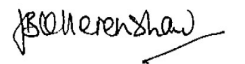# Institutional Review of Higher Education Institutions in Albania
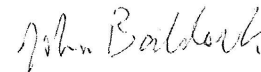
Report of the Institutional Review of the Academy of Applied Sciences, REALD
May 2017

Review Tean:

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Date: 29-30 May 2017

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About this review

The overall aim of Institutional Review is to assess the extent to which each HEI meets the Albanian State Quality Standards which came into force in 2011. Institutional Review is a peer-review process with each review team composed of a mix of UK reviewers appointed by QAA and Albanian reviewers appointed by the Albanian Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (APAAL). The review team is led by a QAA reviewer.

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

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

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

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

As part of the report-writing process, QAA has provided expert support to the review team by ensuring that the review team supports the findings made in the report with evidence, and also by proofreading and summarising the full report for the summary below.

The context of this review

The Academy of Applied Sciences 'Reald' (the Academy; ASAR) was established in 2011 and its first cohort of students graduated at the end of 2015-16. It is a private organisation and under the new legislation it has the status of a University College. Located in the south of Albania in Vlora, its mission is to provide higher education to support the business and professional needs of the region. ASAR occupies a modern building on the outskirts of the city.

ASAR has two faculties: Medical Sciences (with the departments of Pharmacy, Nursing, Physiotherapy, and Dentistry) and Human Sciences or Economy (which includes the departments of Finance and of Management). There is also a cross-cutting research centre. First-cycle programmes leading to the award of a bachelor's degree are offered in Management, Marketing, Physiotherapy and General Nursing, and MSc programmes are offered in Dentistry and Pharmacy. These are five-year programmes integrating first and second-cycle study. Permission was given in 2012 for a Professional Master's programme in Nursing Management. All programmes are offered full-time; there is no distance learning provision.

ASAR has 218 students on three-year undergraduate programmes and 97 on five-year integrated master's programmes. This has risen from 60 and 20 respectively in 2014-15. In 2015-16, 115 students graduated from three-year programmes and 58 from the integrated master's programmes. There are 48 full-time and 23 part-time academic staff all of whom have at least a master's degree, and 19 of whom have doctorates. There is one professor and two associate professors. Most of the students and staff are Albanian but there are six Italian students and two non-Albanian members of staff.

There are nine administrative areas (the Rectorate, the Administration Board, the Academic Senate, the Ethics Council, the Internal Office for Quality Assurance, the Chancellor, the library, archive and human resources) supported by nine administrative and support staff.

Summary report

The self-evaluation report (SER) for the Academy of Applied Sciences 'Reald' (the Academy; ASAR) was prepared by a team of five including a student representative and a draft was discussed at an open meeting. Students whom the team met were aware of the SER and supportive of its content. It is clearly written, reflecting the headings required for the evaluation areas and the documentation provided as evidence is referenced in the text. The report is evaluative with suggestions for improvements that would enable the standards to be met more fully. These suggestions align with the Academy 's development plan and with the views of the students, particularly in respect of accessibility to the building for disabled people and the importance of extending the opportunities for student and staff exchanges and mobility.

The visit took place over two days on 29 and 30 May 2017. The review team consisted of two experienced higher education reviewers from the UK and one experienced higher education member of staff from an Albanian institution. The review team was supported by the Review Manager on behalf of the Albanian Public Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (APAAL), and by a note-taker provided by APAAL. The review team considered the SER and supporting evidence received eight weeks in advance of the review visit. This provided detail of the structures, policies and procedures which support the academic activity of ASAR and enabled the review team to evaluate it against the Albanian State Quality Standards. Evidence included the Statutes and Regulations, programme descriptions, data on graduate employment, annual reports and action plans, and templates for staff employment contracts. The review team also had access to the website.

The review team met senior managers, students, lecturers, administrative and support staff, as well as external partners and employers during the review visit. Discussion enabled the review team to clarify institutional procedures, responsibilities and viewpoints. Notes were taken at all meetings. The review team toured ASAR to see the teaching and learning facilities, particularly the laboratories and the clinic areas for physiotherapy and dentistry where members of the local community can receive treatment free of charge from the students under supervision.

ASAR operates within approved Statutes and has a governance structure including a Rector, Vice-rector, and Chancellor. The faculty structure is managed by deans of faculty who chair the faculty councils, and a committee structure including a Board of Administration, Ethics Council and Academic Senate. The Internal Quality Assessment Unit (IQAU), which includes student representation is autonomous and there is a clear distinction between the financial and academic decision-making bodies. The development strategy and the annual plan include plans to develop ASAR further in areas including lifelong learning, partnerships, the development of teaching and learning facilities, and engaging students in research activities.

Students are well represented in the decision-making bodies and staff are also fully engaged in discussion of the plans for ASAR. Academic Senate, Faculty Councils, and the IQAU all include student representatives and there is an active Student Council. Students' views are taken into account and changes have been made in response to their concerns. ASAR made improvements to the dental and pharmaceutical laboratories promptly in response to comments from students and accreditation requirements. The students are particularly concerned that access to the ASAR building is difficult for anyone with a disability and strongly support this action point identified in the SER.

There is a clear process for setting, approving and monitoring the budget, through the Chancellor and the Board of Administration. Additional staffing, equipment and research

activities can be funded in response to formal requests in line with institutional priorities. The number of students in the various types of classes is regulated to ensure that class sizes are in line with the resources available.

There is a transparent process for appointing staff which involves colleagues appropriately in response to the teaching needs for the year. Part-time staff are also professionals in areas such as pharmacy and nursing and bring their experience of current medical issues into their teaching so that students understand genuine and current cases. Teaching staff are assessed by the IQAU, mainly on the basis of student feedback, and heads of department report annually to confirm the professional conduct of staff. The annual IQAU report has an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and an action plan.

There is a strong commitment at ASAR to supporting the needs of the local region; the review team saw evidence of labour market analysis, and of student and staff activities within the local area including the provision of health checks. Students have undertaken voluntary work in the community to support people in time of need, for example following flooding, and they have supported a local orphanage. Students benefit from the opportunity to undertake internships with local businesses and health providers; they appear keen to use their skills to the benefit of the local area when they graduate, for example by setting up pharmacies in rural areas which do not have one. There are a few collaborations which ASAR aims to build upon to enhance the mobility opportunities offered to staff and students. They have engaged in some projects under the Erasmus scheme and more projects are under discussion.

Only one cohort of students has graduated and ASAR has taken active steps to maintain records of their employment, through personal contact with former students and with employers in the region. The employers whom the review team met think highly of the ASAR students and are very positive about the contribution which they can make in the fields of health and business. The opportunities for tourism in the Vlora area are significant and hotels will benefit from managers with business and marketing training. The Careers Counselling Office (CCO) is developing a database of graduate employment and the review team saw a report which analysed the information to date by age and gender. The CCO supports students in applying for jobs by advising them on preparing CVs and on how to approach an interview.

The curriculum is clearly specified in programme and module regulations, with admissions criteria and assessment grades. Students are given information at the start of the year about their forthcoming studies and are confident that they understand what will be required of them; they are able to get help from tutors if they need it. ASAR aims to teach interactively and students rate the relationship which they have with staff very highly. Library resources are a development area for ASAR, especially to create an online catalogue and to make electronic resources of a good standard more easily available; ASAR is negotiating with McGraw-Hill for an appropriate licence. Students receive a diploma supplement in Albanian and English on graduation.

ASAR is committed to integrating research into teaching through the activities of the Scientific Research Centre which also aspires to align research with the needs of the region. Research is supported by the various cooperation agreements in place and staff attend conferences and publish papers. Some research is undertaken in collaboration with business and ASAR is working with the regional authority to bid for research funding under the Erasmus Interreg scheme. A regular bulletin publicises research activity. Staff are encouraged to undertake a PhD and teaching schedules are managed to accommodate their doctoral study; the Head of Department includes research activity in his/her annual report.

In reaching these judgements, the review team identified one area (the provision of online library resources) where the University has recognised that further development is required and has affirmed the University's proposed action. The review team has also made one recommendation for ASAR to consider as a means of further securing compliance with the State Quality Standards (in relation to access for people with disabilities). The team identified two areas of good practice, in ASAR's partnerships which support the student learning experience and the Academy's contribution to the region, and in the effectiveness of the Student Council.

ASAR undertook the review in accordance with APAAL guidelines. The review team wishes to recognise ASAR's very positive engagement with the process, the evaluative nature of the SER, and the cooperation provided to the review team. This included the provision of additional information very quickly when it was requested and support during the meetings with translation.

