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# ENQA AGENCY REVIEW: AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION (ASHE)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present report is the result of the external review of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, ASHE, undertaken in October 2016 for the renewal of the agency's membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

The process started with the production of a Self-assessment report by ASHE, followed by a site-visit of 3 full days in October 2016 by the experts' panel during which all the stakeholders involved in ASHE's processes were interviewed.

The following activities of ASHE were addressed during the external review:

- Initial accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes (at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral level)
- Reaccreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes
- Re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes
- Audit of higher education institutions

After the end of the first five year cycle in 2016, which has marked a significant step in the process of external quality assurance in higher education as it is the first time that a complete round of reviews was carried out in Croatia, the Agency is now in an improvement phase and is rethinking its procedures with the lessons learnt, with considering feedback received all along the process, and with a view to fully implement the 2015 ESG version in order to enhance procedures for the next accreditation cycle to start in 2017.

ASHE is a well-established and recognized national Agency in Croatia whose role in support to improve quality assurance in the country's higher education institutions is to be emphasized. Its activity is legally established and the procedures and criteria are defined by the Agency.

The purpose of this document is to advise the ENQA Board on the compliance of the Agency with each of the ESG standards, but also to provide recommendations to the Agency in order to facilitate improvement of its activities in quality assurance in higher education.

The panel considers ASHE to be in full compliance with the following standards:

- 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance
- 3.2 Official status
- 3.3 Independence
- 3.4 Thematic analysis
- 3.5 Resources
- 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct
- 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

The panel also considers ASHE to substantially comply with the following standards:

- 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance
- 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose
- 2.3 Implementing processes
- 2.4 Peer-review experts
- 2.6 Reporting

Finally, in the light of all the information provided, the panel considers the Agency to be partially compliant with the following standards:

- 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

- 2.7 Complaints and appeals

The panel concludes that, when considering the case as a whole, ASHE is in compliance with the ESG.

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, ASHE (Agencija za znanost i visoko obrazovanje, AZVO), with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG 2015). It is based on an external review conducted between July 2016 and January 2017.

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

ASHE underwent its first external review in 2011. It was granted full membership of ENQA and was registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in the same year. As requested in the process, ASHE provided a follow-up to the 2011's recommendations in 2012 and 2013.

As this is ASHE's second review, the panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge progress as regards recommendations formulated in the previous review. The panel has adopted a developmental approach. It has done so for two reasons. Firstly, in general, the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim at constant enhancement of Quality Assurance Agencies. Secondly, since the promulgation of the ESG 2015 is relatively recent, the panel paid specific attention to ASHE's ongoing processes aiming at transforming its criteria and processes to the requirements of the ESG 2015.

The Agency is also applying for the renewal of its registration in EQAR.

### MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2011 REVIEW

The first external review which ASHE underwent took place in 2011. It resulted in ASHE being confirmed as full member of ENQA. ASHE's activity was judged very positively; the panel of 2011 considered that the compliance of the ESG (2005) was as follows:

#### ASHE fully complied with ESG 2005:

- 2.1 Use of Internal Quality Assurance Procedures
- 2.2 Development of External Quality Assurance Processes
- 2.3 Criteria for decisions
- 2.4 Processes Fit for Purpose
- 2.5 Reporting
- 2.6 Follow-up Procedures
- 2.7 Periodic Reviews
- 2.8 System-wide Analysis
- 3.1 Use of External Quality Assurance Procedures for Higher Education
- 3.2 Official Status
- 3.4 Resources
- 3.5 Mission Statement
- 3.6 Independence
- 3.7 External Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes used by the Agency
- 3.8 Accountability Procedures

#### ASHE substantially complied with ESG 2005:

- 3.3 Activities

## **REVIEW PROCESS**

The 2016 external review of ASHE was conducted in line with the process described in the current *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of ASHE was appointed by ENQA; it was composed of the following members:

- Jürgen Kohler (Chair), Professor of private law and private litigation, Greifswald University. Former Chair of the German Akkreditierungsrat (Accreditation Council), Germany [EUA nominee]
- Vanessa Duclos (Secretary), Officer - Institutional and International Relations Unit, National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA), Spain [ENQA nominee]
- Boris Ćurković, Freelance educational consultant. Former Deputy Director of the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HEA), Bosnia and Herzegovina [ENQA nominee]
- Simona Dimovska, Master's student in Intellectual property (LL.M) Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. Steering Committee Member of European Students' Union, Macedonia [ESU nominee]

Agnė Grajauskienė, Reviews Manager at ENQA, acted as coordinator of the entire process.

The review process has been carried out as established by the ENQA procedure comprising the nomination of the panel members, production of a self-assessment report by the Agency, a site-visit and finally an external review report sent to ASHE to comment on any factual error they may detect in the draft.

Thanks to the information given in the Self-assessment report (SAR) and the interviews, and based on the evidence provided before and during the site-visit, the panel could reach, for each of the ESG, consensus in judgements on compliance by the end of the visit.

Finally, the result of such process is the present external report drafted by the review Secretary in cooperation with the Chair and panel members. It is submitted to the ENQA Board to enable its members to make an assessment of the ESG compliance of ASHE.

### **Self-assessment report**

ASHE's self-assessment report, comprising 91 pages in length, was sent to the panel approximately six weeks before the site-visit, including documents intended to serve as more detailed information and as evidence in support of statements made in the self-assessment report.

The SAR was produced by a group of 5 ASHE staff members forming the team responsible for the preparation of the self-assessment report. This group acted with the support of all ASHE's departments and a majority of stakeholders who participated directly or received the SAR and confirmed its validity as an accurate description of the Agency.

The report in itself was informative. The panel particularly appreciated the auto-criticism and auto-detection of areas for improvement highlighted throughout the document. To support all the information provided, 10 annexes were forwarded to the panel as evidence. However, a series of additional annexes had to be requested from the Agency. In some cases, due to the fact that a number of the necessary documents had to be requested at relatively short notice before the site-visit and that these required translation, certain information, or evidence thereof, was received only few weeks before the site visit. Some information and documents required some interpretation during the visit; nonetheless, full clarification was accomplished in the course of the evaluation process through further information given during the site visit and through analysis of the reality of ASHE operations.

## Site visit

The site visit for the external review of ASHE took place on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2016 at ASHE's premises in Zagreb. The panel met the different stakeholders linked to the Agency's activities, namely:

- ASHE's Governing Board
- ASHE's Accreditation Council
- ASHE's Management team
- ASHE's staff
- Experts involved in the different external quality assurance processes
- Ministry of Higher Education and Science
- Rector's Conference and Higher Education Institutions' representatives
- Students' representatives
- Socio-economic stakeholders
- The Council of Polytechnics and Colleges representatives

The above-mentioned stakeholders represented all ASHE's activities. The panel appreciates their availability at the time to attend and to answer questions as well as the usefulness of all the interviews during the three full-day visit.

The support provided by ASHE's staff both before and throughout the site-visit is to be underlined. The premises and logistical arrangements were perfectly adapted to the tasks to be carried out. The information requested before the visit and onsite was provided quickly and clearly, and the request for a concluding extra session for clarifications was immediately accepted. The panel do confirm the predisposition of ASHE to provide an answer to all types of requests as well as their kindness and professionalism throughout the process.

Finally, the support of the ENQA coordinator before, during and after the visit has been highly appreciated by the panel.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

### HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The higher education system in Croatia is a binary system, with universities and polytechnics (universities of applied science) as well as colleges, and with both public and private higher education institutions. While some higher education institutions are integrated, there are higher education institutions which acknowledge a strong element of faculty independence in operating higher education. From the perspective of governmental responsibility, higher education operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport (MSES).

At present, Croatia provides tertiary education in a total of 119 higher education institutions, consisting of: 10 Universities (8 public and 2 private), 15 Polytechnics (11 public and 4 private), 25 Colleges (22 private and 3 public), 68 Faculties and Academies (University constituents with the status of a legal person) and finally, one public university centre. The number of students is 178.676, of which 16.729 are enrolled in the private sector and 161.947 in the public sector.

There are two types of degrees:

