

A Plan for the University (A Working Concept)

Like no other institution, the university has a central role in shaping societal values, its needs and aspirations, affecting lives in many different ways. It requires collective action and thinking to be able to effectively respond to this cardinal task. In turn, this collective thinking is subject to constant change and evolution. Therefore, the progress of our endeavors in every domain depends on ideas shaped and implemented on the basis of the continuing engagement of the broad university community. This way, I want to convey my sense of this vision, highlight some core plans in key areas for the next year and beyond, and invite your thoughts. Areas of primary focus include:

1. Changing and amending the Statute of the University and the necessary implementing acts: consolidating and clarifying the legal basis that would help overcome challenges faced by changing times (including on issues relating to academic integrity, mobility, research workload, and academic promotion)
2. Renewing and strengthening the University's academic personnel: the organization of a highly competitive and rigorous hiring process through an internationally-based mechanism that seeks to attract the most talented cadre of candidates with international education experience and objectively proven or demonstrated academic skill and potential
3. Expanding efforts and investments in the sciences, by developing programs that fund competitive projects on applied science, technology and social norms
4. Extending the University's international role: increasing its international presence and standing
5. Consolidating and strengthening the rules and mechanisms concerning academic integrity, personal and professional conduct, and discrimination and harassment
6. Providing the best educational experience and facilities for students: reshaping and revitalizing the learning curriculum and testing centers
7. Strengthening and supporting the research capacities of the research-based centers and institutes
8. Expanding and strengthening the capacity of the administrative staff
9. Revitalizing the institutional capacities for a more effective communication of the results of the academic staff, of their achievements, and contributions to society
10. Constantly identifying and addressing resource needs, including through partnerships with other public entities and businesses

I. Changing and amending the Statute of the University and the necessary implementing acts

The University Statute lays down the foundations for the governance of the institution. Its substantive design and the clarity of its provisions are absolutely essential for an effective decision-making process. In the absence of changes, or indeed the real prospects for changing and amending the Law on Higher Education makes the change of Statute an imperative. The fact that the law remains as it is does not in itself present a bar to changing the Statute. This is not only because the Law contains rather general provisions, and makes determinations of a broader nature, but also because the Statute is approved by the Assembly, same as the Law. After all, the idea is not to modify in any way those very precise and express determinations made in law; rather, those aspects that are delegated for regulation to the University Statute. As it stands, the Statute is rather ambiguous, relies on mechanisms that have proven ineffective (such as those on ethics) and envisages low-bar standards on academic promotion and/or professorial titles.

To create a more settled vision of expectations about the intended changes, those will mainly relate to the development and detailing of rules pertaining to the selection and promotion of members of the academic staff and to questions relating to the status and rights of those members of the staff who exercise other public or official duties. The Statute needs to provide proper authorizations for the issuance of inferior implementing acts, which these changes will do. The Statute should also envisage very detailed elements on the internationalization of academic achievements and scholarship for university personnel.

Different institutional mechanisms ought to be foreseen (*e.g.*, mechanisms concerning academic integrity) or their status and scope of competencies ought to be better outlined in the Statute (such as, for example, in the case of the Statutory Commission). Among the new institutional bodies to be explored would be the Student Ombudsperson Office and a similar one for the academic personnel. These offices—a common practice elsewhere—could serve as valuable resources of information and guidance on University rules, regulations, policies and procedures, and as institutionalized avenues to define and articulate the concerns or issues of students and staff. The establishment of a Central Research Council that will constantly collect, update and classify staff publications in a central database could be explored, same as the idea for having permanent research staff positions. The Statute should also provide for a more advanced standard on international publications of staff—as regards both academic promotion and contractual obligations—so that scholarship generated by staff is internationally certified in rigor A+ platforms such as Science Citations Index (SCI), etc.

II. Renewing and strengthening the University's academic personnel

The University should make no investment more important than in building and supporting outstanding faculty. It has been a very long time since a substantial growth of staff has occurred. Renewing staff membership is essential to the fulfillment of the University's curricular and research aspirations. To do this, we have to have resources, and clear and implementable targets. Most of all, we have to ensure that we can live up to the imperative of recruiting the most talented pool of scholars, both junior and established. This way, we must plan for a generational transition in our academic units, all of which have faced and are facing numerous faculty retirements in the coming years. Data for 2021 and up to this moment show that a total of 33 Professors were retired. In the meantime, the University has hired on a short-term contractual basis a total of 393 external staff members in 2021.