The review team concluded that the Quality Standards are fully met in four areas, and substantially met in one area. As a result, the review team concludes that standards are fully met overall. On the basis of ASAR's rapid and positive response to previous developments suggested by students and by accreditation panels, the review team is confident that ASAR will act quickly and effectively to implement the affirmation and the recommendation made. This enables the review team to recommend that the overall judgement is that the State Quality Standards are fully met.

Summary of findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- the partnerships with a range of employers and organisations which provide opportunities for students to gain experience of the workplace to develop their skills and employability and which also support ASAR Reald's contribution to the region (paragraphs 1.10, 1.11, 2.14, 3.9; *Chapter III Standard III.2, Chapter III Standard III.3, Chapter III Standard VII.6, Chapter I Standard I.9*)
- the effectiveness of the Student Council including its commitment to activities which enhance the welfare of people in the area (paragraph 5.7; *Chapter I Standard III.7*).

Weaknesses

The review team identified the following weakness:

- that the building is unsafe for students and visitors with a disability, particularly those with mobility problems (paragraph 5.4; *Chapter I Standard III.4*).

Recommendations

The review team identified the following recommendation:

- that the building be made safe and user-friendly for access for students and visitors with disabilities by the addition of guide rails at the entrance and on the stairs, and a ramp at the entrance within 12 months of the receipt of the final report (paragraph 5.4; *Chapter I Standard III.4*).

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team affirms the following action already in progress:

- that ASAR complete the development of an online library catalogue and implement the agreement with McGraw-Hill for access to e-books (paragraph 5.5; *Chapter I Standard III.5*).

Summary of judgements for each Evaluation Area

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

Summary judgement

The reviewers recommend to the Accreditation Council that at ASAR Reald the State Quality Standards are **fully met**.

Detailed report

Evaluation Area 1: The Organisation and its Management

1.1 The Academy of Applied Studies 'Reald' is composed of two main units: the Faculty of Medical Science and the Faculty of Economy or Human Science. The Faculty of Medical Science is composed of the departments of Nursing / Stomatology, Pharmacy, and Physiotherapy. The Faculty of Economy includes the departments of Finance, Management and Marketing. The self-evaluation report (SER) **[SER p.6]** outlines ASAR's governance and regulatory frameworks which are designed to align with national legal requirements for higher education institutions. ASAR operates in accordance with the requirements of its Statutes, **[1]** drafted in compliance with the legislation in force **[law no.80/2015 2 'On Higher Education and Research at Institution of Higher Education']** and they define the mission and main objectives of the Academy **[1 article 3]**. The mission and vision of ASAR are reflected in the drafting of programmes, the teaching process and in curriculum development. ASAR's Statutes are consistent with the institutional mission, adjusted as required by external factors. ASAR's Academic Senate has approved a revised Statute reflecting its new status as a University College **[52; 84]**. This change reflects the economic and social development of the Vlora region, and the SER states that it will enhance the sustainability of ASAR and hence support its contribution to the area **[SER p.6]**. The Academic Senate has approved an internal Regulation in line with the Statutes **[2]**. Based on the institutional regulations, each of the faculties has its own regulation **[3, 7]**. **[*Chapter III Standard I.1*]**

1.2 ASAR has collegial bodies, organisational structures and governance authorities that support its academic activity **[41]**. The Academic Senate is the highest decision-making body which functions on the basis of a clearly defined regulation **[1 article 15; 4; 11]**. The Board of Administration has a remit clearly defined in the ASAR Statutes **[1 Article 10]** to deal with the discussion and approval of financial matters and functions on the basis of a regulation **[13]**. The Faculty Council is a collegial decision-making body at faculty level. It has seven members, elected every four years **[1 article 20]**. Integral to the structure of ASAR is the Rectorate, defined in the Statutes, which implements the decisions taken by the Academic Senate and Board of Administration **[1 article 12]**. The Council of Ethics is a collegial body also sanctioned in the Statutes **[1 article 16]** which functions on the basis of a ruling by the Academic Senate **[5]**. Existing arrangements for the management and administration of ASAR, and for collegial decision-making, work appropriately and are well understood by staff at all levels **[M1, M8]**. Academic staff are aware of the decisions made by the Board of Administration or the Academic Senate. Notifications come through the Dean and Head of Department or via email **[M8 q.1]**. The Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU) works with the Rectorate and is sanctioned in the Statutes as the body responsible for the periodic assessment of the teaching process and research activities **[1 article 17]**. **[*Chapter III Standard I.2*]**

1.3 Existing arrangements for the management and administration of ASAR, and for collegial decision-making, work appropriately and are well understood by staff at all levels **[M1; M8]**. As indicated at paragraph 1.2, academic staff are informed of the decisions made by the Board of Administration or the Academic Senate by the Dean or Head of Department, in meetings or via email **[M8 q.1]**. **[*Chapter III Standard I.3*]**

1.4 ASAR ensures that the limits of its autonomy are respected and that it exercises its autonomy within the prevailing laws and regulations. Self-governance in institutional affairs extends to all organisational academic and administrative units, to teaching and scientific activities, to financial and administrative matters, and to the approval of institutional

agreements with outside bodies **[M1 q2]**. The independent internal audit unit for financial statements, A&E Audition Ltd, ensures effectively that ASAR complies with the institutional Statutes and internal regulations and with national higher education law **[8]**. ASAR has been subject to accreditation led by external experts from within and beyond Albania **[SER p.9; 43; 44]**. The basis for ASAR's revenue is student fees, but there are also partners, projects and collaborations with foreign universities. The mobility of students and academic staff is a development focus for the administrative and decision-making bodies of the Academy **[M3; M4; M7]**. **[*Chapter III Standard I.4*]**

1.5   The 2011-16 Strategy has been drawn up in accordance with the ASAR's mission, vision and purpose, and contains appropriate objectives and accompanying actions to support implementation **[9]**. This strategy led the Academy to meet certain objectives such as the provision of integrated master's programmes, the promotion of vocational training, and cooperation with other local private companies, with the regional Municipality of Vlora, and with universities **[59; M2; M5; M7]**. The new Strategy 2016-21 **[10; 84]** aims at developing study programmes in compliance with the country's market needs, particularly those of the southern region. Changes under the new law are reflected in the new strategy, including a recent government decision which enables ASAR to deliver continuing education, an opportunity not foreseen in the previous strategy **[M1]**. **[*Chapter III Standard I.5*]**

1.6   The annual report is prepared by the Rectorate at the end of each academic year and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Sports (the MoES). It provides a comprehensive reflection of internal and external educational and scientific activities, and is based on an effective extended process of self-assessment which is understood by staff **[SER p.11; 25; 57; 58; 64; 80; 91]**. The report is informed by the annual IQAU report based on student feedback, and on departmental reports on teaching activities completed at the end of the academic year and on research activity finalised at the end of the calendar year **[SER p.11; M1 q.6]**. The annual IQAU report is associated with a SWOT analysis and a supporting action plan, all of which is approved by the Academic Senate **[57]**. **[*Chapter III Standard I.6*]**

1.7   ASAR's academic and scientific activities are undertaken in two faculties: the Faculty of Medical Sciences with four departments (Physiotherapy, Pharmacy, Nursing and Dentistry) and the Faculty of Economy or Human Sciences with two departments (Finance and Management) **[SER p.12; 11; M2; M6; M7]**. In addition, the Scientific Research Centre coordinates research work while respecting the freedom of each department, identifying key priorities related to strategic objectives and regional development needs **[M1]**. Faculties and departments are organised in accordance with legal requirements; management, executive, and administrative structures are separate from academic structures and organisational units and the academic staff of the basic units are appropriately qualified **[M2]**. ASAR exercises academic freedom in teaching and research and staff can exercise independence in organising academic activities in teaching, research, and the curricula of study programmes **[M2; M6]**. ASAR offers seven study programmes, of which four are first-cycle (Bachelor level), one is second-cycle (Professional Master's) and two are integrated second-cycle Master of Science programmes **[SER p.12; 11; M2; M6]**. ASAR has an official website www.asar.edu.al, which is updated on a regular basis **[M7]**. **[*Chapter III Standard II.1*]**