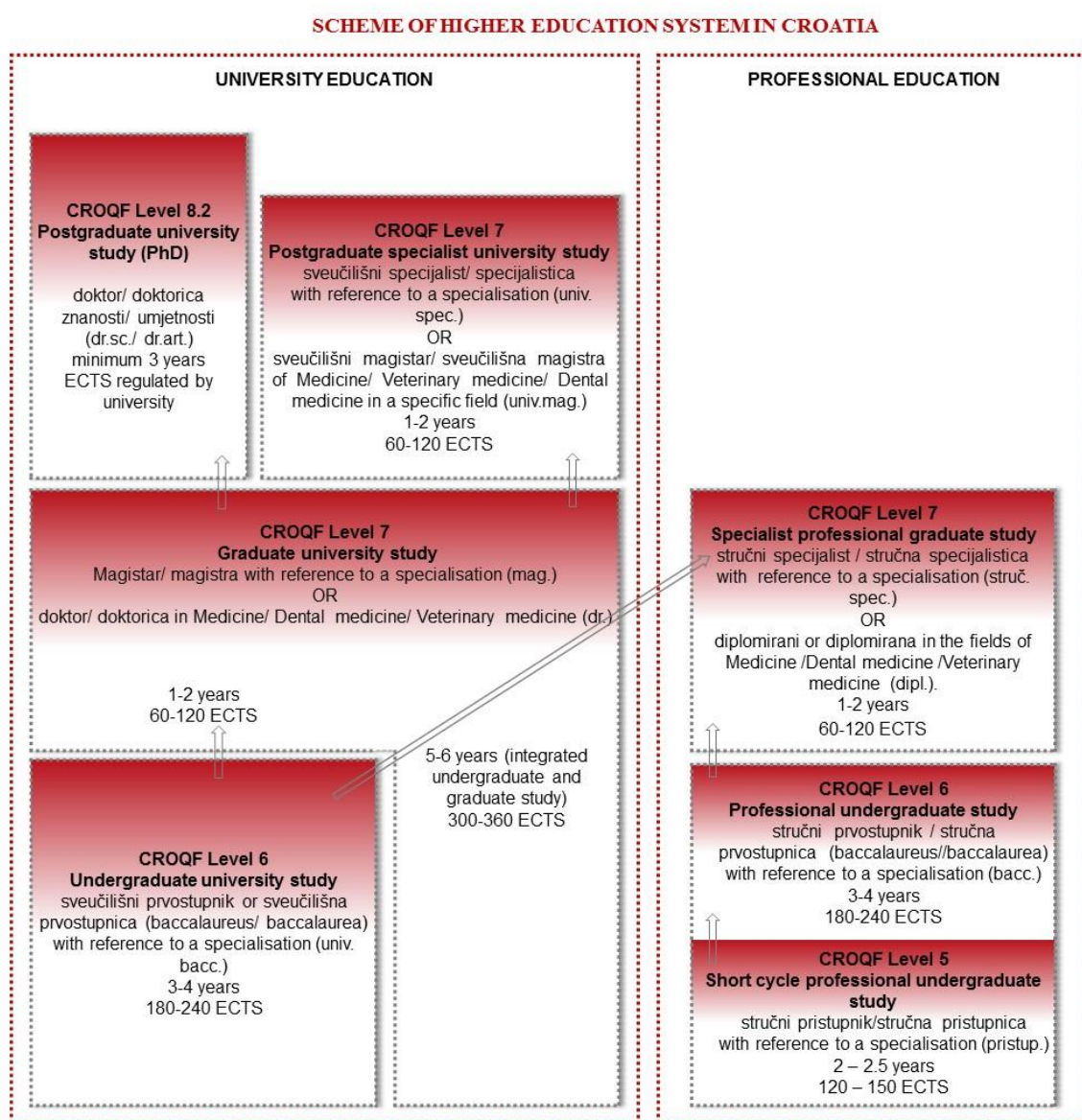
- University study programmes (delivered only by Universities): trains students at all three levels of higher education to work in society in general and to be both research-oriented and to provide professional knowledge.
- Professional study programmes (mainly delivered by Polytechnics and Colleges, but can be delivered, exceptionally, by Universities, too): trains students to be employable in applied professions which require academic background while not emphasizing the development of



specific research expertise of graduates. They provide education at the level of bachelor and master (EQF levels 6 and 7).

The total number of degrees offered in the country is 1370 (1129 university study programmes and 241 professional study programmes).

The types and levels of degrees are defined by the Croatian Qualifications Framework which was adopted in 2013 by the Act on Croatian Qualifications Framework (CroQF). However, it is worth noting that, at that time, it contains only generic descriptors, while Croatia is still in the process of developing individual specific standards for specific academic fields and their study programmes. The structure is divided into the three common cycles: undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate studies for university degrees and short professional studies, professional undergraduate study and specialist professional graduate study for the professional education; this type of structure is indicated in the following overview, as given in the ASHE self assessment report and on the ASHE website: figure:



Source: [ASHE's website](#)

The total number of ECTS at the end of both the graduate university study cycle and the graduate professional study cycle amounts to 300 ECTS Credits.

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Quality Assurance in Croatia started to be developed in the 1990's, while major progress was brought about by the creation of the Agency for Science and Higher Education in 2005 and the further regulation by the Law on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education developed under the auspices of the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports and by National Parliament in 2009 (and with subsequent ministerial ordinances). This rather detailed law applies to quality assurance for all types of higher education and science institutions in Croatia. It defines minimum quality criteria, the procedures on quality assurance as well as the role of each stakeholder involved in these procedures, and more concretely, it defines the role of ASHE as the unique competent body for external quality assurance activities in Croatia.

Since the last review in 2011, the Croatian higher education system and its quality assurance evolved. In 2013 the Law on Croatian Qualifications Framework, followed by an Ordinance in 2014 were adopted, setting the base for deeper implementation of the National Qualification Framework through the evaluation of study programmes against the standards defined within this framework. This is a task that ASHE will have to carry out once the standards will be defined at the level of subject benchmark statements.

On the other hand, in 2014, a national Strategy for Education, Science and Technology for the period 2014-2020 was ratified by the Croatian Parliament, intended to foster the:

- Improvement of study programmes
- Introduction of a binary system of high quality
- Assurance of the quality of staff at Higher Education Institutions
- Assurance of an efficient system of Higher Education Institutions' funding
- Improvement of the student standard (paying attention to the social dimension)
- Development of the international dimension of Higher Education
- Assurance of the importance of quality culture and accountability principle

These political and legal developments allow predicting that further changes in terms of intended improvements are expected also with regard to quality assurance within the Croatian Higher Education Area in the next few years. In view of this fact, ASHE's operations are subject to dynamism of changes in the national context.

## **AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION – ASHE**

The Agency for Science and Higher Education, ASHE, was established in 2005 by a Government Decree. At that time, ASHE was charged with the responsibility to implement the procedures of external evaluation and accreditation in science and higher education, while the National Council for Science and the National Council for Higher Education, which at that time was endowed with the competence to develop quality assurance procedures, operated at the level of national strategy in higher education and research.

After a first round of evaluations under this framework, it was decided, in 2009, to amend this Law with the aim of reinforcing ASHE's role and independence. The Law defines ASHE as the sole quality assurance body competent for external evaluation in science and higher education. And it establishes the framework in which the Agency should develop external quality assurance tasks on:

1. Initial accreditation
2. Re-accreditation
3. Thematic evaluation
4. Audit

## **ASHE'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE**

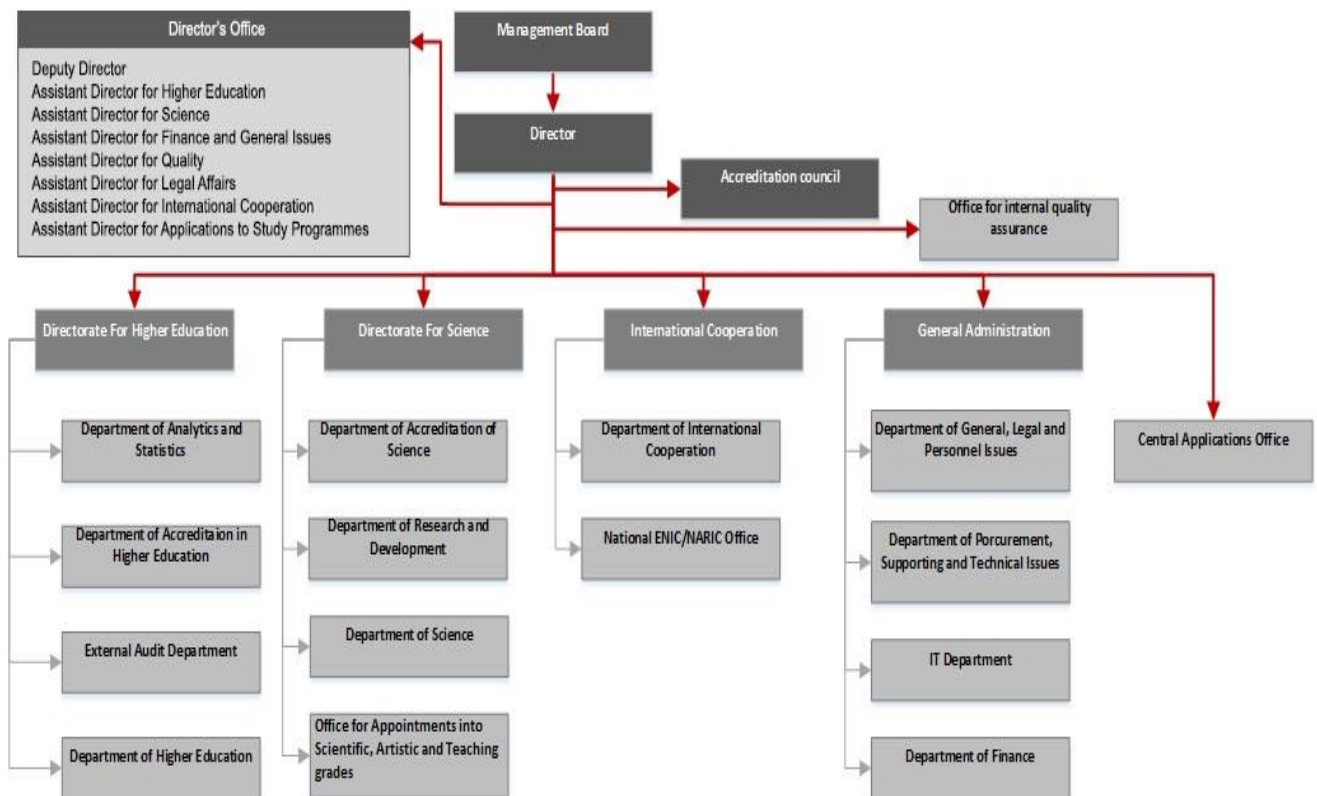
ASHE has the status of independent legal person founded by the Republic of Croatia. ASHE is operated under the auspices of three Bodies: the Management Board, Director and the Accreditation Council.

The **Management Board** is composed of 8 members and a chair appointed for four years by the Croatian Parliament, based on nominations of the Rectors' Conference, the Council of Polytechnics Schools of Professional Higher Education, the Government (academic members in that case, not state officer positions), the National Council of Science, the National Council of Higher Education, the Croatian Students Union, and a member of ASHE's management. This Board is in charge of the supervision of ASHE's work and the ratification of its budget, strategic plan, annual report and annual work plan. It is the validation Body of the Agency.

The **Director**, appointed by the Management Board for a four year term renewable, represents the Agency and manages all its activities, human resources, legal actions and budget.

The **Accreditation Council**, which is the decision-making body of the Agency in matters of quality assurance, is composed of 11 members plus an associate member without voting rights who is a representative of a civil society organisation appointed for four years by the ASHE Management Board at the proposal of the ASHE Director. Accreditation Council's members are representatives of the different stakeholders in quality assurance affairs: higher education institutions, students and business sector members, who are nominated by their respective organizations (Rectors' Conference, Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, Chamber of Commerce, Student Union, National Council for Higher Education, Science and Technological Development), but also through a public call for some of its academic members. Its role is to revise and adopt the different accreditation or audit procedures and criteria to appoint members of appeal committees and experts panels (the latter based on proposals by ASHE's staff), to decide on any accreditation outcome, to produce annual reports on activities, etc. The Accreditation Council is also responsible for issuing an opinion on all the accreditations and audits. It does so by deciding on the accreditation or audit results – based on the information and data in the SAR and report of the evaluation panel established in the given case –, which is then transmitted to the Director and subsequently to the Ministry for formal information of the higher education institution on the result of the process.