The myriad hiring decisions that will be made over the next year or two will have an enormous impact on the University for decades to come. And we cannot hope and wish to build an outstanding academic community for the next generation without paying increased and systematic attention to issues of planning, resource management, and faculty development. These efforts will definitely require our systematic attention and significant resources. To this end, I will plan and propose the adoption of budgetary resources that will allow for the **recruitment of 200 to 300 new members of the academic personnel** across the University during the next year (2023). This is aimed at both supporting the generational transition and increasing faculty excellence. The more precise determination of numbers, seeking to strike a balance among the fourteen different academic units of the University, will be based on a thorough study of the relevant data that will allow us to better understand the University's academic personnel in terms of numbers, composition, and the level of support needed for academic advancement of the respective academic unit.

Our penultimate objective must be to instill a societal sense of trust in the hiring process. In pursuance of this objective and in order to attract the most talented cadre of candidates with international education experience and objectively proven or demonstrated academic skill and potential, I propose to put in place a highly competitive and rigorous hiring process, including through a properly designed international-based mechanism. Although my understanding is that the existing legal infrastructure supports this option, if needed, I will pursue any changes needed in the current framework, to bring the desired clarity and ensure that **the evaluation of applications and recommendations are made from committees composed of reputable international scholars and Professors**. This will still preserve the formal decision-making powers of the University organs, primarily that of the Senate while allowing for a foreign academically outstanding body of professors to objectively evaluate the merits of each candidate. This will decrease local discretion thereby preventing the process from legitimacy contestations that usually accompany almost every new recruitment. It will also kick off a new, contemporary practice of academic recruitment that relies on highest merit-based standards, one which insists in people who have credits in international research and education and are capable of proving

themselves as suitable candidates for professorship before a jury whose members are tenured professors in top-100 world universities.

Our ultimate objective must be to excel and set a high standard in the crucial areas of academic excellence and international standing.

III. Expanding efforts and investments in the sciences, by developing programs that fund competitive projects on applied science, technology and social norms

Thanks to the academic potential and imaginative efforts of many faculty members, the University is increasingly well positioned to move forward at a time of extraordinary opportunity in the sciences. We may not be able to produce Nobel Prize winners (a theoretical proposition not to be excluded by way of future aspirations) but we have every reason to aspire high, and to produce highly competent and internationally competitive scholars.

Science is expensive, but it is singularly important. However, current investments fail by far to appreciate this importance. The present University strategy provides for the allocation of only 1% of the University's budget to science. This is inconceivable and unacceptable. At a national level also, the data provided by the most recent European Commission country report for Kosovo indicate that the total budget allocated in 2022 for science and innovation is less than 0,1% of GDP. My understanding however is that it is not that there is no available budgetary resources, but rather there is a lack of appropriately designed processes and capacities to absorb those resources.

I seek to propose that the University budget allocated to research and innovation be made up of no less than 10% of its overall budget. I will make every effort to persuade the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation to commit from its own resources the same amount in implementation of joint initiatives that will support scientific inquiry, increase research output, produce knowledge relevant to teaching curricula and market needs and, overall, expand the frontiers of our academic standing.

In pursuance of this objective, I envision the following efforts:

1. I will seek to increase the number of research projects funded by the University. Data for 2022 show that the University has funded only 7 small research projects of up to 12,000 Euro. This almost challenges even the notion of symbolism. I seek to propose and implement during the first year a plan that would **fund two projects for each academic unit (a total of 28) for an amount of around 25,000 Euro per project**. A combination of fundamental and applied research projects will be aimed at.

I will seek to also secure **funding for an additional number (up to five) of projects of a cross-disciplinary nature**, namely projects that cross the traditional disciplinary boundaries in search of new intellectual challenges for an amount of **around 50,000 Euro per project** – preference will be given to projects that feed on the productive interplay of scientific inquiry and technological innovation.

The requirement will be that **each project results in the publication of at least two academic papers in a journal indexed** in the databases recognized by the University regulation such as SCI for the selection and promotion of academic staff (projects from the Faculty of Arts being an exception to this requirement).