1.8   ASAR ensures constructive debate in all its decision-making and administrative bodies **[M1; M2; M6]**. Academic staff and students have representatives in the main bodies **[M2; M3; M4]** so that they are always involved in discussions and are part of the decision-making process. Decision-making processes are inclusive. Discussions take place in the department and then go to the Faculty Council which is chaired by the Dean of the Faculty; the Council's views are passed to the Academic Senate or Board of Administration for consideration **[32; M1; M6]**. Students are also active members of the boards and councils of

which they are members and bring into these decision-making bodies the concerns and opinions of the students, for example their views about the quality of teaching and especially any comments which may not have been recorded elsewhere **[M3; 4]**. Decisions about student transfers or applications are discussed with the academic staff and they are also part of the budget approval and staff recruitment processes **[M2;6]**. **[*Chapter III Standard II.3*]**

1.9   In relation to employment, admissions, payment, and use of public information, ASAR appears to respect and operate in accordance with prevailing competition rules. **[SER p.12; 9; 10 item 1; M1; M2; M6]** ASAR is regularly informed about the priorities for regional economic development. **[58]** Examples include liaison with the Regional Directorate of the Municipality of Vlora, gathering statistical data from INSTAT, and obtaining information from partners while students are doing internships. The new Strategic Development Plan 2016-21 also emphasises the importance of addressing labour market needs **[10, p. 5 point d]**. Activities in support of this include a market study undertaken by the Department of Management **[58]**. The Careers Counselling Office (CCO) gathers statistical and other information from the Labour Office and INSTAT on regional development priorities and job vacancies in the Vlora area **[26]**. Information obtained through the internship process on the needs of companies provides the basis for curriculum development **[60; M6; M7]**. **[*Chapter III Standard III.1*]**

1.10   ASAR cooperates successfully with a range of governmental and non-governmental organisations, often through signed agreements **[SER p.13; 60; M6; M3; M4; MM7; 10 p.4]**. It has cooperation agreements with other higher education institutions both nationally and internationally, including the University of Salerno in Italy, the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria in Portugal, and Tirana Medical University **[2; 13; 60; 14]**. Changes have been made to study programmes as a result of collaborative links and partnerships **[M7]**. ASAR's regional partnerships bring benefits to students through labour market links which improve the quality of the curriculum and students' employment opportunities, not least through their internships. Partnerships at the international level also provide opportunities for more staff mobility and research collaboration. The review team regarded as **good practice** the partnerships with a range of employers and organisations which provide opportunities for students to gain experience of the workplace to develop their skills and employability and which also support ASAR Reald's contribution to the region (see also paragraphs 1.11, 2.14 and 3.9) **[*Chapter III Standard III.2*]**

1.11   The main strength of ASAR's cooperation with external institutions is through the provision of practical study opportunities. **[60; M3; M4; M6; M7]** Meetings with students and external partners confirmed that students are able to benefit from a range of such links with local and regional public and private employers, and that opportunities are made available by these organisations for students to gain professional practice experience; this contributes to the feature of good practice finding at paragraph 1.10. **[M3; M4; M6]**. **[*Chapter III Standard III.3*]**

1.12   International staff and student mobility is one of the strategic objectives of ASAR **[SER p.12; 10 point 5]** which has organised conferences and scientific activities with national and international participants to support this aim. Examples include an international interdisciplinary conference 'Identity, Image and Society during the time of integration and globalisation' (2012) in cooperation with Ismail Qemali University Vlora, Panvaresia University Vlora, and Marin Barleti Tirana University; a conference on science helping the community in 2012; the first conference of Dentistry Studies (2013); an international project: Advanced Touristic Destinations (2014); an international tourism research project, Brick of Babel (2015); and a conference on Fiscal Politics and Reporting Tax (2016) **[15; M7]**. ASAR is proactive in providing support for academic staff mobility and supports academic staff research with some financial support for individual academic research **[M7; 88]**. ASAR

provided evidence of articles published by academic staff **[69; M7]**. ASAR also supports student mobility **[SER p.14]**. ASAR invites foreign professors to give open lectures and guests come from abroad to take part in conferences that it organises although the evidence provided does not indicate clearly their year of participation or the impact they have made on scientific research **[63]**. **[*Chapter III Standard III.4*]**

1.13   ASAR operates in accordance with the requirements of its Statutes and the general internal regulation and is organised to ensure efficiency in its management and administration. Collegiate decision-making functions properly and is communicated to staff at all levels. ASAR uses reports and data on quality issues effectively, including information and feedback obtained through student surveys. Similarly, ASAR has established formal mechanisms to provide academic staff with feedback on actions undertaken by the Rector's Office or Academic Senate, including those resulting from data analysis derived from reports or surveys. ASAR supports discussion and debate in its collegial bodies. The boards and councils are regularly convened and information on agenda items is made available beforehand. ASAR ensures that the limits of its autonomy are respected and its autonomy operates within the limits of prevailing laws and regulations. Discussions on teaching, financial and administrative matters are extended to all academic and administrative organisational units. Academic staff have the independence they require to organise the academic activities of teaching, research and curriculum development. ASAR is proactive in labour market research and the Careers Counselling Office (CCO) plays a key role in this regard. Students, graduates and employers rate highly the work of the CCO including the way in which they track graduate destinations and maintain communication with local and regional employers and other partners. The extent and impact of ASAR's partnerships, particularly within the region, is good practice.

Findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following feature of good practice:

- the partnerships with a range of employers and organisations which provide opportunities for students to gain experience of the workplace to develop their skills and employability and which also support ASAR Reald's contribution to the region (paragraphs 1.10, 1.11, 2.14, 3.9; *Chapter III Standard III.2, Chapter III Standard III.3; Chapter III Standard VII.6; Chapter I Standard I.9*).

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not affirm any actions already in progress.

Judgement

The Standards for the Organisation and its Management are fully met.

Evaluation Area 2: Resourcing

2.1   ASAR has a strategy for the management of teaching quality which includes increasing the number of staff and their training in line with increases in the student numbers as a result of significant changes in market demand **[M1]**. ASAR follows a clear policy regarding recruiting academic staff (full-time and part-time). The right to choose staff stems from the Academy's autonomy **[1 article 18 & 19]** and recruitment requests originate in the department as the basic management unit **[M2]**. Requests for part-time academic staff may be made to address temporary staff absences when they are studying for a PhD or on a research project or for other reasons. The department's proposal goes to the Faculty Council and then to the Academic Senate. Staff recruitment requirements are submitted prior to the beginning of the academic year **[M8]**. The recruitment procedure is clear and the composition of the ad hoc committee is in accordance with the ASAR regulations **[M8]**. The ad hoc committee consists of four members (the chair and three others) **[17]**. In evaluating applications, priority is given to candidates who have graduated from well-known schools abroad. The evaluation process is conducted by the ad hoc committee and final approval is obtained from the Rector **[17]**. ASAR also welcomes staff from elsewhere for conferences and project activity **[63]**. **[*Chapter III Standard IV.1*]**

2.2   ASAR follows a clear policy to integrate academic staff in decision-making bodies, reflecting its Statutes and internal regulations **[1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 9: 10; 11; 12]**. ASAR provides laboratory and teaching facilities as required by academic staff **[M2; site tour]**. It also has policies to ensure that academic staff have, or gain, appropriate qualifications. Staff have participated in a project supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and in international conferences **[M8; 62]**. Newly-recruited staff are supported by more experienced academic colleagues **[M8]** and the Research Centre plays a role in their skills development. The purpose of the Centre is to coordinate research activity throughout the Academy and in each department. The Scientific Research Centre collaborates with departments to set scientific priorities that are closely linked to the strategic objectives dictated by regional development needs **[M8]**. Each year the departments submit project proposals to the Scientific Research Centre which, based on agreed research priorities, selects the best projects and passes them to the Academic Senate for approval and to the Board of Administration for financial support **[M2]**. Achievements are published in the ASAR Bulletin twice a year **[M2; M8]**. Academic staff are also involved in the process of informing prospective students about the opportunities at ASAR **[M3; M4, M8]**. **[*Chapter III Standard IV.2*]**

2.3   ASAR follows a training plan in line with the scientific priorities defined in the development strategy **[9; 10]**; staff can obtain qualifications and develop specialist skills within the framework of co-operation with universities in Albania and abroad and ASAR provides some financial support for this **[92]**. The main beneficiaries are staff studying for a doctorate **[M8]**. ASAR has also organised international development workshops and conferences such as the international conference in 2012, a conference on 'Science helping the Community' in 2015, a first Dental Conference in 2015, and a conference on Fiscal Policy and Taxation in 2016. Research performance is monitored by the Scientific Research Centre and at departmental level through a process led by the Head of Department; it is discussed and approved in the Senate. Monitoring of the quality of the teaching of academic staff is done by the IQAU through questionnaires supplied to students **[35; 36; 70; 71]**. Young staff are encouraged in the teaching process: more experienced and senior staff direct, support and monitor their teaching activity **[M8]**. ASAR also encourages foreign teachers to interact with academic staff and students **[63]**. **[*Chapter III Standard IV.3*]**