The Agency has 73 employees, of which 20 are involved in quality assurance activities. It is structured as follows:



Source: [ASHE's website](#)

#### ASHE'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

ASHE performs a series of procedures on external quality assurance, according to its legal framework and carries out the following processes:

a) **Initial accreditation of study programmes and Higher Education Institutions:**

All new higher education institution (public and private) and all new study programmes of Private Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges – not at public universities which act under their own responsibility – must undergo an external evaluation process based on defined criteria and the model: self-evaluation report/site visit by an experts' panel/external review report in order to check if the HEI or study programme meets the legal quality requirements. The process is legally established by the Ministry's Ordinance of the Content of Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out Study Programmes and Reaccreditation of Higher Education Institutions, which provides mostly input criteria for initial accreditation. ASHE issued the document called Initial Accreditation Procedure. The Agency makes a recommendation of issuing or denying a license for the implementation of a proposed study programme or higher education institution, while the final decision is issued by the Ministry based on the recommendation communicated to the Ministry by ASHE. This is an ex-ante accreditation leading to licensing. Since 2011 ASHE has run this process for 32 study programmes and one HEI (Higher Education Institution).

b) **Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and study programmes:**

The re-accreditation procedure accredits all the public and private higher education institutions. Re-accreditation is established by the Ordinance of the Content of Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out Study Programmes and Reaccreditation of Higher Education Institutions and follows input criteria provided by it, but it is based on Procedure for Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions, Criteria for Assessment of Quality of Higher Education Institutions within Universities and Criteria or Assessment of Quality of Polytechnics and Colleges, all adopted

by ASHE.. Although the re-accreditation is basically institution-oriented, it also results in decisions at the study programmes level based on checks if the HEI meets the minimum conditions legally established as well as the additional quality criteria of the Agency. Each HEI and each study programme should undergo a re-accreditation every 5 years and under the same procedure both the Institution and all the study programmes are evaluated. The process includes a phase of self-evaluation, site-visit by an experts' panel, external review report, appeal procedure and follow-up. On the basis of the SAR, external review report and data collected, the Accreditation Council issues an opinion aiming at recommending the Ministry to issue a confirmation to perform the activities and study programmes, a denial of license or a letter of expectation with a 1 to 3 years' follow-up on the action plan. The outcome of such follow-up can lead to an issuance or denial of license. Since 2011 ASHE has run this process for 139 HEIs.

c) **Audit procedure:**

The Audit process aims at assessing the level of development and efficiency of the quality assurance system of an HEI or a Faculty, based on the ESG part I. The process comprises the drafting and evaluation of a SAR, a site-visit by a panel, external review report, appeal procedure and follow-up. In the case of a positive decision by the Accreditation Council, a certificate is issued. A total of 40 Institutions have gone through this procedure in the last 5 years, of which 17 were awarded the certificate. At present, the audit is a compulsory procedure; however, legal changes envisaged will make it a voluntary activity carried out at the discretion of each HEI.

d) **Re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes:**

Re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes is a new activity which ASHE introduced in 2016, based on the document "Re-accreditation of Postgraduate University Study Programmes in Croatia: Principles and Criteria". The process includes a self-evaluation, site-visit by experts' panel, external review report, appeal procedure and follow-up. Evaluation of doctoral study programmes is conducted in clusters, with one large panel in charge for all programmes in similar scientific fields and sub-panels carrying out site-visits and submitting a programme level report. The Accreditation Council adopted a plan of reaccreditation of study programmes for 2016 and 2017. So far, 31 processes started for 6 clusters in June and September 2016. At the time of the external review of the ENQA panel, no case was completed.

e) **Thematic evaluation:**

From time to time, ASHE runs thematic evaluations, which aim at evaluating a specific aspect of the higher education system, resulting in a report. Thematic evaluations aim at reporting on a specific, particular subject, with the report being based on study and data evaluation done by a group of experts. The process is usually based on data collection and desk research, rarely on site visits. The process always results in a publicly available report in the form of summary of data collected and system-wide recommendations, adopted by the Accreditation Council. These evaluations can be launched by proposal of the Ministry, a higher education Institution and/or its students' union, but also at ASHE's own accord. If the result of this evaluation is unsatisfactory, (in rare cases) ASHE can start a re-accreditation procedure. This has been the case for the Doctoral study programmes, which ASHE commenced to evaluate and accredit at the request of the Ministry in 2012 and 2013. This particular process resulted in establishing the new procedure for re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes, which started in 2016 (see above).

Thematic evaluations do not produce any outcomes at the level of individual institutions or programmes and are not used as a basis for reaccreditation procedure of individual institutions or programmes. For this reason, thematic evaluations have not been considered as being part of the scope of the ESG. Nevertheless, the system-wide re-accreditation procedures launched after analysing the results of such analysis are considered as being in the scope of the ESG as it is the case for the re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes mentioned under point d).

**f) Other activities not directly linked to quality assurance in higher education and science:**

In addition to the aforementioned activities run by ASHE in matters of external quality assurance, ASHE carries out a series of other tasks. In particular, ASHE provides QA of scientific institutions through different procedures such as initial accreditation of scientific organisations, re-accreditation of scientific organisations, thematic evaluation in science and evaluation of research quality for the purpose of establishing centres of excellence in research.<sup>1</sup> These procedures, even though some elements of the ESG are taken into account in their layout, focus on concrete criteria on research based on specific items and international practices in this field. However, as for the procedure of re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes, there is an exception in that this ASHE activity is considered to be a case of re-accreditation in higher education due to its essential link to teaching and learning; hence, in these cases the ASHE approach fully undertakes to match the ESG requirements.

ASHE also manages the Central Application Office related to activities on the submission and processing of applications to HEIs thanks to which candidates can apply for the desired degrees.

The Croatian ENIC-NARIC office, which carries out the tasks for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications, is under ASHE's responsibility.

Finally, ASHE provides professional and administrative support to the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, the Committee for Ethics in Science and Higher Education and to the Office for Scientific Field Committees.

**g) International activity:**

ASHE is an active Agency at international level, being a member of:

- INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education)
- CHEA (Council for Higher Education Accreditation)
- OECD IMHE (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Institutional Management in Higher Education)
- IREG (Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence)

At the European level in particular, ASHE is a member of:

- ENQA
- EQAR
- CEENQA (Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education)
- ECA (European Consortium for Accreditation)

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<sup>1</sup> These processes are not covered by this review. Please, see Annex 2: Terms of References of the Review.

Within these networks, ASHE participates in a number of Working Groups and Projects aiming at improving Quality Assurance in Croatia. This has allowed the Agency to participate in several international events and present the Agency's activities all over the world.

Regarding ASHE cross-border activities, the Agency has run and is running only very few evaluation processes abroad without direct legal consequences as far as the Law does not allow the Agency to do so:

- Evaluation of the International School for Social and Business Studies in Celje (Slovenia), which was a pilot evaluation procedure that was not intended to serve as an evaluation in lieu of a compulsory national Slovenian evaluation or accreditation.
- Evaluation of the University of Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), which is currently being run and will not carry legal consequences in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Both evaluations were carried out under ASHE's criteria and methodology and led to the publication of a report on the outcomes of the review in question.

At present and in the foreseeable future, ASHE does not intend to broaden its international accreditation or auditing activities significantly. The current legislation in Croatia and in those countries in which ASHE has operated so far does not allow the Agency to run reviews in foreign countries with accreditation consequences. This has been the case of an audit carried out in Slovenia. However, as for the Institutional evaluation of the University of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ASHE's accreditation decision is relevant for certifying the qualification of that institution as a university recognized by Croatian authorities, e.g. for funding purposes.

#### **h) Near-future developments**

It is worth noting that ASHE is going to see, in the next few months, changes in its processes due to reforms of the relevant law which will reform, inter alia, external quality assurance.

In particular, in 2017 a new procedure is likely to be launched in Croatia regarding the evaluation of study programmes for the registration in Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) based on the corresponding Laws. Once subject-specific academic and occupational qualification standards ("subject benchmark statements") have been defined within the CROQF, ASHE will have to check if the study programmes are aligned both with the ESGs in general and with those outcomes defined in the CROQF. However, so far the political process foresees that the law will make checks of programmes against the CROQF and the academic and occupational qualification standards to be a voluntary process only.

Another major modification will concern Audits. These will no longer be a compulsory process but a voluntary one.

The other procedures will be subject to changes within ASHE as the result of the end of the first cycle and detection of areas of improvement.

#### **ASHE'S FUNDING**

The budget is largely state funded; ASHE does not charge higher education institutions for external QA exercises. The budget is defined as a result of the Director of ASHE's proposal to the Ministry of Finance for a three years period. In 2015, 19.317.782 Kunas of the total budget of 22.167.045 Kunas (equivalent to approximately 2.950.400 EUR) were provided by the State budget, while other revenue originate in projects funded by the EU and own revenues. Generally speaking, the Croatian national budget makes provision for steady funding, while the budget varies by about 10% from one period to another. The total budget is of 22.167.045 Kunas. It is divided into the following items:

- Staff expenditure (including salaries and other staff expenditures): 8.497.540 Kunas
- Material costs (including travel costs, material and energy expenditure, service costs and other costs): 11.368.109 Kunas
- Acquisition of non-financial assets (including software licences, investment for computer programmes, office, computer and communication equipment, maintenance, furniture, etc.): 1.792.738 Kunas.

The division within the budget is discussed every year, based on the work plan to be carried out through a proposal made by ASHE's Director to the Management Board, which formally approves the budget.



# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF ASHE WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG 2015)

## ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

**Standard:**

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

#### **Evidence**

The Agency for Science and Higher Education, as the unique Quality Assurance Body in Croatia for Science and Higher Education, undertakes, on a regular and cyclical basis, a series of external quality assurance procedures detailed in the section “ASHE’s functions, activities, procedures” on page 12 of the present report. The Agency runs Initial Accreditation of Study Programmes and Higher Education Institutions, Re-accreditation of Higher education Institutions and Study Programmes (including an additional re-accreditation process for the Doctoral study programmes, and finally Audits of Internal Quality Assurance Systems of Higher Education Institutions. All these functions are law-based and regulated by Acts and Ordinances endorsed by the State with a clear reference to the importance of the ESG within the Agency’s processes: “In carrying out the activities determined by this Act and other regulations, the Agency shall be autonomous and independent, respecting European standards and guidelines as well as international practice in the field of quality assurance in science and higher education” (Act on Quality Assurance).

The aforementioned basic external quality assurance activities are supported and augmented by ASHE’s role to collect and process information on the quality and efficiency of academic and higher education activities, and also on the developmental trends of the systems of research and higher education (Act on Quality Assurance) through the analyses of data and publication of thematic analyses (developed under ESG 3.4). In addition, ASHE adopts a supportive role in the Croatian Higher Education Area to help with the better understanding of national and international good practice in quality assurance in higher education and research, namely through the organization of workshops and seminars on specific topics like the ESG 2015 or learning outcomes.

The mission, vision, purpose and values of ASHE, which underpin the aforesaid aims and objectives in matters of quality assurance and enhancement and also indicate ASHE’s commitment to involve relevant stakeholders in this pursuit, are clearly stated in the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan. A similar statement of the ASHE’s mission and vision was provided by the ASHE Strategy 2010 – 2014. The current statement on vision and mission, which is relevant for ASHE’s strategy, reads:

*ASHE’s vision:*

“By actively participating in shaping trends and innovative practice in the field of quality assurance, ASHE will strive to contribute to positive changes in the European Higher Education Area.”

*ASHE’s mission:*

“ASHE promotes the importance of quality assurance in higher education and science with the aim of continuous quality improvement of higher education institutions, scientific organisations and the overall Croatian system of science and higher education and its recognisability within the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area, while encouraging the society’s sustainable development”.

Based on this mission, ASHE has developed its four years Strategic plan which is accompanied, every year, by an annual report on the activities carried out along the past year as well as the activity plan for the next year, publicly available on the website.

Regarding the stakeholders' involvement in the governance and work of the Agency, the official documents, interviews, members of the different governance bodies or the experts' panel members clearly shows that they are involved at all the levels: bodies, panels, definition of new accreditation procedures, improvement of accreditation procedures and finally thematic analysis. In concrete terms, for example, the experts and Accreditation Council are involved in the development of the procedures and criteria at all levels. This is accomplished by participating actively in the meetings and workshops organized to elaborate new or revised procedures, as is the case with the revision of the re-accreditation procedure for HEIs and study programmes to be launched at the end of 2016. Beside of that, representatives of students and higher education institutions regularly participate as voting members in the Governing Board of the Agency, while representatives of higher education institutions, students and the Croatian Chamber of Commerce are full members of the Accreditation Council.

### **Analysis**

On the basis of all the evidence (paper and voice based) provided by ASHE, the panel believes that the different external quality assurance procedures and other activities of the Agency are run in a regular mode, and that these activities are clear and understandable to the different stakeholders, which are actively invited to take part in developing and practicing these activities.

The mission is defined, published and used as a founding principle to set the Strategy of ASHE which determines the objectives to be reached for a four years period each, followed by a yearly follow-up of its implementation.

The different stakeholders, namely the Ministry, Higher Education Institutions, academics, students, business sector representatives and international representatives are actively represented in the different bodies and committees of the Agency. However, at the governance level, the panel recommend to consider to also include at least one international expert as a constituent member of the Management Board and the Accreditation Council, while the panel appreciates that, at that moment, international experts tend to be sufficiently represented within the expert panels.

It is evident that the relevant stakeholders also are involved in the development or improvement of the accreditation procedures carried out by ASHE, be it through meetings, questionnaires or consultation processes. But also in the thematic analysis which ASHE launches from case to case as and when necessary, as for example in creating a working group composed by several of the above-mentioned stakeholders for the analysis of issues concerning doctoral study programmes.

Finally, it was clear to the panel, thanks to the interviews to stakeholders, that ASHE's work is highly appreciated and trusted, and that the agency has a key role in quality assurance developments in the country.

The panel believes – despite a number of improvements the Agency should put in place with regard to the ESG part 2 – that at present ASHE essentially runs its activities in line with the criteria defined under part 2 in a generally satisfactory way in that ASHE substantially complies with ESG 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6 and partially complies with ESG 2.5 and 2.7. Moreover, in as much as deficiencies can be detected, ASHE is aware of these and is prepared to tackle them.

### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends – as is also envisaged and stated in the SAR – to strengthen the participation of international experts in its governance body and/or, if such should be established in the future, its advisory bodies, thus adding an international perspective to its operations at the level of institutional decision-making.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

#### **ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS**

Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

#### **Evidence**

The Agency for Science and Higher Education was created by the Croatian Parliament Decree published in the Official Gazette 101/04, 08/07 in 2005 and was strengthened by the Law on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education of 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2009. A series of Ministerial Ordinance have been issued during recent years, defining the procedures to be carried out by the Agency as regards initial accreditation and re-accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions and audits.

The interviews reassured that ASHE is formally recognized by the different stakeholders, as the only interlocutor and competent authority in charge of the procedures for external quality assurance of study programmes and higher education institutions in Croatia.

#### **Analysis**

ASHE is the only organization, at national level, to be in charge of external accreditation procedures of study programmes and higher education institutions and audits. The Law on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education officially defines the structure of the Agency, its competencies and the rules for the different procedures, while the Ordinances stipulate the minimum criteria at national level.

All the accreditation procedures of ASHE take into account and refer to the Law and Ordinances in its procedures for accreditation and make it public so that the principle of reciprocity between the Agency and the legislation which regulates it is completely covered.

ASHE is recognized by the Ministry and National Council for Higher Education as a key stakeholder and is invited to propose the necessary changes to be introduced in each update of relevant laws and ordinances. Most of the contributions provided by the Agency are adopted, which confirms the importance of ASHE for the Croatian authorities.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

#### **ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE**

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

#### **Evidence**

The “Law on Quality Assurance” states that:

- “Agency shall have the status of an independent legal person with public authorities entered to the judicial records.”
- “In carrying out the activities determined by this Law and other regulations, the Agency shall be autonomous and independent, respecting European Standards and Guidelines as well as international practice in the field of quality assurance in science and higher education.”

In addition, the official and published Statute of the Agency for Science and Higher Education stipulate that “The Agency shall have the capacity of a legal person and it shall be entered into the court register. The Agency shall autonomously and independently perform the activities within the scope and jurisdiction established by the Institutions Act, Law on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education and other acts which regulate the scope of activities of the Agency.”

In line with these formal statements, the on-site interviews carried out by the panel clearly confirmed the independence of the Agency at the time to define its procedures and criteria, to make accreditation decisions, to select and name its experts for panels, to name its Bodies’ representatives, and to assign the budget to the activities. This judgement is based on the following factors in particular:

The Accreditation Council, composed of 11 members appointed by the Management Board of ASHE, is indeed, legally and de facto, the decision-making body of the Agency regarding criteria, procedures and accreditation results. There is representation of the different stakeholders involved in external quality assurance as defined by ASHE itself; these are nominated by relevant organizations but act independent from these in their personal capacity. Members are academics nominated by the Rectors’ Conference, Council of Polytechnics and Colleges and National Council for Higher Education, Science and Technological Development as well as through a public call; a student is nominated by the Croatian Student Council, and a Business Sector Representative is nominated by the Croatian Chamber of Economy. The membership nominations are ratified by the Management Board after a proposal of the Director of ASHE. The Management Board is also composed of different stakeholders proposed by the Government, the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, the National Council for Science, Higher education and Technological Development, the Croatian Student Council and one employee of the Agency.

As for the selection and nomination of experts, a public call is launched every year when the accreditation cycle is defined and the experts (national and international academics, students and business sector representatives) can apply if they fulfil the selection criteria requested by ASHE to run its accreditation procedures. Once selected, they all sign the “Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement” which details the fact that they act for themselves, not representing any body or institution which might be inclined to influence their work. The panel is proposed to the higher education institutions, which can notify any argued conflict of interest with the members. If a conflict of interest is detected, the panel member is replaced. In addition, the coordinator chosen from the Agency’s staff guarantees that there is no undue influence on the panel members.

The Strategic Plan, Annual reports, Action plan, Procedures, Criteria, members of the panels are all published on the website and so, are accessible for society as a whole.

As regards funding and allocation of the budget, most funding comes from public funds and is defined for a three years period upon an ASHE proposal based on the last years’ budgets as well as the national state budget. The division of these funds is done within the Agency in view of the activities to be carried out, which is stated in the yearly, published action plan, jointly with the Annual Report. The budget plan is adhered to by the agency’s administration.

Regarding the independence of outcomes, the decisions or recommendations of the experts' panels must be taken in a process which leads to consensus or, de facto in rare cases, by majority vote. Once the reports are finalized, they are forwarded to the Accreditation Council who issues an opinion, always respecting – while not necessarily having to follow – the panel's judgements and proposals concerning on the accreditation or audit result. In effect, therefore, the Accreditation Council forms its opinion with the external review report provided by the expert panel, in due consideration of the latter's findings based on the SAR and additional information gathered during the site visit. The Accreditation Council transmits its findings to the Agency's Director.

In the Croatian system, as regards initial accreditation and re-accreditation of Study Programmes and Higher Education Institutions, ASHE proposes a recommendation to the Ministry, which issues a formal decision based on ASHE's statement.

The external review reports with recommendations and decisions are published on the website.

### **Analysis**

The Croatian Law states, through the Act on Quality Assurance, that ASHE is an independent body. It was evident to the panel that ASHE meets the standard both with regard to legal independence and equally for organisational independence.

