectives of the programme and provided at a high academic level.
B	**Passed subject to conditions**	The programme does not fulfil some relevant criteria. However, the institution should be able to remedy the shortcomings within nine months after the assessment.
C	**Suspension of the accreditation procedure**	The programme does not fulfil relevant criteria, but it is likely, that it will be able to remedy the shortcomings within 18 months after the assessment. The HEI may apply for a resumption of the accreditation procedure.
D	**Failed**	The programme does not fulfil relevant criteria, and is not expected to be able to meet all assessment criteria within 18 months' time.

5. Accreditation recommendation of the expert panel to the evalag Accreditation Commission

According to the expert panel, the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" meets the **evalag** criteria for international programme accreditation. Therefore, the panel recommends it for accreditation and recommends awarding the **evalag** label for international programme accreditation.

The team recommends the EPOKA University to consider and implement the following conditions (C) and recommendations (R) in this report to further improve the study programme.

Programme profile

R 1   The international trends in business informatics and its further development towards more independence as academic discipline should be taken more into account.

R 2   The integration of research into teaching should be strengthened: Concrete research projects should also be assigned to Bachelor's students in order to make teaching lively and, overall, to promote young academics in addition to the perspective of professional application of the subject.

R 3   The university and the department should expand and facilitate the mobility programmes for incoming and outgoing students (e.g., ERASMUS+) and further staff exchange.

Curriculum

R 4   The curriculum should be reviewed against more recent developments, by keeping the course and labs content up-to-date with the latest versions of the used technology or software.

R 5   All three pillars of business informatics should be equally considered in order to also raise the profile of the subject within the university.

R 6   In order to strengthen the scientific claim of the possible thesis/project, the credit allocation should be reviewed (increase to 12 ECTS through electives in direct connection with the thesis/project).

Student assessment

R 7   The university and the department should continue to monitor the assessment system and practice and offer further need based training for staff on a regular basis.

R 8   The thesis/graduation project should be promoted more strongly to students as the final exam that best prepares them for a future academic career.

R 9   The experiences with online examinations should be made known outside the university.

Organisation of the study programme

C 1   The minimum duration of the internship must be increased to at least two months.

R 10   A mobility windows should be set up explicitly for a bachelor project, an exchange semester, or an internship which could also take place abroad. This could be accomplished for example by increasing the workload in the first and second year and reduce it in the third year.

Resources

R 11   Access possibility to internet via Education Roaming (eduroam) should be established, both for international guests and for own personnel.

R 12   The number of socket outlets in public areas should be increased.

R 13   The university should expand its IT support for students to include personal laptops as well as support financially weaker students in purchasing equipment.

Quality assurance

C 2   The student workload must be monitored systematically and continuously.

R 14   EPOKA University should further elaborate the good existing quality assurance concept, especially into closing the feedback loops with students.

6. Accreditation decision of the evalag Accreditation Commission

6.1 Decision

In its meeting on 22 March 2022, the **evalag** Accreditation Commission unanimously decides to accredit the study programme "Business Informatics (B.A.)" at EPOKA University with the conditions (C) and recommendations (R) mentioned in Chapter 5.

6.2 Compliance with the conditions

EPOKA University submitted a detailed report on the fulfilment of the set conditions in due time.

The **evalag** Accreditation Commission decides unanimously that the requirements for the accreditation of the Bachelor' degree programme ""Business Informatics (B.A.)" at EPOKA University, Tirana, Albania are to be regarded as fulfilled (as from 24 March 2023).

Annex: Site visit schedule

November 16, 2021: On-site visit & Preparations: 15:00-19:00

13:15	Arrival at Tirana Airport: 1 evalag, 1 member of the expert panel
15:00	• Meeting on campus with leadership of university and study programme • Short guided campus tour (lecture hall, seminar rooms, library, administration/student service etc. …)
17:00-19:00	Internal online meeting of expert panel, review of site visit plan, last preparations for the upcoming meetings

November 17, 2021: 08:30-17:30

08:30-09:00	Internal online meeting of expert panel
09:00-10:30	Meeting (on-site & online) with • Rector • Dean of Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences • Head of Department of Business Administration • Department Coordinator
10:30-11:00	Break / Internal meeting of expert panel
11:00-12:00	Meeting (on-site & online) with faculty members (teachers)
12:00-12:30	Virtual Campus Tour: Classrooms, Library, Registrar, ICT Co-ordination Office, Student Clubs and Activities Office …
12:30-14:00	Lunch Break
14:00-15:00	Meeting (on-site & online) with students
15:00-16:00	Meeting (on-site & online) with • Dean of Students • Career Planning and Alumni Office • Administrative Units (library, IT, registrar, student support units…)
16:00-17:30	Break / Internal online meeting: review of first day

November 18, 2021: 08:30-12:30

08:30-09:00	Internal online meeting of expert panel
09:00-09:45	Meeting (on-site & online) with alumni and employers
09:45-10:00	Break
10:00-10:45	Meeting (on-site & online) with Quality Management
10:45-12:00	Internal online meeting of expert panel
12:00-12:30	Closing meeting (on-site & online) with representatives of EPOKA University and of the study programme