2.4   ASAR supports institutional social life through promotional activities, graduation ceremonies, the promotion of tourism in Vlora, and days dedicated to particular health

issues such as HIV-AIDS and hypertension **[M3; M4; M7; M8]**. ASAR enhances the social interaction of academic and administrative staff and students by organising recreational activities and excursions **[SER p.18; 18; 68; 98]**. **[*Chapter III Standard IV.4*]**

2.5 ASAR takes its responsibilities related to human resource management seriously. The management functions are defined by the Statutes and by the internal regulations of the faculties and the basic units, particularly the departments **[1 article 35]**. The administrative unit includes a human resource office that manages the recruitment process, the preparation of full and part-time academic staff contracts, and the employment of the auxiliary and administrative staff in compliance with the national Labour Code; all appointees have a job description **[31; 32]**. **[*Chapter III Standard II.2*]**

2.6 ASAR is a private institution and the basis of its finances is student fees, the founding organisation, Eskeld Ltd', and projects with different partners **[1; 73]**. ASAR has a clear formal structure for drafting the budget. The administrative unit responsible for this is the finance office and the Chancellor has overall responsibility for setting the draft budget **[1; 41]** in collaboration with departments which are part of the discussion **[M2; M8]**. The Faculty Council, and the Senate and the Board of Administration Board at institutional level, play a crucial role in the discussion and approval of the draft budget. Allocation of funds is made on the basis of the financial priorities and needs of the departments **[M2]**. For example, the Faculty of Medicine receives higher funding because of the expensive laboratory equipment required. The Rectorate is responsible for the implementation of financial decisions. The budget also includes financial support for student activities which is managed with support from the CCO **[doc decision of administration board for students; M7]**. **[*Chapter III Standard VI.1*]**

2.7 In accordance with the Academy's Statutes and internal regulations the Board of Administration is the decision-making body at ASAR which oversees and controls the administrative, financial and economic management of its assets and properties **[SER p.19; 1 article 11 item d]**. The Chancellor is responsible for the implementation of financial policies, and the daily administration and financial management of the Academy. **[1; M2]** The Chancellor is assisted in the implementation and control of the budget by an external audit company. Auditing processes are defined clearly in legislation. ASAR undertakes financial analysis of the income from student fees, and of the necessary expenditure, including requests from staff for purchasing new equipment, items necessary for laboratory courses, library books and research materials. On the basis of this analysis they draft the budget for the coming year **[SER p.19; M7]**. **[*Chapter III Standard VI.2*]**

2.8 ASAR is subject to internal audit by the founding body, to external auditing, and to the Vlora Regional Directorate of Tax, High State Control, and Control by the Ministry of Education and Sports. The audit process has a clear legal basis for its operation **[1]**. The monitoring processes enable issues in the faculty to be identified and an action plan put in place to address them **[SWOT analysis]**. **[*Chapter III Standard VI.3*]**

2.9 The ASAR information system is coordinated with both an electronic information system and hard copy. Information on the website is updated with new and important information for students or other interest groups. The online system consists of a website http://asar.edu.al, staff and student portal, social network, media system, and an email system for students and staff based on the domain name.surname@asar.edu.al). Key information is also provided on notice-boards placed on each floor. There is an IT laboratory. Brochures and leaflets provide information about study programmes. ASAR uses media advertising as well as the local TV station to communicate core activities and information to partners and the public **[SER p.20; 46; site tour; M6; M3; M4; M8]**. **[*Chapter III Standard VII.1*]**

2.10 The ASAR information technology infrastructure includes computer laboratories, 80 PCs, and 10 video projectors providing students with a comfortable and comprehensive study environment. ASAR provides teaching laboratories for medical subjects. In addition to PCs, printers and scanners, students have access to a range of specialist equipment including 'phantom heads' and dental seats for dentistry and massage tables and a Magnotech machine for physiotherapy **[75; SER p.21]**. The students use hard copy and online library resources **[http://www.asar.edu.al/biblioteka-online]** and the Academy is negotiating an agreement with McGraw-Hill to enrich access to online literature (see paragraph 5.5) **[M8]**. ASAR is equipped with a LAN enabling access to the internet throughout the building. The website is updated on a regular basis and the IT engineer is responsible for maintenance of the equipment. The information used for updating the website is provided by academic departments and administrative units to ensure accuracy **[M7; M8; M3; 4M]**. **[*Chapter III Standard VII.2*]**

2.11 ASAR has two buildings: in the main building are located both faculties and all the teaching and learning space, while the second building is available for offices and sports activities. The buildings belong to the founding society, Eskeld Ltd **[36; 37; 39; 40; site tour]**. It fulfils the hygiene and sanitary conditions required and has a fire protection system **[38; 37]**. ASAR has a courtyard 2000m^2 designed for relaxing and the recreational activities of students, and there is a café located alongside the courtyard. **[site tour]**. The building does not have access suitable for people with disabilities: there is no entrance ramp and there are no handrails on the stairs, nor is there a lift. This is addressed in Evaluation Area 5. **[*Chapter III Standard VII.3*]**

2.12 ASAR has a protocol for archiving materials to preserve its academic, cultural and scientific heritage in accordance with Albanian law **[SER p.21; Law no.7726 dated 29.06.1993; 33]**. Syllabi and relevant literature for all study programmes plus PhD theses, publications and textbooks written by full-time academic staff are preserved in the library. Scientific conferences organised by ASAR provide an opportunity for academic staff to present and promote their research, as does the Bulletin which is published on a regular basis. The library fulfils the needs of students in terms of hard-copy books and developments are in progress to enrich access to electronic resources. This is addressed in evaluation area 5. **[M8; site tour; 69]** **[*Chapter III Standard VII.4*]**

2.13 ASAR is located in the urban area of Vlora away from industrial sites. It provides an appropriate infrastructure for its academic, administrative and social activities including classrooms, offices, meeting rooms, an academic senate room, a library and laboratories in which to carry out teaching, research and administration. The ASAR building is well illuminated, and equipped with a heating and cooling system. Lecture and seminar rooms are well lit, with windows. Laboratories are suitably equipped to fulfil the requirements of the programmes. All classes are monitored with CCTV for security. All buildings and equipment are part of a regular monitoring and maintenance system **[74; 75]**. **[*Chapter III Standard VII.5*]**

2.14 ASAR has an administrative structure which provides support at all levels; organisational structures are aligned with the development strategy and the Statutes **[1; 2]**. ASAR plays an important role in the economic and cultural development of the Vlora region, providing trained professionals in areas such as pharmacy, dentistry and physiotherapy that are highly sought-after in the Vlora labour market. ASAR has partnerships with a range of employers and organisations that provide opportunities for students to gain experience of the workplace to develop their skills and employability and which also support ASAR Reald's contribution to the region. This contributes to the feature of good practice finding at paragraph 1.10. Students are keen to open pharmacies in rural areas which would have a positive impact on the development of the Vlora region **[10; M3; M4; M6; M8]**. Some of ASAR's conferences support on-going professional development **[100]** and the strategy

envisages the development of a sound research base **[10 item 12, 13; M1; M7]**. **[*Chapter III Standard VII.6*]**

2.15 ASAR owns two buildings. In the main building, built in 2001, there are classrooms, laboratories, administration facilities and a coffee shop for students. The second building located behind is currently school premises but may be used in future as additional space for academic staff, classrooms and sports activities. Teaching facilities include laboratories for chemistry, biochemistry, pharmaceutical chemistry, dentistry, and anatomy. The dental, nursing and physiotherapy clinic areas provide a health service to local people particularly those who are older and/or in need. The laboratories have the equipment necessary to fulfil the teaching requirements **[site tour; SER p.23]**. **[*Chapter III Standard V.1*]**