The composition of the Management Board and the Accreditation Council is heterogeneous and the representation of stakeholders is large as far as members are from the different bodies and Institutions involved in quality of higher education in Croatia. The way their members are selected, public and transparent, avoids undue influence of one of these bodies or its representatives over the other body or its members.

The members of the expert panels are selected and nominated by ASHE; independently from any undue external influence (this is developed in detail under ESG 2.4) thanks to a defined system of a public call, the selection upon specific criteria and the signing of the "Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement".

In addition to personal independence, institutional and operational independence is safeguarded. The Agency's public Strategic Plan 2014-2020, which should be considered to be an instrument of institutional governance, ensures that the priorities set and the activities to be carried out are those included in that document which is completed, every year, with an annual action plan approved by the Accreditation Council of the agency. It shows that the Agency does define its strategic objectives for a short and mid-term period which guarantees that, during this period, no influence from external stakeholders is possible.

Even though the accreditation procedures and minimum criteria for each process are defined by the Law and Ministerial Ordinances, the accreditation procedures are developed by the Agency's staff with the participation of the different stakeholders. Moreover, and in particular, the decision on accrediting or certifying an institution or programme in a given individual procedure is entirely vested in ASHE and its constituent body, the Accreditation Council.

The panel confirms that de facto ASHE's practices follow the conceptual processes mentioned above.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

### ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

#### Evidence

According to the Law on Quality Assurance, it is part of ASHE's core activities to carry out the procedure of thematic evaluation and collect and process information about the systems of science and higher education, with the focus on the quality and efficiency of research activity and higher education activity as well as on the developmental trends of the systems of research and higher education. As a result of such analysis, mainly through analysis of collected data, ASHE detected a need for improvement regarding doctoral study programmes. This in effect, led to the launch of the re-accreditation procedure for doctoral study programmes.

ASHE publishes the results of its accreditation and audit procedures in its annual report published on the website and printed in hardcopies. This document assembles quantitative and qualitative data that allows society to see the present situation and the improvements to be aimed for in the next evaluation cycles.

ASHE, from time to time, also published specific reports, which the interviewed stakeholders are aware of. Among these are, for example, the report on Medical Sciences, which gives information to society regarding the directives of this field, the minimum criteria, etc.; a report focusing on the establishment and work of services for professional guidance /career counselling of students and employees in the Croatian Higher Education Institutions; and a report on the results of a survey conducted among students about their satisfaction with study programmes and their preparation for the labour market.

Moreover, ASHE has a specific department for research and data collection. It is in charge of, for example, publication of an overview on the quality of the self-evaluation and external review reports. ASHE also produces a handbook in which all statistics and important data on the activities of the Agency are collected. It is available for any further analysis with a view to developing quality in the sector.

#### Analysis

In addition to some reports published on specific subjects, ASHE, mainly through the data collection and quantitative analysis of the first Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions' cycle, is establishing the new procedure that will include changes based on the conclusions of this meta-evaluation run between 2010 and 2015. Some of the results show that the new re-accreditation procedure will need to focus more strongly on learning outcomes, and to adapt criteria more specifically to make these more fitting for specific subjects or fields.

In particular, ASHE has carried out extensive analyses on the doctoral study programmes. Through the detection of some issues – quality assurance not developed sufficiently, content, financing, etc. – with Doctoral study programmes during the initial and re-accreditation procedures for Higher Education Institutions. Based on the data gathered from the self-evaluation and external reports as well as questionnaires, ASHE published a report on the matter at the request of stakeholders and the Ministry, with the latter realizing, as a consequence of this report, that there was a need to act in this field in order to remedy shortcomings.

In order to accomplish change, the Ministry entrusted ASHE with the responsibility to support improvement in the area of doctoral study programmes. The result of such a process has been the

definition of specific criteria for the Re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes, applied in a process separate from the one dealing with the re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions. The new accreditation process started in June 2015 with the self-evaluation for the Re-accreditation of Doctoral study programmes.

The panel considers that the practical relevance of the analysis provided by ASHE is indicated by the fact that the results of some of its thematic analysis feed into ASHE's subsequent accreditation procedures, which is, for example the case in the re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

### **ESG 3.5 RESOURCES**

Standard:

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

#### **Evidence**

ASHE's financial resources come from the state budget for carrying out its quality assurance activities, and on EU funds for some extra international activities (for budget detail, see "ASHE's funding on page 15). The state budget is fixed for a three years term after a proposal of ASHE to be allocated, with a total amount based on the general budget of the Ministry of Finance. The allocation to each of the activities, staff, experts and other resources is defined by the Agency itself which divides the line items with no external influence. This fact was confirmed in several interviews. Accreditation cycles are defined each year, which allows the Agency to have an accurate estimate of the human, material and financial resources needed for a concrete period. Hence, ASHE can manage its budget and staff accordingly.

Regarding human resources, the Agency counts with 73 employees, of whom 20 are exclusively assigned to quality assurance in science and higher education tasks and act as coordinators during the reviews. The interviews confirmed the quality of knowledge of the staff by their answers to all the questions and issues raised and that they are regularly trained; moreover, the interviews also confirmed the commitment of ASHE staff to rendering good service in their activities.

The material resources, especially the office where ASHE is based, have proven to have the requirements to let the Agency's staff to carry out their job in a suitable way.

#### **Analysis**

In practice, i.e. as regards the actual performance of ASHE in running its accreditation and auditing processes, there is evidence corroborated in interviews – and plausibly so in view of the number of staff, the office premises, and the budget in general – that, in principle, there are no financial or staff shortages which might prevent ASHE from performing its tasks assigned to the agency. This is the case despite some variations in funding, as indicated in the SAR, due to the economic situation in the country. Financial, material and human resources are, in general, sufficient to carry out ASHE's assessment tasks as well as the organization, from time to time, of workshops and seminars on topics of interests for different stakeholders.

The budget is stable, in spite of variations that can amount to 10% during the last five years, and allows the Agency to run its activities properly. ASHE diversifies, to a minor extent, its income through international projects in order to cover the expenses these activities may entail. The panel nonetheless encourages ASHE to use the possibility foreseen in its Statute to generate more income from other sources to emphasize its supportive role in the Croatian Higher Education Area, for

example by means of the EU Social Fund, and also – if so intended – for the development of internationalization activities, since these will probably require an increase in extra resources.

The number of staff structure has been extended since the 2011 review, progressing from 64 staff members to 73 in 2016, in line with the higher number of accreditation procedures in place within the Agency. While quantity and quality is clearly sufficient as a whole, the panel nonetheless observed that the balance in staffing numbers assigned to the different accreditation and auditing procedures should be improved. In particular, the human resources assigned to the Audit procedure (which has led to auditing 40 institutions so far, with interim reports provided) does not allow to carry out all the auditing processes to be carried out at the current qualitative level considering that, while all universities and polytechnics were audited, the majority of colleges were not audited, while the Law currently in force expects all higher education institutions to be audited through the Agency's process. Even if this procedure is to be changed by the Law to make it voluntary in the future – a legal change which the panel would regret –, the auditing process should at present be treated as a compulsory accreditation process, with the need to provide more staff resources in order to finalize the first audit cycle. However, while this observation indicates a need to optimize staff allocation in a particular field of ASHE's activities, this observation does not constitute judgement that overall resources are not adequate in principle.

On the other hand, the panel would recommend ASHE to take particular care of the imminent increase in the number of accreditation procedures, which may be brought about by specific CROQF accreditation to be launched in 2017 and the re-accreditation of Doctoral study programmes which has just been launched in June this year, by reflecting on the workload which this increase will entail for the present staff structure.

During the last five years, there have been activities to enhance professional development. Staff is regularly trained, also through stays in other Institutions, by attending ENQA or ECA events, UNESCO online courses, etc. This indicates that part of the resources is dedicated to staff development.

#### **Panel commendations**

ASHE is to be commended for the quality of the staff, its involvement in the activity of the Agency and the level of knowledge of the national and international practices in quality assurance. The panel found the staff to be very committed and capable.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The panel suggests ASHE to study the possibility of assigning more resources to the Audit processes in order to finalize the first cycle of evaluations at the present qualitative and quantitative levels, and to run the procedure in its entirety, namely by including colleges which have not been subjects to audits yet.

The panel recommends ASHE, in particular also in the view of the increase in the number of accreditation procedures and to reflect on the workload it will entail for the present staff structure, and to take action if necessary.

#### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**



### ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

**Standard:**

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

#### **Evidence**

ASHE has a published quality assurance policy in line with the ISO 9001 standard. Its policy defines the internal quality assurance processes. ASHE uses a quality assurance manual, which operationalizes the quality policy statements. Every year the Agency runs an internal audit. It passes through an external recertification of its quality management system carried out by Det Norske Veritas Adriatica (DNV) every three years, including an external audit each year.

Several feedback systems have been developed by the Agency in order to collect information oriented to the improvement of its activities, particularly of the accreditation processes. Surveys, questionnaires and meetings with the different stakeholders of ASHE are studied and used to improve criteria and processes. In addition to this, ASHE launched, at the end of the first complete accreditation cycle of 5 years, a survey on the impact of its procedures on the Croatian Higher Education system. Each year a survey is provided to the staff and Accreditation Council's members in order to also analyse the internal perspective on ASHE's work.

All the Agency's employees, experts, Management Board and Accreditation Council's members must sign the Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement. In addition to this, employees have to sign the Code of Ethics of ASHE employees. The Boards are regulated by Rules of Procedures, and the Accreditation Council has a specific Ethics Codex, which determines general ethical guidelines for its members.

To avoid any conflict of interest between the panel members and the HEI to be evaluated, the panel composition, when elaborated, is sent to the HEI in question in order to give it the opportunity to comment on any possible conflict of interest.

Every year ASHE publishes its annual report on its website, which contains an analysis and data on the results of the different activities carried out by the Agency. ASHE also publishes synthesis and meta-evaluations of its procedures at the end of each year cycle.

#### **Analysis**

The panel could see during the site-visit that ASHE has maintained continuity regarding its quality assurance system management since the 2011 review and the double check of its system: there is both internal quality assessment through an annual audit, and an external one through the certification foundation DNV. Both practices are proof of the importance given to ASHE's quality aspiration.