2. I seek to propose the **allocation of resources for one international academic conference or similar event to be organized annually from each of the academic units** (a total of fourteen annually), with substantial participation of international scholars and professors (at least half of panel members being international), which would result in the publication of a conference proceeding and/or broader dissemination of results through other means.
3. I plan to keep the existing practice of **funding those authors who publish with journals indexed in the Web of Science and Scopus Q1&Q2**, with a view to increasing both the amount allocated for journal articles and the number of articles to be funded per year. This will involve amendments to the existing rules.
4. I will plan a specific budgetary amount for **funding open access fees** of those accepted papers of our academic staff from leading journals in the respective disciplines subject to their indexing in the following Web of Science databases: Science Citation Index Expanded; Social Sciences Citation Index; and Arts & Humanities Citation Index. A specific regulation will detail the criteria.
5. I will plan for the first year the **recognition of the top ten scholars** from the University with highest number of all-time citations and the top ten with highest number of citations in the preceding year, including certain **monetary prizes**. The details will be set forth in a specific regulation. Those who have been selected in such a program will also benefit—in line with the new Statute—a facilitated procedure on academic promotion within the University and will be offered more sabbatical opportunities in best world universities.
6. I will seek to plan funding for access to both general and specialized digital libraries / databases and fund the **purchase** of a specific number of **books and subscription to leading academic journals** per academic unit, as selected by members of the respective academic community. The details will be set forth in a specific regulation. In parallel, the University of Prishtina academic publications will be incentivized and the publishing component—which could be potentially built around a rebranded **UPress**—be particularly supported and strengthened.

7. I will propose the release from payment of fees, or, in the alternative, design a **program of scholarships for doctoral students**, in order to bring them closer to the University; incentivize their research, build future research capacities, and increase the University's research output.
8. I will seek to promote a culture of respect and honor for those who have distinguished themselves with eminent scholarly results and contributions to their disciplines by regularly bestowing such honorific titles as **professor emeriti**. Each academic unit should be able to identify and propose at least one member of its academic community for this honorary recognition on an annual basis. The existing rules will be reviewed and revised.
9. I will pursue collaborative efforts with international partners to secure additional funding opportunities or to pursue joint efforts that contribute to the **strengthening of our research capacities**, including in particular increased participation and winning projects in the Horizon Europe programme.
10. I will seek to build partnerships with private initiatives and enterprises and, in the process, to **stimulate investment from the private sector**. A working group will be established with a view to developing a Smart Specialization Strategy.

IV. Extending the University's international role: increasing its international presence and standing

At a time when it is so crucial to understand the world around us and to have others in the world understand and recognize us, the University has a special role to play by recruiting staff and preparing students who are able to comprehend and embrace changing global realities. The University should make sure in particular that our staff and students are able to produce and acquire knowledge and skills that are comparable to the knowledge and skills produced and acquired at other institutions of higher learning in Europe and beyond.

Given the previously unseen interconnection and interdependence, in large part created by modern technology, hence an increased trend of seeking or acquiring knowledge in other countries or at other institutions of higher learning in Europe and beyond, the University today faces a far more difficult challenge than at any other time before, which is that: it is essentially not competing only with similar institutions in Kosovo or even in the region, but with universities and other institutions of higher learning in the larger European continent or even beyond. This background therefore dictates the need for very urgent attention and action to seek ways to articulate and implement a competitive vision with others in this larger horizon, and to

attract and sustain the interest of the strongest candidates for choosing this University to study and most talented staff to work with it.

For this purpose, as an initial step, I plan to establish a university-wide task force to review policies and practices concerning the creation, management, and coordination of international projects and activities in order to help the University expand its international presence and increase its international standing.

A major part of today's reputation is played by how universities are ranked internationally. Notwithstanding any subjectivities and value imperfections inherent in quantifying the ranking, the reality is that these ranking indexes are exerting significant influence on public perception and institutional reputation. One of the popular platforms that constantly generate public attention is the *Webometrics Ranking of World Universities*. The latest results, recording a decline for the University of Prishtina, generated particular public attention and criticism. With this ranking system in mind, but others not excluded, I plan and propose the following measures:

1. Subscribing every academic member of the University in google scholar and research gate platforms;
2. Incentivizing all academic units to publish their daily research activities in separate web pages in English in a language format that attracts search-engine attention;
3. Requesting from each academic unit to come up and apply with at least a master's degree in a foreign language; one which would attract foreign students to choose University of Prishtina as a study place;
4. Oblige every academic unit to conclude a joint-study agreement with a foreign, reputable school and ensure a minimum mobility of staff with their peers;
5. Set up a fund for foreign student scholarship which would pay basic living costs for studying and researching at the University of Prishtina foreign-language study programs;
6. Design and establish a visitor teaching program for foreign professors who are willing and interested to lecture block modules in existing study programs.