2.16 ASAR has established and maintains appropriate systems to manage documentation effectively in hard-copy and electronic forms; these are managed and run by an administrator in the main office. The office is responsible for the maintenance of students' hardcopy documentation; this includes their matriculation qualifications, their assessments and progression status. Information is also kept in a database. The office is open from 8.00 to 16.00 for new students enrolling and from 14.00 to 16.00 for the students in the second and third years of study and in the Professional Master's programmes **[site tour]**. Student data is collected by completing the relevant forms on the first occasion of registration and is updated in subsequent years. The secretary's office is open to students to obtain their examination grades and to support any requirements related to teaching. Students can also submit complaints which may be passed on to heads of department; if a complaint is related to assessment, an appropriate review committee is established **[M3; M8]**. Students' diploma theses are deposited in the archive and their assessments based on assignments are also reflected in the registers **[site tour; 33; 35; 76; 28]**. The databases enable the administrator to provide statistical analysis of key information such as reports on student progress with their ranking according to their assessment results. All data is verified and meets the requirements of MoES and the National Examination Agency (NEA). **[*Chapter III Standard V.2*]**

2.17 ASAR has a clear structure described on the University website that includes the application process and criteria for recruiting full-time and part-time academic staff. Recruitment procedures are defined in its Statutes and Regulations and academic staff are part of the recruitment process. The primary criterion is experience and, where possible, staff are sought with qualifications gained at foreign universities. ASAR, in cooperation with academic staff and students, plays an important role in the Vlora region, undertaking activities which have a positive social impact. ASAR has set up an internal evaluation mechanism to assess academic staff and each department responds to the process. ASAR has developed transparent and appropriate procedures for managing financial resources administered in accordance with public financial management standards and regulations; annual accounts are submitted to the Ministry. Academic staff contribute to discussions and proposals when the budget is set. The partnership network which ASAR has established is good practice.

2.18 ASAR supports the development of taught programmes through the provision of appropriate infrastructure and equipment; classroom and laboratory equipment is sufficient to enable students to gain both theoretical and practical knowledge and skills. ASAR provides the basic literature required for the programmes offered and is negotiating an agreement with McGraw-Hill to further enrich the resources.

Findings

Good practice

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

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not affirm any actions already in progress.

Judgement

The Standards for Resourcing are fully met.

Evaluation Area 3: The Curriculum

3.1   Admissions requirements are made clear in the programme documentation for both first and second cycles **[6; 24]** and staff engage in open days for high school students **[82]** to give them information about the programmes available and the entry procedures. The website has programme information for students **[SER p.20]** and the public **[SER p.25]**. Students **[M3; M4]** find information about ASAR easy to obtain though media advertisements, the website, word of mouth and leaflets in high schools **[42]**. Some obtain material direct from the ASAR office. They find the information accurate and the national admission process clear **[M3; M4]**. Students are particularly attracted to ASAR by the low staff:student ratio, the facilities, the reputation of the staff and their friendliness **[M3; M4]**. *[Chapter I Standard I.1]*

3.2   ASAR does not offer extensive continuing education but it is an aim of the development strategy **[10]** which is also recognised in the SER **[SER p.44]**. Although ASAR does not offer part-time provision it does attract mature students, particularly in the area of business management for people with work experience who wish to improve their skills and gain some theoretical understanding **[tour]**. A summer workshop on research methods was provided in 2016 **[website, May 2017; SER p.26; 101]** and CPD offered in the area of health provision is accredited by the National Centre of Continuing Education for Health Professionals. Recent bye-laws have clarified how this should be provided which will allow ASAR to make progress in this area **[SER p.26; M1]**. *[Chapter I Standard I.2]*

3.3   The Development Strategy promotes the need to support the development of professional skills in the region **[10]** and the regulations for programmes such as **[7]** the MSc in Pharmacy include the desired graduate employment destinations of the students. The internship booklets **[21; 22]** show how students can benefit from the opportunity for professional practice within their studies, logging their experience as they go. Students **[M3]** and employers **[M5]** confirmed the value of this process. Staff from ASAR and employees within the relevant professional setting supervise students during their professional practice modules or internships **[M3]**. Nursing students in their second and third years receive very close supervision when they are in hospitals and clinics on a one-to-one basis from either an ASAR tutor or a hospital nurse **[M3]**. *[Chapter I Standard I.3]*

3.4   The review team saw evidence of the programmes being developed in the light of regional need, including a study of tourism in southern Albania **[79]**, and the SER **[SER p.27]** states that programmes are developed in line with the strategies of the Ministries of Health and of Education. Partners who are employers and professionals in their field have the opportunity to discuss the curriculum with ASAR staff **[M5]** and feel that the programmes are well oriented to the needs of businesses and the health service. Part-time staff are typically also current professionals in their field and gave the review team examples of how they draw on this to inform their teaching. A doctor who has received training on breast-feeding guidelines from the World Health Organization as part of a wider project in Vlora wishes to include this topic in the curriculum, and a dentist ensures that patients coming in from the local area present with problems which relate to topics which the students are currently studying **[M6]**. This enables students to see the practical and social as well as the technical value of their studies, and the students whom the team met showed a strong commitment to the local area. Some wish to set up pharmacies when they graduate in villages which do not currently have them **[M3; M4]**. While most students are local, there are a few from Italy **[11]** and a Turkish student had received help with the Albanian language. A Diploma Supplement is issued in English and Albanian **[24; 25; SER p.31]**. [*Chapter I, Standard I.4*]

3.5   There is a process by which a request can be made for additional staffing when the teaching load for the year has been calculated **[72; 77; SER p.28; M2; M6]** and the regulations for the programmes include maximum and minimum student numbers. **[7]** For the MSc in Pharmacy, student numbers range between seven and 100 with groups of 25-30 for core teaching and 12-15 for laboratory work. The staff workload is 6-8 hours per week teaching **[11]** and the overall workload is 50-70 per cent teaching, 20-30 per cent research and development and 10-20 per cent support for the institution **[SER p.28]**. Staff workloads can be managed to provide study time for those who are studying for a PhD or attending a conference **[M6]** and the flexibility of the part-time staff supports the effective allocation of staff workloads **[M2]**. **[*Chapter I Standard I.5*]**

3.6   There is clear information about programmes and modules which includes the aims and objectives of the programme, the individual modules, the assessment weightings and the study hours. ECTS credits are used **[6; 25; SER p.29]** and staff tell students at the start of each year in the first lecture what syllabus they will cover **[M3; M4; M6; SER p.29]**. The regulations for BSc Physiotherapy **[6]** state the conceptual challenges students need to master to develop and assess a hypothesis; for the BSc Management **[25]** some of the module outlines include a brief reading list, typically one or two mandatory and one or two optional books. **[*Chapter I Standard I.6*]**

3.7   Programme regulations set out the pattern of study which in the first cycle starts from a basic level and provides students with core knowledge and skills **[6; 25]**. ECTS is used **[SER p.29; 1]**. Typically students study more theory in the first year and then move to contact with patients and to internships in the later years of the programme **[M3]** as they gain in understanding and confidence. This ensures that they understand the principles before they apply them in practice. Assessment is also set out in the regulations for the programmes. Assessment of the BSc Management is 70 per cent examination, 30 per cent coursework **[25]** and the programme details include information about the public defence of the diploma. The regulations for BSc Physiotherapy **[6]** include assessment grades as a percentage aligned with points and then with an alphabetic scale. The regulations also include reassessment rules and attendance requirements (100 per cent at all sessions). Students understand what is required of them **[M3]** and get feedback after their exams on what were generally the most problematic areas so that they understand what they did wrong and can improve. They can also obtain individual feedback on specific marks **[M3]** if they are unclear why a mark has been given. The CCO advises students about their study choices as well as their employment opportunities and even helps students who may be thinking of leaving the programme to find a suitable way forward **[M7]**. Graduate employment is monitored **[26]** as is the pass rate **[8]** which stands at 100 per cent. This provides confidence that ASAR graduates are well equipped for employment and this is endorsed by partner employers **[M5]**. **[*Chapter I Standard I.7*]**

3.8   The first-cycle programme structure develops students' understanding and then allows them to put it into practice (see also paragraph 3.7). In addition to this students have a good relationship with staff and can seek help at any time **[M3; M4]**. They receive strong support from tutors at ASAR **[M3]** and from supervisors in their professional practice internships **[M5]**. Staff explain the programme of study at the start of the year or semester, giving a weekly calendar of topics to the class **[M3; M6]**. They are proactive in identifying examples from real life, including case studies from their professional practice to stimulate students' interest **[M6]**. Examples include legal cases, and real clinical cases **[M6]**. Staff use slides to make learning more interactive **[M6]** and when students have requested that slides be added to classes **[M4]** to provide a visual stimulus to learning, this has been done. **[SER p.30]** Teaching methods are intended to be easily absorbed at the start of the study period and the tutorial system is designed to support students' transition into higher education **[SER p.30]**. One member of staff explained to the review team that she tries not to make the first hour of a two-hour class too difficult but then uses the second hour to check that students

have understood what they have been told [**M6**]. Another draws on his membership of a professional association to find out about international teaching practices which he can include in his classes [**M6**]. These approaches all help students to acclimatise to their learning and students appreciate the support they get from staff [**M3, M4**]; the low ratio of students to staff supports this (see also paragraph 5.1). Some newly recruited staff are very experienced [**M6; site tour**] and can give younger colleagues support to help them make best use of the teaching sessions. Advice includes how to divide the time between practical and theoretical work, what literature to use, and how to manage lectures and seminars. This may involve staff sitting in on one another's teaching sessions [**M6**]. Staff without PhDs are supported to attain them so that their research informs their teaching [**M6**]. [***Chapter I Standard I.8***]