ASHE does have several feedback mechanisms through questionnaires to be returned by stakeholders after a round of evaluation, through surveys covering staff and Accreditation Council, through information gathered during the meetings and at workshops with stakeholders, by means of information provided by the ASHE coordinator after the reviews or direct information issued from the social networks. Still, of course the most notable feature is the fact that ASHE evaluates the results gathered through the aforementioned information channels. The analysis of the information collected, and the consequences drawn from the analysis, has for example – as was noticed by the stakeholders – led to improvement in the formulation of the reports, in modifications in the reports' template, and in providing more information on the Croatian Higher Education System to international experts' panel members.

In addition and in particular in view of changes brought about by the new ESG and new national regulations being on the way, the panel commends favourably on ASHE's practice to send a survey to all its stakeholders in 2015, enquiring on the impact of the external quality assurance activities of the Agency on the system at the end of the first cycle of evaluations, and doing so in order to use the outcomes of the survey to launch a process of improvement of ASHE's quality criteria and processes. The panel believes that the Agency, through the different documents forwarded to the experts, staff and Boards, ensures professionalism and avoids intolerance. This is said with the caveat that, since ASHE performs its activity in a small system which by the very nature of this fact may be prone to more cases of conflict of interest, ASHE may pay special attention to ensuring an even stronger element of participation of international experts throughout all its accreditation and auditing panels (for detail as to involvement of international experts, see assessment of ESG 2.4 below), in addition to the different mechanisms already in place to avoid conflict of interest. While this recommendation may be difficult to follow for language and logistical reasons, it should be observed with strictness particularly in institutional (re-)accreditation and auditing processes.

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel would like to commend ASHE for its large collaboration with the different stakeholders involved in its activities and the attention paid to their opinions which are listened and transferred into adequate action.

#### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

#### **ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES**

Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

#### **Evidence**

The Croatian legislation and more concretely the "Law on Quality Assurance" states that "The Agency for Science and Higher Education shall meet all the requirements for a full membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR) within 4 years from the day of entry into force of this Act."

Although there is no other specific mention to external reviews in the Law, the different stakeholders confirmed, during the interviews, their interest in ASHE to go through this kind of processes in order to show society the quality of their work.

The regular quality analysis of the management system carried out under the auspices Det Norske Veritas Adriatica (DNV) is another feature of external quality assurance.

#### **Analysis**

ASHE ran its first ENQA external review in 2011, complying with the legal Law requirement to be confirmed as full-member of ENQA and EQAR in the 4 years following the approval of the Law in 2009. Despite no other legal instructions regarding the renewal of this membership, ASHE decided to carry out its second external review in 2016. This is proof of the interest in analysing and improving its own processes as well as an indication that ASHE wishes to comply with the ESG.

#### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

### ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

#### Evidence

The Croatian Law states that the public and private Higher Education Institutions shall establish their own internal quality assurance system or unit and should undergo, every 5 years, ASHE's Audit procedure whose aim is to check the degree of implementation and efficiency of the higher education institutions' internal quality assurance system resulting on, in the case of a positive report, a certificate confirming its level of development.

The activities and enhancement of the internal quality assurance system also are a legal requirement for the Initial and Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and of Study programmes.

These legal requirements are reflected, along with the Agency's criteria based on the ESG, in the different accreditation or audit procedures as follows (source: ASHE's self-assessment report):

	Audit	Initial accreditation of HEIs and study programmes	Re-accreditation of HEIs and study programmes	Re-accreditation of Doctoral study programmes
<b>ESG Part I</b>				
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	1.1	2.2, 2.3, 2.6, 3.15	1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8	2.1, 2.5
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	1.2	1.2, 1.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, 4.1.3	1.4, 2.1, 2.4, 2.6, 2.10	2.2, 4.2 to 4.6
1.3 Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment	1.3	2.4, 2.8, 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3	1.6, 2.8, 3.4, 3.7, 3.8	3.4, 4.7
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	1.2, 2.3, 1.5	3.8, 3.10, 4.2, 4.6	2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 6.1	2.6, 2.7, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 4.8
1.5 Teaching staff	1.4	2.9, 5.7, 5.8	2.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7	1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.3, 2.4, 3.1, 4.8
1.6 Learning resources and student support	1.5	2.10, 5.1 to 5.6, 5.11	3.3, 7.1 to 7.6	1.6, 3.9, 3.10
1.7 Information management	1.6	2.6	1.5	No specific criterion but submission of data is required during the re-accreditation process
1.8 Public information	1.7	2.3, 2.8, 3.16, 3.20	3.6	2.7
1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	1.2	2.7, 5.10	1.5, 1.6, 2.1, 2.5, 2.7, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 7.1, 7.5	2.3
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	Legal requirement	Legal requirement	Legal requirement	Legal requirement

Due to the fact that ESG 2015 are recent and in consideration of the fact that the first accreditation cycle ended in 2015 only and was to be conducted in a standard way to allow equality of process and criteria, it was clear for the Agency and stakeholders that the ESG 2005 were to be in the focus of operations, and therefore, that there is still room for improvement as to a complete application of the new ESG version.

The interviews allowed confirming that, in essence, all ESG Part 1 standards are covered by the criteria defined for each procedure of the Agency. However, as stated in interviews with stakeholders and also with ASHE staff, some of these elements tend not to be covered as deeply as

they should, mainly in relation with the assessment of learning outcomes, but also on the fact that the focus is based more on a quantitative than a qualitative approach.

ASHE is in the process of launching a special project, to be supported by specific EU funding, which is intended to explore the implementation of ESG 2015 in the Croatian quality assurance system as a whole and with a particular view to sharpening ASHE's quality criteria and processes in order to match ESG 2015 more succinctly.

### **Analysis**

ASHE has been working, since the beginning of its accreditation and audit activities towards the implementation of ESG part I, taking it into account in the design and application of its procedures.

The panel judges the quality criteria to be defined on the basis of ESG Part I, and that the internal quality assurance processes of the higher education institutions, especially in case of the audit processes, are addressed with a view to ESG Part I. The audit concept has been designed particularly on the basis of ESG part I, it clearly focuses on the availability and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance mechanisms and processes in higher education institutions.

However, as for Initial and Re-accreditation processes of Higher Education Institutions and Study programmes, the approach requires some adjustment in some aspects highlighted in ESG Part I. While it can be said that most elements of ESG part I are part of the evaluation criteria of these procedures, in some aspects the in-depth analysis needs sharpening. In these processes, the panel particularly suggests to consider the degree to which educational objectives other than employability are assessed. In addition, concepts of competence development and of defined learning outcomes as well as student-centred learning should be emphasized and assessed more strongly. Moreover, the criteria of ASHE, in as far as they are essentially based on ESG 2005, are not yet linked to the new ESG's version in a sufficiently deep mode in some other aspects – apart from the ones just mentioned – which were introduced or at least have gained more weight in the ESG 2015. In particular, the present criteria do not mention the assessment of HEI processes and policies for fair recognition of qualifications, periods of study and prior learning. In effect, this leads to ASHE's practice to limit its in-depth check of these matters merely to those cases in which documents provided by higher education institutions, only as and when seen during the site visit, would point to critical issues in these matters.

These aforesaid qualitative facets should be deepened in the new post-2016 procedures to be launched in a near future as an outcome of the aforementioned project for updating ASHE processes. The panel would nonetheless like to emphasize the following: while the panel considers the aforesaid re-calibrations of foci to be a necessity, it nevertheless understands that doing so is part of a learning process which the entire higher education system needs to undergo and which requires some phasing-in time due to the fact that these concepts, while implicit, have not been expressly present in national debates on quality concepts.

The panel also understands that there is a tool at national level missing which would allow – or at least help – the system to develop the concept of broader learning objectives as well as competence and learning outcome concepts: the Croatian Qualifications Framework (in short: CROQF) which has not yet been introduced as a quality parameter (ESG 1.2) in the initial accreditation and re-accreditation of study programmes procedure. The key reason for this feature is seen by ASHE in the fact that generic descriptors have been defined in CROQF, but that the specific descriptors and corresponding competences for specific programmes – academic and occupational qualification standards – are not yet available and only on the way to be developed. ASHE is aware of this issue

and aims at including reference to CROQF in the next accreditation cycle, at least to its generic level descriptors and, if available, to relevant academic and occupational qualification standards.

With regard to the application of the criteria, it has been noticed – and this may also be one of the key causes for the aforementioned desiderata – that a major part of the Initial accreditation procedure for study programmes are much of a quantitative nature (numbers of teachers, resources...). However, ESG 1 indicates that there should also be a stronger role as regards a qualitative approach at the initial stage of a programme.

However, the panel would again like to underline that the shift from ESG 2005 to ESG 2015 came at a time when the Agency was finishing its first re-accreditation cycle and designing its new procedures. The panel appreciates that ASHE, after ending the first cycle of accreditations and in the view of the legal changes to come, is working on new accreditation and re-accreditation criteria for higher education institutions and study programmes as well on the new Audit model, which take into account the changes brought about by ESG 2015. The panel also appreciates that ASHE took the opportunity to develop the new procedure for the re-accreditation of Doctoral study programmes on the basis of the new European Standards and Guidelines, and the panel encourages the Agency to extend this practice to the other procedures carried out.

ASHE is in a transition period, moving from a minimum standard to a more strongly improvement-oriented quality assurance process. It is in this line that ASHE wishes to apply the shift to ESG 2015 in a correct and consistent manner, to prepare the new criteria for the different procedures while making sure that necessary changes in legal instruments are provided. In that view, ASHE has launched a two and a half-year EU Social Fund project called Improving the System of Ensuring and Improving the Quality of Higher Education (SKAZVO) in 2016 which aims at improving the quality assurance and enhance systems in higher education, and more concretely at elaborating a new model for external evaluation in the whole Croatian quality assurance system. In particular, it is designed to strive for improving the current procedures through the implementation, with a detailed calendar, of the new ESGs. The Results are expected by 2018.

In its judgement of this criterion of the ESG, the panel bore in mind that ASHE is in a developmental phase of transition. As a consequence, the panel judgement is to be taken and seen under these circumstances and with this caveat.