V. Consolidating and strengthening the rules and mechanisms concerning academic integrity, personal and professional conduct, and discrimination and harassment

Academic integrity is a major element of a university's strength and institutional dignity. Open questions around university's staff integrity—for which there was neither a persistent determination nor sufficient objectivity and institutional capacity from existing ethics and other decision-making bodies—continue to associate the entire university conduct with a poor brand, a sense of ignorance and a general negative opinion by the general public. This mess needs to be cleared in a way that does not harm the public role which the university is vested with and one which would assure objective and substantiated response from proper academic evaluations.

To meet these goals, I will undertake the following:

1. Design and set up an ethics system that is composed, amongst others, of reputable international members of academia who have experience and public trust on disciplinary proceedings at their home universities;
2. Promote radical transparency and inclusiveness in the evaluation process, including close and continuous monitoring from civic activists;
3. Devise a mechanism that elevates the standard of proof, one which would ensure that only cases of proven evidence can be submitted for evaluation before ethics body;
4. Envisage a mechanism that sets the burden of proof to the complaining party and associate all costs for activating the mechanism to the party that has lost the case;
5. Promote the concept that maintenance of a proper ethics policy has financial repercussions; however, the university must be able to provide for that funding in order to assure the public that it is a credible and honest player in its market. In this connection, I seek to also place an emphasis on prevention, making sure that any new thesis being submitted at the University undergoes a plagiarism check before it is allowed to proceed to the defense stage. This will equally apply to any other publications by staff and students. All members of the academic community should have access to anti-plagiarism platforms and do the screenings before submitting their work for consideration for publication elsewhere. We might not be able to change the history of what has happened before, but we can certainly create a new one, which is one that builds on and avoids the mistakes of the past;

6. These measures require robust regulatory changes in the existing rules concerning academic integrity, personal and professional conduct, and discrimination and harassment, which changes will be effectuated as a matter of high priority and with the already outlined radical transparency and inclusiveness (any interested parties, the civic activists included, will be invited to form part of a broad consultative process). Prior to their formal adoption, all these regulations will undergo a thorough review from the Statutory Commission to ensure compliance with both applicable domestic rules and the highest international standards.

VI. Providing the best educational experience and facilities for students: reshaping and revitalizing the learning curriculum and testing centers

One of the University's ever-present challenges is to provide our students with the opportunity for an educational experience commensurate with their extraordinary talents and aspirations. In order to achieve this, we have to follow and implement imperative trends elsewhere, primarily in Western Europe and North America. In this connection, I will outline only a few broad trends:

- First, efforts at **curricular review and reform** ought to be constant. Each academic unit will be obliged to engage with foreign assessors in each curricular review at least at bachelor level.
- Second, many of our academic units should create new approaches to the professions and the sectors of society they influence and serve, **combining scholarly rigor with relevance to practice**. I will incentivize and jointly with the Ministry of Education prioritize most market-emerging fields of study that the University needs to introduce in the short-run, including applied sciences such as ICT, mechatronic engineering, services that are currently being outsourced by foreign markets (EU, US, Canada, etc.) and production industries such as *e.g.* food, soil quality, bio agriculture, fine minerals and alike.
- Third, within the University, we should begin to enhance collaboration across different academic units and departments. **Joint degree programs** increasingly allow students to prepare for careers that bring different professional and intellectual interests to bear on some of society's most pressing problems.

Other trends or indeed a number of other specific objectives will form part of this governing vision:

1. Our students' educational experience should increasingly extend beyond the boundaries of our University. We will pursue initiatives and international cooperation agreements

that promote the international experience of our students. I will make every effort to **increase the number of students who study abroad** as part of international exchange programs.

2. Life outside the classroom should continue to develop, pursuing collaborative projects that will result in the **creation of attractive student spaces** supported by University. Such initiatives will be explored with the involvement of the leadership and members of the staff of both the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Architecture.
3. Students should have **proper and sufficient access to modern technology**; at a minimum, each academic unit should have computer labs or spaces for access to the internet and printing.