3.9   In the second cycle, the MScs in Dentistry and Pharmacy are subject to professional accreditation [**SER p.31**]. The curriculum details for the MSc Pharmacy [**24**] and the regulations [**6**] specify the knowledge which students should acquire and the deeper intellectual skills related to the master's award. It includes the aim to prepare specialists who can either be employed or continue with their studies, showing a commitment to lifelong learning. Partner employers are strongly of the view that the students are well prepared with the skills and knowledge they require to enter the workplace [**M5**] and internships are focused at the end of the programmes so that students can apply their knowledge in the workplace [**M4**]. This contributes to the feature of good practice finding at paragraph 1.10. [***Chapter I Standard I.9***]

3.10   Assessment at the end of a Professional Master's programme focuses on the implementation of professional skills: dentistry students are assessed working on the phantom heads rather than just on their theoretical knowledge [**M4**]. The regulations of the Scientific Research Centre include the aim of integrating research into teaching [**85**] which would particularly support second cycle programmes. The curriculum details [**24; 6**] include the breakdown of study hours and detailed module descriptors. Assessment of the MScs is based on points which are converted into grades. [**24**]. There are regulations relating to assessment including re-assessment [**24**]. [***Chapter I Standard I.9***]

3.11   Programmes use ECTS and are Bologna compliant [**SER p.30-31; M6**]. Staff regard this as key to securing international standards and allowing students the possibility of studying elsewhere [**M6**]. There are links with other institutions including an agreement with the University of Salerno which would allow for joint programmes or for students to move to Salerno for their master's programme [**M1**], but take-up is very limited [**SER p.43; M1;M2; M3; M4; M6**]. The Vlora region is involved in the Erasmus+ scheme [**M6**] and ASAR is working with the local region to bid for Erasmus-funded Interreg research projects. Possible partners are Italy and Montenegro [**M5**]. Discussions are also underway for Interreg funding for an Albanian-Greek cross-border project with the University of Corfu [**M1**]. Students are required to have a foreign language (English) on entry [**SER p.31**] to support their opportunities for wider professional development and if the Pharmacy Department obtains membership of the European Association of Pharmaceutical Faculties [**3; SER p.3; M6**] that is expected to support and encourage mobility. Students would like to be able to study for the required pre-master's English language qualifications at ASAR [**M3**]. [***Chapter I Standard I.10***]

3.12   There is evidence of the practical application of theory in the medical faculty programmes, including a 20-credit professional practice module in pharmacy [**24**] and internship opportunities in physiotherapy [**21; 22**]. The internship booklet takes students through what they should be able to do as a result of their internships in physiotherapy and includes a diary in which they can record their professional development [**21; M6**]. Business students have a similar experience in the final year of their programmes [**M3; M5**] and employers are particularly positive about the potential of these graduates to transform family

businesses through their expertise or to ensure that hotels and other tourism-related activities are professionally run **[M5]**. Students and employers highly commend the professional practice experience which the students receive and which makes them ready for the employment market **[M3; M4; M5]**. The experience of the part-time staff who are also practising professionals enables them to bring real-life cases into the classroom (see also paragraphs 3,4 and 3.8) and students of dentistry and physiotherapy treat local people under supervision free of charge **[site tour]**. **[*Chapter I Standard I.11*]**

3.13   The curriculum details for the MSc Pharmacy **[24]** include the aim of preparing specialists who can both be employed and continue with their studies, showing a commitment to lifelong learning. The curriculum of the BSc Management **[25]** includes a statement of the kind of work which graduates would be expected to be able to enter (at manager level). Employers **[M5]** confirm that these aspirations are realistic. The CCO supports this aim **[29; SER p.32]** as its remit includes providing students with advice on study route 'packages' **[29]** which relate to students' skills and career aspirations. The CCO also organises **[19. M7]** open workshops on topics including CV writing, motivational letters **[M3]** and job interviews. Students confirm that the CCO helps them to research the job market and advises them on jobs in the region **[M3]**. **[*Chapter I Standard I.12*]**

3.14   The curriculum at ASAR is designed with the social and labour market needs of the region and the employment prospects of the students in mind. The programmes provide students with theoretical understanding in the earlier stages, after which they apply that knowledge in practical situations. This enables them to acclimatise to their studies and to develop the skills which will make them employable in health work or business. Patients from the local area come to ASAR for certain kinds of health treatment which enables students to have patient contact early in their studies, and there are formal professional practice modules and internships for all students, typically in the final year of their programme. Professional master's programmes provide a longer period of study which allows for more sophisticated skills to be developed. Employers are very positive about the students and graduates whom they encounter and students have a strong commitment to working in the local area; the partnerships which support this are good practice. The curriculum allows staff to draw on their professional experience to provide case studies to demonstrate the practical implications of the subjects taught. The programmes are clearly specified in the relevant documents, ECTS are used and a Diploma Supplement is given.

Findings

Good practice

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

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

Recommendations

The review team did not make any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not affirm any actions already in progress.

Judgement

The Standards for the Curriculum are fully met.

Evaluation Area 4: Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research

4.1   The first and second-cycle programmes provided by ASAR are comprehensively documented in terms of admissions requirements, programme and course content, and assessment methods **[24; 25; 32]**. The allocation of teaching staff and learning resources (laboratory space, equipment, access to internships and practice placements) is systematically coordinated and monitored **[21; 22; 24; 25]**. The availability of appropriate literatures and library resources is carefully planned and appropriately resourced although it would benefit from greater access to electronic resources (see also paragraph 5.5) **[M2; M7]**. Detailed programme specifications and individual course descriptions are available for all the awards made by ASAR **[21; 22]**. These are regularly reviewed by the teaching staff in order to ensure they are up to date and relevant **[SER; M6]**. Any necessary curriculum changes are approved by the relevant Faculty Councils and then the Academic Senate. Students confirmed the availability of necessary laboratory equipment and materials, of appropriate literatures either from the ASAR library or online, and of systematic oversight by ASAR of internships and practice placements **[M3; M4]**. **[*Chapter I Standard II.1*]**

4.2   The assessment of students is governed by the academy's regulations which define the proportions of marks obtained by attendance, coursework and final examinations **[2; 27]**. The regulations also prescribe how examinations shall be timetabled, conducted and assessed including how students may submit appeals and complaints **[2]**. Students are informed about the assessment of individual courses directly by their teachers and also via the student portal **[SER]**. The assessment methods for individual courses are also set out in the course descriptions **[24; 25]**. Marking is conducted by at least two members of the academic staff and is overseen by the relevant head of department **[2; M7]**. Graduating students are issued with detailed diploma supplements that describe the content, level and context of their studies **[24; 25]**. Students met by the review team indicated that they receive guidance on assessment content and methods directly from their teachers and in course guides issued at the start of each semester. Students are aware of both formal and informal routes for complaints and appeals **[M3; M4]**. **[*Chapter I Standard II.2*]**

4.3   ASAR has in place procedures for the regular review of all the programmes it delivers and of student progress and the quality of teaching **[SER; 8]**. Students are asked to complete questionnaires for all their courses **[36; 56]**. In addition staff are asked on an annual basis to review the courses they have taught taking particular account of student outcomes, students' assessments and any student complaints and in each department a staff group annually considers what revisions should be made to syllabi, assessment and teaching arrangements **[SER; 35]**. These sources of evidence are reviewed annually by the IQAU and an annual report to the Senate and the Management Board is produced that includes recommendations for further improvements or changes which are then included in action plans **[8; 56; 80; M1; M7]**. At the time of this review student and staff evaluations had recently been used to inform the Development Strategy 2016-21 and a SWOT analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Academy **[10; 57]**. **[*Chapter I Standard II.3*]**