The panel recommends a follow-up of the state of advancement and the impact on all the accreditation criteria and processes with a specific reference to the ESG part I in the later course of 2018.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends ASHE, within the new accreditation models to be used in the next cycle, to focus on a more qualitative analysis of the criteria, which is, at this time, more quantitative-focused, taking particularly into account the specific qualitative features in ESG Part I mentioned above.

The panel recommends a follow-up report in 2018 on the state of advancement and the impact of SKAZVO Project on the criteria of all the accreditation procedures referring to ESG part I and particularly on learning outcomes and reference to the Qualifications Framework.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

### Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

### 2011 review recommendation:

“Recommendation: although the panel considers the standard to be fully fulfilled, it has a consideration for the future. After the current external quality assurance system will be well established and institutions will have gone<sup>2</sup> evaluation or reaccreditation, the panel recommends evaluating the several procedures that form external quality assurance system and assessing whether merging the processes would be beneficial.”

### Evidence

The quality assurance processes carried out by ASHE are designed on the basis of the Law on Quality Assurance and Ordinances. Thus, they are embedded within the legal framework. The procedures and criteria to be used in these processes are then elaborated by the Agency in a close collaboration with the different stakeholders.

After the end of the first cycle of 5 years accreditation in 2015, ASHE is now improving its procedures thanks to the results of several data collections and feedback mechanisms, mainly based on stakeholders' surveys which state their opinion on the impact of the processes (applicability of the criteria and guidelines, experts' panels and ASHE support, etc), and on the questionnaires sent to the higher education institutions and experts after each evaluation or round of evaluations. All these evaluations are accompanied by a series of meetings with the experts, Rectors' Conference, Faculty Councils, or Croatian Council of Polytechnics and Colleges and Deans to discuss the recommendations on improvements that ASHE considered, and, as seems fit, is prepared to incorporate in the new accreditation and audit models to be implemented in the next cycle.

As regards the aim of the Agency in line with its mission to promote the importance of quality assurance in higher education and science, ASHE has implemented processes in a improvement-led way and has included, in all its procedures (except in Initial Accreditation processes), a system of recommendations, regardless of the accreditation result, on which the institutions have to report on a regular basis during the follow-up phase.

The interviews confirmed the fact that the processes run by ASHE has induced, for the Croatian Higher Education Area and more concretely for the higher education institutions, major improvement within the institutions and awareness on the importance of internal and external quality assurance.

ASHE runs very few international processes – one in Slovenia and one in Bosnia and Herzegovina –, using the same methodology and criteria as for national HEIs, with the only specificity being that ASHE informed the Quality Assurance Agencies of the respective country on the process to be run. Nevertheless, none of these procedures have legal consequences since Croatian Law does currently not allow ASHE to step beyond evaluation in other jurisdictions by carrying out accreditation abroad.

As for the recommendation of 2011 to consider the possibility of merging processes in view of the several procedures in place and with a view towards enhancing the flexibility of external quality assurance system to allow HEIs to demonstrate the effectiveness of their internal quality assurance,

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<sup>2</sup> Instead of ,gone', read: undergone.

there is still scope for improvement. There are elements of effective overlap. Doctoral study programmes are evaluated twice: through the Re-accreditation of Higher Education and study programmes procedure and the Re-accreditation of Doctoral study programmes, which raises the question to what extent findings from one of these processes can be utilized for the other, or to what extent doctoral programmes, due to their specificities, require specific accreditation processes. Moreover, internal quality assurance processes are looked at in all the Agency's processes.

### **Analysis**

Despite the strong regulatory basis of the different accreditation and audit activities due to relevant laws and ordinances, ensuring the developmental approach of these is ASHE's responsibility. This is matched with the support of all the stakeholders involved in its activity, since these are consulted regularly on their vision of the processes in order to improve the existing procedures. The stakeholders' opinion is taken into account and the new criteria and procedures are based on the information ASHE's could compile and analyse along the last 5 years' cycle.

The panel believes that the quality assurance and audit reports which always contain recommendations help the higher education institutions to improve their internal processes, and the fact that they have to go through a compulsory follow-up within the procedures allows them to demonstrate it. Nevertheless, the Initial Accreditation procedure does not contemplate recommendations in its model and reports; the panel would suggest ASHE to introduce this practice in this process as well.

In the 2011 review, the panel recommended ASHE to evaluate the several procedures that form external quality assurance system and assess whether merging the processes would be beneficial. ASHE did rethink its model and decided that the Audit procedure, in the next cycle, will be voluntary and no longer compulsory. However, the panel is concerned about the fact that the procedures are still overlapping. Especially in view of the fact that assessment of internal quality assurance of HEI's is seen by ESG 2015 Part I as being an integral part of any external quality assurance process, the question arises how institutional and programme accreditation should be arranged in a way that pays tribute to this communality. Moreover, in view of the need to consider internal institutional quality assurance processes more strongly, the question arises whether or not there should be a move to grant "self-accrediting rights for programmes" to those HEI's who have demonstrated the quality of their internal quality systems.

The Doctoral study programmes are subject to two different Re-accreditation procedures: the procedure of Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and study programmes which looks at all the study programmes at Bachelor, Master and Doctoral levels, and the specific Re-accreditation process which re-accredits Doctoral study programmes and looks deeply into the Doctoral degrees. These two procedures are unduly burdensome as far as there are two ways of accreditation, one lighter and one deeper, and therefore these may be merged to one. The panel would suggest ASHE to take this into account during the development of the new legislation in collaboration with the Ministry and reflect on the possibility to unite the evaluation of Doctoral study programmes, but always subject to legal changes.

On the other hand, the Audit procedure is going to be, in the next cycle, a voluntary process. This takes place despite the results raised during the first cycle, showing that only 17 out of 40 Institutions evaluated obtained the certificate and thus indicating the need to support the higher education institutions in improving their internal quality assurance processes. The panel thinks that the Audit procedure is a key element to foster quality management and quality culture in the Croatian Higher Education System, and that – if it were to become a voluntary activity – it should be promoted in order to motivate higher education institutions to participate in this procedure. With a

view to achieving this aim but also to avoid any overlapping with the Initial and Re-accreditation procedures, ASHE should envisage optimizing the Audit procedure, maybe through the possibility of discharging the Audit-certified HEIs from assessing the criteria linked to internal quality assurance processes and management in institutional and programme accreditation processes.

Finally, the panel is deeply concerned to hear that the Ministry, through legislation to be implemented for the new accreditation processes, probably due in 2017, is considering a merely voluntary nature of evaluations of study programmes for entry in the CROQF Register; i.e., this in effect means that the check of compliance of study programmes with the national qualification framework is not treated as an integral part of any internal quality assurance process nor of external programme or institutional quality assurance processes. Apart from missing the objective to streamline processes, this undertaking would contravene ESG 1.2 and jeopardize international recognition of Croatian degrees. ASHE should make sure that there is a compulsory link between the CROQF assessment and initial as well as reaccreditation procedures, and also as far as institutional accreditation processes are concerned in as much as these need to assess the capability of an HEI to ensure alignment of its programmes to CROQF.

The panel assumes that checking the alignment of programmes to CROQF systematically as an integral part of accreditation processes will also help to ensure that specificities of certain programmes which are, due to their characteristics – like the arts subjects –, different from the usual academic programmes can be covered in a more tailor-made way than in the present case. Providing a more adapted approach to external quality assurance in such cases is a desideratum which ASHE itself states in its SWOT analysis.

In reaching its conclusion (as stated hereafter), the panel had to take into consideration that the typology of quality assurance processes and their methodological approaches are extensively prescribed by law. Hence most of the aforesaid desiderata are outside the organizational remit of ASHE, while the panel acknowledges that ASHE is striving to accomplish, by means of legislative change, the essentials of the aforesaid objectives in terms of streamlining and optimisation of processes.

It is in this light, i.e. with a view to conceding to the legal prerequisites which determine ASHE's operations, that the panel's conclusion as formulated hereafter is to be seen.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends ASHE to run Doctoral study programmes' accreditation through a unique procedure rather than two separate ones, and to take this objective into account during future legal negotiations.

The panel recommends considering possibilities to introduce concepts of "self accreditation rights for programmes" to the benefit of HEI's who have shown strong evidence for the existence of a robust internal quality management and quality assurance system. It could be connected with audit in future development of ASHE procedures and policies and should involve regular self-evaluation of study programmes by internal quality assurance systems at higher education institutions.

The panel recommends ASHE to reflect on a way of encouraging the HEIs to participate in the future Audit procedure, if it were to be voluntary, and to optimize its articulation with accreditation processes in order to avoid overlap, to foster the quality culture and to help improving Institutional internal quality assurance processes.



The panel strongly recommends ASHE to ensure a link of the new CROQF procedure to be launched in 2017 with accreditation procedures of any kind. In doing so, ASHE should also ensure provision of a more flexible approach to capture specificities of certain programmes which differ from the usual academic features, such as the arts, in a more adequate, flexible manner.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

**ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES**

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

**2011 review recommendation:**

“The panel suggests to ASHE to consider if development of procedures for regular follow up in accreditation will be needed in the future.”

**Evidence**

Every audit or accreditation process carried out by ASHE implements elaborated and published procedures which are clearly described in terms of the legal framework, criteria, panels' composition and selection and the different phases of the process (self-evaluation, site-visit, external review report, decision-making process and grade, appeal procedure in its case and follow-up).

The accreditation model applicable to all the procedures, with the exception of the initial accreditation of study programmes and HEIs, is a:

- Self-evaluation report
- Site-visit to the Institution to externally assess its compliance with the Agency's criteria
- External review report published on the website
- Follow-up procedure except in the case of the initial accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions.

All ASHE procedures include a self-evaluation report (with a series of quantitative data requested) elaborated and provided by the higher education institution to be evaluated. ASHE provides them with the guidelines for drafting self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions; furthermore, ASHE also organizes workshops on self-evaluation specific subjects like, for example, learning outcomes.

The site-visit is a common component of the different ASHE's procedures but run in a different way. In procedures of the re-accreditation of higher education institutions, audits and re-accreditation of doctoral programmes the site visit lasts from one to three days (plus one day for the panel's briefing a day prior to the site-visit in case of re-accreditation of HEIs). In cases of initial accreditation of Study Programmes and HEIs, there is a one-day visit. If necessary, in exceptional cases, the site visit can be extended if so agreed between the higher education institution in question, ASHE, and the expert panel chosen to visit the higher education institutions.