One additional objective should be the establishment of computerized **testing centers**, especially in those academic units that have a larger number of students, so as to enable fair treatment among students, and true and accurate measurement of knowledge and results.

VII. Strengthening and supporting the research capacities of the research-based centers and institutes

Specialized centers focused on research should be the leading components of the University's research enterprise. They are well positioned to coordinate research efforts and projects within each academic unit of the University. As part of this objective, the focus shall primarily be on the following tasks:

1. I will seek to support the current and promote the establishment of new research centers and institutes throughout the University.
2. I will ensure that the new Statute and the accompanying regulations will revoke the existing bureaucratic structure relating to university foreign donor projects. I will ensure that the new Statute will vest university research institutes with a legal personality, though they will still remain owned, audited and affiliated with the University, that allows them to apply for A+ foreign donors (such as European Research Fund, horizons, foreign research foundations, international organizations' funds, etc.) alongside the University. Such a status will incentivize academic staff to kick off research institutes' initiatives and, while asserting their market potential in research funding, elevate the brand of UP as a credible research institution that receives funds from multiple foreign, A+ foundations. This will massively activate a completely passive research market workforce which the university possesses and definitely attribute a pride that the UP must

have already demonstrated in this perspective. As a comparison, most private and other regional public universities have a better record of foreign funds than the University of Prishtina, an indicator that demonstrates how ignorant bureaucracy has ruined UP's market potential that is presently very passive.

3. I will seek to remove the current provision in the relevant regulation that provides for a relatively high percentage of income from these research centers or institutes to be allocated to the University budget.
4. I will seek ways to streamline and simplify the procedure for the administration of funds from these research centers or institutes, so as to reduce the administrative burden for their operation.
5. I will make sure that the University will be able to fund the key administrative positions within these research centers or institutes.

VIII. Expanding and strengthening the capacity of the administrative staff

A competent and effective administration is vital to the functioning and success of any institution. The same is true with the University of Prishtina. Despite all efforts and commitment of the current administrative staff, one might observe an absence of new recruitments for a rather long period of time. In spite of numerous retirements over the years, those positions have been left vacant. According to available data, there are a total of 71 vacant positions, which have been approved but never filled.

The implementation of many projects and initiatives, in particular those with an international character, would require well-prepared administrative personnel, equipped with foreign language and related skills. While the process of hiring administrative staff is subject to another set of legislation, the criteria of merit and excellence should equally apply to this category of personnel.

IX. Revitalizing the institutional capacities for a more effective communication of the results of the academic staff, of their achievements, and contributions to society

At the time we live, effective communication and publicity often trumps even the result itself; thus, while the prime objective of the agenda should be centered around the results, achievements and contributions of the staff, recognizing them is not only intellectually desirable but also necessary to maximize the University's educational and research impact and overall

societal contributions. This has not always been the case; often, many achievements or contributions of staff, have gone publicly silent. The web page of the University and those of the individual academic units should be the basic starting points for implementing a vision of a more open, active and robust space for transmitting any and all activities and results of staff and students, thus going far beyond the mere publication of administrative or official meetings of the leadership of the University and that of the academic units. Every single publication of staff members, same as any other contributions, national or international, ought to be publicly conveyed in service of not only transparency, but also institutional recognition and public reputation. In line with larger international goals and trends, all news (in particular the one related to staff publications) should be also published in the English version of the web pages. An enhanced presence in the social media platforms is also critical. In order to implement this vision, a permanent position of a Director of Communications and/or highly skilled media professionals is indispensable. A consolidated Communications Strategy will be developed and put in place at the earliest possibility.

X. Constantly identifying and addressing resource needs, including through partnerships with other public entities and businesses

Given the scale of our legitimate ambitions, it is only natural to identify and look for resources that supplement those of the University. In order to keep up with the trends of a modern university and to be able to link its functions and operations as closely as possible to the market needs and opportunities, the University should actively explore and forge partnerships with a whole host of other entities, public and private. A mixed advisory group composed of members of the academic personnel and business community could be initially established to look for ways of exploring and mobilizing the public-private potential in the field of higher education, research and innovation. One can obviously imagine many forms that such partnerships could take, from funding specific market-relevant research to questions of architectural style and life on campus. All in all, there needs to be a correlation between strategic priorities and specific fundraising targets.