4.4   ASAR monitors the quality of learning and teaching largely through its IQAU which also contributes decisions about staff development **[M1; M7; 35]**. Given the relatively small size of the institution staff development is largely managed through informal mechanisms **[M6]**. New and established staff are paired so that any problems that arise in teaching can be discussed and all staff participate in the annual reviews of programmes **[35; M2; M6]**. Younger staff are encouraged and supported to obtain further qualifications **[M2; M6]**. **[*Chapter I Standard II.4*]**

4.5   ASAR supports research in the areas relevant to its teaching through the operation of an institutional-level Research Centre and also at the level of each of its six departments which monitor and coordinate the research and publication activities of staff **[11; SER; M6]**. The Research Centre proposes an annual funding allocation to support staff research activities which is approved by the Board of Directors [docs 67; 88]. Staff research is published in an ASAR research journal and staff have been involved in international scientific conferences both in Vlora and abroad **[15; 59; 62; 69; M6]**. **[*Chapter II Standard I.1, I.2*]**

4.6   The Development Strategy 2016-21 commits ASAR to the development of medical and economic research relevant both to the region and internationally **[10]**. ASAR has signed formal agreements with relevant universities in Albania and internationally to develop research and teaching collaborations, though at the time of this review these had not yet led to substantial outputs **[16; M1; M6]**. The review team saw evidence that staff of ASAR have attended and contributed to international scientific conferences **[62; 82; 99]**. At the time of the review ASAR had recently completed a joint application for EU Interreg Funding in collaboration with academics in Italy, Montenegro, Corfu and Greece **[M5]**. In the context of the recent establishment of ASAR it is to be expected that research internationalisation is relatively undeveloped. However, it was clear from the evidence seen and heard by the review team that ASAR has in place structures and resourcing that are likely to increase research collaboration and outputs in the future. **[*Chapter II Standard I.3*]**

4.7   Research within ASAR and by its staff and students is encouraged in a number of ways. Within the six individual academic departments research groups have been formed and are led by senior staff **[M6]**. The ASAR Research Centre monitors and reports on research activities to Academic Senate and the Board of Directors **[67; 85; 87; 88]**. Staff studying for doctorates are allowed time for their research **[70; M6]**. **[*Chapter II Standard I.4*]**

4.8   ASAR has defined policies and priorities for research activity by its staff and students that are consistent with its role as an academy delivering Cycle 1 and 2 programmes in the medical sciences and in economics **[1; 2]**. The research objectives of the Academy are related to the employment and development priorities of the region **[8; 61; M5]**. Both full-time and part-time staff are required to have appropriate scientific qualifications and the regulations include appropriate protection for academic freedom and ethical approval of research **[2; 5; 53]**. Research activity is coordinated by the institutional Research Centre and funding has been allocated to support staff research activities **[88]**. Staff research is published in the six-monthly ASAR Research Bulletin and in international journals **[62; 69; 82]**. ASAR collaborates in identifying research needs with Vlora Municipality, the Regional Council of Vlora and with local hospitals and dental practices **[SER; M5]**. The view of the review team is that scientific and other research activity conducted by ASAR is consistent with its size, age and the areas in which it provides academic programmes. **[*Chapter II Standard I.5-1.8*]**

4.9   The teaching and research priorities of ASAR are designed to benefit and meet the needs of the region and the nation. The focus of the six teaching programmes provided by the academy focus on meeting the employment needs of the region in Dentistry, Nursing, Physiotherapy and Pharmacy as well as in Management and Tourism. Teaching, learning and assessment are systematically managed and monitored. The Academy routinely reviews staff performance and student outcomes and sets annual and strategic targets for enhancement. The research and publication activities of the staff are appropriate to the size and focus of the institution and are satisfactorily resourced and monitored.

Findings

Good practice

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

Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses:

Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendations.

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not affirm any actions already in progress.

Judgement

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

Evaluation Area 5: Students and their Support

5.1   The Academy publishes clear descriptions of the programmes it offers on its website and in leaflets distributed to high schools **[SER; docs 42; 66; M3; M4]**. Staff from the Academy also visit schools and the academic programmes are advertised on local television **[66; M3]**. The application and admissions process is standard for Albania and allows students to apply to up to 10 institutions **[32]**. ASAR also runs an 'open week' when potential applicants can visit the academy and meet staff teaching the programmes they are interested in **[M3; M4]**. The Academy is open to foreign students and at the time of the review six foreign students had been admitted since it opened **[SER; M2]**. Students met by the team confirmed that information about the academy and its programmes is easily obtained and that the admissions process operates well. The Academy runs orientation events for incoming students and the heads of the six departments provide a verbal introduction to the syllabi, the teaching hours and credit weightings which are consistent with the Bologna system **[Mtg3]**. The ratio of students to staff is low and this attracted some of the applicants met by the review team. Overall the staff:student ratio is 1:6 and exceeds the national requirements for both classroom and laboratory teaching **[SER; M3; M4]**. The review team hopes that ASAR will be able to maintain this positive feature as it expands. **[*Chapter I Standard III.1*]**

5.2   ASAR communicates with its students through induction and class meetings, the student portal, email and social media **[SER; M3; M4]**. Students also receive hardcopy handbooks and guides to their programmes and courses and important information is placed on noticeboards **[SER; M3; M4; M5]**. Student data is held by the administration office and on an online data-system which is managed by the IT Office. Data on individual students (registration details, student achievement and progression) are held in a student records database under the control of the Academic Secretary **[SER; M7]**. At the time of the review the academy was in the process of updating the student database to allow easier online access **[M7]**. Students and staff met by the review team confirmed that communication methods used by ASAR are comprehensive and reliable **[M3; M4; M6]**. **[*Chapter I Standard III.2*]**

5.3   As well as the methods for guiding, advising and orientating students described in paragraph 5.1, each student is provided with a personal tutor to whom they can go for both academic and personal advice. A new tutor is allocated for each year of study **[M6]**. Students in their final year who are on practice placements in hospitals or pharmacies have both a tutor within the academy and another from amongst the staff in the placement location **[M4; M6]**. Comprehensive guidance is available to students wishing to change courses, though such changes are rare **[SER; M7]**. **[*Chapter I Standard III.3*]**

5.4   The Academy operates a non-discriminatory admissions policy and treats applications from minority groups equally **[M2; 65]**. Provision to engage in sporting activities on site is limited to a small basketball pitch but access to a wide range of cultural and sporting opportunities is provided in cooperation with other organisations **[SER; 18; 98]**. Although the Academy has provision for treating people with disabilities as part of its physiotherapy and nursing training, access to the building for wheelchair users is not provided **[M3, site tour]**. The review team regards as a weakness the fact that the building is unsafe for students and visitors with a disability, particularly those with mobility problems. Consequently Chapter I, Standard III.4 is not met and the review team **recommends** that the building be made safe and user-friendly for access for students and visitors with disabilities by the addition of guide rails at the entrance and on the stairs, and a ramp at the entrance within 12 months of the receipt of the final report. **[*Chapter I Standard III.4*]**

5.5   The Academy's library of some 1200 books is open from 8.30 to 17.30 every day. The stock of the library consists principally of core textbooks recommended for the courses delivered. The IT department is in the process of building a digital catalogue of the library stock **[M7]**. ASAR plans the purchase of books for the library using a three-year budget driven by the requirements of the curriculum **[SER; M6; M7]**. Students met by the review team confirmed that they are able to obtain both Albanian and foreign texts required for their courses **[M3; M4]**. The Academy is negotiating final arrangements to purchase access to the McGraw-Hill online e-book system to provide access to a greater range of textbooks and academic and technical journals **[SER; M7]**. The review team believes that ASAR should progress these plans which will support compliance with Chapter 1 Standard III.5, and therefore makes an affirmation that ASAR complete the development of an online library catalogue and implement the agreement with McGraw-Hill for access to e-books. **[*Chapter I Standard III.5*]**

5.6   Students in the first cycle receive guidance from their lecturers and from their personal tutors **[86; M6]**. Students also have access to advice and workshops provided by the Careers Office. This is supplementary to the guidance provided by teaching staff and focuses on the employment and career implications of programme and course choices **[19; M7; SER]**. The Careers Office staff also provide individual advice on the writing of applications to employers and the construction of CVs, supported by a database of available jobs in the region **[M3]**. **[*Chapter I Standard III.6*]**

5.7   The ASAR Statutes provide for student councils at institutional and departmental levels and for the representation of students on key bodies of the Academy: Academic Senate, Faculty Councils, and the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU) **[1; SER]**. The Student Council can apply to the Board of Administration for financial support for particular activities **[87]**. The Student Council consists of two elected representatives from each department and the Council then elects a chairperson for the year. The Student Council discusses all matters affecting students and may submit requests and complaints to heads of departments, to deans of the faculties and to the Academic Senate. The evidence heard by the review team indicated that the Student Council and student representation of ASAR bodies operate effectively and have been able to deal with a number of student concerns **[M3; M4]**. The evidence also demonstrates that the Student Council plays a significant part in the community life of the students: organising parties, arranging for voluntary work in the community by students such as helping people affected by floods or donating blood to hospital blood banks **[M3; M4]**. There was agreement amongst the students met by the review team that the systems for student representation work effectively and contribute to a sense of solidarity amongst students **[M3; M4]**. The review team regarded the effectiveness of the Student Council including its commitment to activities which enhance the welfare of people in the area as **good practice**. **[*Chapter I Standard III.7*]**

5.8   Sporting facilities are limited as indicated at paragraph 5.4. The Student Council organises social and voluntary activities with the support of the Academy **[SER; 18; 87; M3; M4]**. ASAR is too small to provide health care facilities for its students, but the staff and students have close links with local medical and other services **[M5; M6]**. The Careers Office also organises workshops and other events such as visits related to potential employment opportunities **[19; M7]**. **[*Chapter I Standard III.8*]**

5.9   The mission of ASAR is focused on meeting the skills needs of the southern region labour market and the Academy and its academic staff are closely linked to local public and private sector institutions such as hospitals, dental practices, pharmacies and hotels **[1; 2; 8; 10; 62]**. The review team met a group of significant local employers who confirmed that they find ASAR particularly easy to communicate with and quick to respond to local economic priorities and labour market needs **[M5]**. The CCO plays a significant part in the life of the Academy and individual career and employment advice is always available to students **[M2;**

M3; M4; M7]. A significant part of the preparation of students for employment is the practice placements and internships, particularly in the final year of the professional programmes **[20; 21; 60; M4; M5; M6]**. **[*Chapter I Standard III.9*]**

5.10   ASAR has in place effective procedures for the admission, orientation, teaching and assessment of students that comply with national and local legislation. Information about the programmes offered and individual courses are comprehensively documented and publicly available. Staff employed by the ASAR are carefully recruited and are appropriately qualified and experienced to deliver both the academic and practical training required by the programmes. Graduating students receive certificates and diploma supplements that are consistent with ESG certification standards. The generous staff-student ratio of 1:6 and the comprehensive provision of administrative support and careers guidance are positive features. Students met by the review team indicated they had chosen to attend ASAR because of the individualised support provided in both the academic education and on practice placements. Student representation on key decision-making bodies of the Academy and through the Student Council operates effectively; the proactive approach of the Student Council is good practice. Library and IT support together with access to laboratory space and equipment both at ASAR and on practice placements are satisfactory but ASAR should complete its negotiations to provide greater access to electronic library resources. The lack of safe access for people with mobility problems is a weakness.

Findings

Good practice

The review team identified the following feature of good practice:

- the effectiveness of the Student Council including its commitment to activities which enhance the welfare of people in the area (paragraph 5.7; *Chapter I Standard III.7*).

Weaknesses

The review team identified the following weakness:

- that the building is unsafe for students and visitors with a disability, particularly those with mobility problems (paragraph 5.4; *Chapter I Standard III.4*).

Recommendations

The review team identified the following recommendation:

- that the building be made safe and user-friendly for access for students and visitors with disabilities by the addition of guide rails at the entrance and on the stairs, and a ramp at the entrance within 12 months of the receipt of the final report (paragraph 5.4; *Chapter I Standard III.4*).

Affirmation of action being taken

The review team affirms the following action already in progress:

- that ASAR complete the development of an online library catalogue and implement the agreement with McGraw-Hill for access to e-books (paragraph 5.5; *Chapter I Standard III.5*).

Judgement

The Standards for Students and their Support are substantially met.

Evidence list

1. The Statutes of ASAR
2. The general regulations of ASAR
3. The regulations of the Faculty of Medical Sciences
4. The regulations of the Academic Senate
5. The regulations of the Council of Ethics
6. The regulations of the BSc Physiotherapy
7. The regulations of the MSc Pharmacy
8. Academic, research and financial annual report of ASAR 2015-2016
9. Development strategy 2011-2015
10. Development strategy 2016-2021
11. General Information Document (GID) (data set)
12. List of Academic Senate decisions
13. List of Board of Administration decisions
14. List of cooperation agreements with higher education institutions a) national level,
15. b) international level (example)
16. List of international activities in which the institution has been involved
17. Cooperation agreements for student and staff mobility (example)
18. Procedures for employment in ASAR
19. List of students' activities (academic and cultural)
20. List of workshops to support students' employability and skills
21. List of diploma theses for the MSc Stomatology
22. Internship booklet for the BSc Physiotherapy
23. Internship booklet for the MSc Stomatology
24. Calendar plan for academic year 2016-2017
25. Curriculum of the Faculty of Medical Sciences (MSc Pharmacy and BSc Physiotherapy)
26. Curriculum of the Faculty of Economics (BSc Management)
27. Statistical data relating to alumni
28. Regulations for examinations in ASAR
29. Regulations of the Secretary of ASAR
30. Regulations of the Office of Careers Counselling
31. Transfer procedures for students
32. Template employment contract (full-time and part-time)
33. The practice of compiling and approving criteria for admission to ASAR
34. Regulations of the archive in ASAR
35. Model for managing final and midterm examinations
36. 35   The regulations of the Internal Quality Assurance Unit
37. Students' questionnaires: example
38. Fire protection certificate
39. Certificate of sanitary hygiene
40. Certificate of ownership of immovable property ASAR
41. List of auditors of ASAR
42. Organogram of ASAR
43. Information brochure
44. Draft institutional accreditation report (cover)

45. Institutional and programme accreditation
46. Screen print of the ASAR webpage
47. Screen print of the ASAR Facebook page
48. Screen print showing internal communications
49. Web link to academic staff portal
50. Screen print of the PAAHE web site
51. Screen print of the web site showing announcements for the students and the public
52. Order of the Academic Senate for the approval of the ASAR Statute
53. Order of the Academic Senate for the approval of the new Statute
54. Ethics Council decisions
55. Example of the institutional decision-making process
56. Example of the protocol of a meeting of the Board/Council of Administration
57. The Report of IQAU 2015-2016
58. Action Plan for improvement derived from the IQAU SWOT analysis
59. Market research for the BSc Management
60. Dentistry conference at ASAR
61. List of collaborations for internships
62. List of cooperation agreements with public and private institutions
63. List of international activity of the academic staff
64. List of foreign and invited staff
65. Workload of academic staff for 2016-2017 (model)
66. Decision of the administration board relating to student grants
67. Agenda for visits to high schools to inform prospective students
68. Research funds 2016-2017
69. List of social activities for staff
70. List of scientific articles of academic staff
71. Model for the evaluation of staff by the head of department
72. Evaluation panel for the recruitment of new academic staff
73. Departmental request for the recruitment of new staff
74. Compiling and approving the draft budget
75. List of teaching methods
76. List of moveable assets of ASAR
77. Matriculation data: model
78. Implementation of the annual staff teaching load
79. Membership request to EAPF
80. Study of tourism in the south region
81. Action plan of the IQAU
82. Scientific articles published by staff
83. List of promoted activities of staff
84. Government verdict nr 650, date 14.6.2011 and permission of MoES nr.564, date 22.11.2011
85. Accompanying letter and cover of the new Statutes
86. Regulations of the Scientific Research Centre
87. Tutorial list
88. Example of financial support for student activity
89. Financial support for staff scientific activity: example
90. Example of allocating additional funds for buying 4 phantom heads from the 2016 budget
91. Working group for compiling the budget

92.91   Annual financial report 2016
93.92   List of staff who have applied for third cycle study .
94. Screen print of the MoES website
95. Screen print of the RASH website
96. Screen print of the web site of Ualbania
97. Ownership of the property
98. Tutorial regulation
99. Example of financial support for staff leisure activity
100.   Summer school organized by ASAR
101.   List of conferences in ASAR

Meetings

M1   Meeting 1 Vice-Rector
M2   Meeting 2 Senior Staff
M3   Meeting 3 First-cycle students
M4   Meeting 4 Second-cycle students
M5   Meeting 5 Partners and employers
M6   Meeting 6 Academic staff
M7   Meeting 7 Support staff
M8   Meeting 8 Vice-Rector