After the site-visits, an external review report is drafted by the panel and sent to the coordinator of the review who revises the draft to make sure that all relevant criteria are covered and that the structure of the report is correct. The content and structure of the external review reports differ

from one procedure to the other in as much as this is due to differences in institutions or programmes, but all reports respond to the defined criteria of the corresponding procedure.

The Follow-up procedure for the re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions, study programmes and Doctoral study programmes is twofold, depending on the accreditation result (which can be: 1. issuance of a positive compliance decision; 2. issuance of a letter of expectation: in cases when the Higher Education Institution is expected to act on deficiencies which are serious enough while not so serious as to require closure of a programme or institution; 3. denial of license: which means the closing of a HEI or specific study programme):

- 1) When the result of the review is a letter of expectation, the follow-up period is fixed by the Accreditation Council between one and three years after receiving the letter; at the end of the period set, a new site-visit takes place.
- 2) When the result is positive, the Institution should provide an action plan to ASHE within the six months following the final report, and a follow-up is done every year on this action plan till the next re-accreditation.

In the case of initial accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions there is no follow-up procedure. Indirectly, follow-up takes place within reaccreditation processes, which are carried out five years after accreditation.

Finally, the Audit processes have a follow-up six-month after the report has been issued. The Higher Education Institution shall send the improvements reached to ASHE in order to be awarded a certificate in case the HEI has implemented the recommendations.

To ensure the consistency of the model, ASHE appoints a coordinator. This person is a staff member who oversees procedures to guarantee that the process is being developed in the case as defined by the Agency, and that the standard set of criteria is applied consistently. The coordinator does not participate actively in the interviews or in judgements, both of which is the responsibility of the experts, but provides advisory and technical support to the experts along the whole process.

All stakeholders mentioned that they have a clear understanding of the model and are comfortable working with it. Nevertheless, it has been notified that, before the visit, more evidence should be provided to expert panels by HEI's before arrival on campus in order not to lose too much time during the site-visit that, in some cases, may turn out to be somewhat too short.

### **Analysis**

The panel is of the opinion that ASHE complies with the usual procedural flow as envisaged by the ESG Standard: a self-assessment, an external assessment and a site visit, an external assessment report and follow-up are part of the Agency's procedures, published on the website and applied by all the stakeholders involved in the processes.

However, in the view of a series of evidence, the panel found that, in some cases, the reliability of the process and usefulness could be improved.

The system includes a site visit which, in the case of the Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Re-accreditation of Doctoral programmes, occasionally appears to be too short in order to realize an in-depth assessment.

The procedure for the re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions includes, as a rule, from onetothree days visit, that should allow the panel to not only assess the governance and management of quality assurance, students, academic staff, scientific activity, international activities, and resources but also all study programmes the Institution (or Faculty) offers at bachelor,

master and doctoral levels. This approach appears to be over-burdened and results in external reports which do not cover the criteria sufficiently deeply and lead to the broad recommendations which are not always as useful and quality-focused as wanted by the Institutions as confirmed during the interviews and by reports.

In these cases, the problem is occasionally exacerbated by the fact that the panel has to consult the evidence onsite and has less time for interviews. ASHE is aware of this point and is going to improve it in the new re-accreditation procedure.

In addition, there is also a conceptual matter that should be touched upon: The Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions' procedure implies (from a conceptual perspective) and includes (from a procedural perspective) the procedure for the Re-accreditation of study programmes, too. It is difficult to differentiate between the two as the study programmes re-accreditation is concentrated into the assessment of one criterion of the Institutional accreditation process. This appears not to be so clear to some experts who assume to re-accredit Higher Education Institutions only but not study programmes at the same time, while the result of the re-accreditation may lead to closing some study programmes based on the panel's report.

Regarding the re-accreditation of doctoral programmes, while site visits may also take up to three days according to ASHE regulations, there are cases in which the site visits are limited to about four hours net. Even though the site visit may not be extended over several days in cases of the small doctoral programmes, it is doubtful whether such a short timespan allows the visiting ASHE panel to analyse each criterion through interviews deeply, in particular when considering that this procedure is to contemplate links to research and how these links impact on intended learning outcomes.

Finally, as to the point raised as a recommendation in the 2011 external review of ASHE, which is to put in place a regular follow up in accreditation. This recommendation has been taken up by ASHE for the Re-accreditation procedures, albeit not yet for the Initial Accreditation of study programmes and Higher Education Institutions.

### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends ASHE to look at the over-burdening effects to be witnessed in its Re-accreditation Procedures, and it encourages the Agency, when possible, to extend the site-visit duration in order to allow the panels to carry out more in-depth analysis, resulting in more concrete recommendations in the reports, and to ask HEIs to provide more evidence before the site visit.

The panel recommends ASHE to consider the inclusion of a follow-up procedure in the Initial Accreditation of study programmes and Higher Education Institutions, thus allowing applicants to remedy any shortcomings of minor significance.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

#### **ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS**

Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

### **Evidence**

The criteria for the selection of experts are described in the different procedures of the Agency and published on the website.

For the Re-accreditation of higher education institutions, and the Re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes, the panel is composed of 5 experts including four academics (two of them being foreign experts) and one student. For specific study programmes, one of the academics can be replaced by a business sector representative. For the Initial Accreditation of study programmes and Higher Education Institutions, the panel is composed of 3 members: two academics and one student.

The profile demanded in both procedures is clearly defined. The academic members should have good knowledge of the field covered by the higher education institution, being recognized for their teaching excellence at national and international levels, and they should also speak English fluently and have sufficient competence concerning social skills. The latter is official policy and good practice, due to ASHE's statement that expert panels need to show, apart from mastering the English language, good communication and teamwork skills, and must adhere to agreed protocols and procedures. In addition to these qualifications, the chairperson must have experience in quality assurance activities in higher education and should have had a management position experience in a higher education institution. Finally, the student should have knowledge in quality assurance in higher education and be involved, if possible, in a student organisation. Specific criteria are applied depending on the field of study or type of Institution to be evaluated.

For the Audit Procedure, the panel is composed of two representatives of Higher Education Institutions or scientific organizations (one national and one international), one representative of the business sector, and a student member. The general competences the panel members should have are good knowledge of higher education, research, and quality assurance, good knowledge of quality assurance systems and experience in audit.

Different interviews during the site-visit confirmed that the selected experts by ASHE have excellent skills and competences for each of the profiles defined for the panels of each type of accreditation or auditing processes.

Regarding the training of experts, the panel learned from the interviews that the audit experts or auditors undergo the specific training at the time when they are selected, leading to a certification which allows them to act as panel members in Audit processes. This training focuses on organisational and procedural aspects and on explanation of the context of the Croatian system of higher education and research. As regards these initiating training provisions, there is also a specific online training for foreign experts, consisting of – in a first module – information on the Croatian Higher Education System and – in a second module – the real-case simulation of an Audit process.

For accreditation procedures, a one-day briefing is organized the day prior to the site-visit. Throughout the year, ASHE organizes seminars and workshops on specific topics (for example in assessing programmes in medicine) which experts are invited to. It is also worth noting that the support provided by the Agency's staff all along the processes of the different evaluation activities, in particular their availability and problem-solving capability, received praise from the experts which the panel met.

All experts who participate in ASHE's external evaluations sign the "Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement". The Agency iterates its ethical standards in all its criteria and processes for the selection of expert panel members.

### **Analysis**

The composition of the panel and the selection of panel members are clear, published and, as a rule, appropriate.

While ASHE does have a database of experts, ASHE also launches, for every new accreditation cycle or new field of study to be evaluated, a public call to which any national or international potential expert can apply. Experts may also present their application on the basis of a personal initiative, or they can be contacted directly by the Agency to cover some specific profile. ASHE's staff selects, among the list of experts and profiles needed, a complete panel. This is then proposed to the Accreditation Council for approval. The list of experts is then presented to the higher education institution in question in order to give it the opportunity to state whether there is any conflict of interest with any of the experts nominated. The panel is convinced that this procedure is sound and appropriate to operate the Agency.

As regards the composition of panels, academics and students are represented in all the panels nominated by ASHE. The initial and re-accreditation procedures contemplate the possibility to include a business sector representative as part of the accreditation teams. However, the panel is of the opinion that the presence of a business sector representative of society, for instance from the business sector, if appropriate in view of the character of a programme, could be automatized and a good option when completely shifting to ESG 2015 and thus emphasizing the evaluation of graduate competences and of learning outcomes; this applies both to initial accreditation processes and re-accreditation processes. The panel would like to highlight the fact positively that ASHE undertakes to involve one or several international experts in review teams, despite the difficulty this entails as regards financial and logistic matters, and the panel therefore commends ASHE for this endeavour.

Regarding the training of experts, it is evident to the panel that the Audit experts are trained appropriately through an online training for international experts, or through a one day presence training for the national experts, during which a role play is organized, and at the end of which, if successful, the experts are certified as fit for work within a panel for the Audit Procedure.

However, for the Initial accreditation of study programmes and higher education institution as well as for the re-accreditation of higher education institutions and doctoral study programmes, despite the documents which are provided to the experts in due time before the accreditation processes, the panel has gathered the impression that the one-day on-the-case briefing organized the day prior to the site-visit is more focused on an organizational objective on how to carry out the visit rather than on training in the context in which the experts are working or the criteria they are using. This fact brings with it some consequence on the interpretation and application of the criteria used in the accreditation procedures (cf: criteria 2.5).

#### **Panel commendations**

ASHE is to be commended for the high participation of international experts in the panels of the different procedures.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends ASHE to automatize, if possible, the presence of a representative of society, e.g. a business sector representative, in all its re-accreditation panels.

It is also recommended to organize a training (face to face or virtual) about the national context (due to the high number of international experts involved in the processes) as well as on the interpretation of the criteria for the procedures the experts are expected to apply in the initial and re-accreditation processes.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

### Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

### Evidence

The different procedures and criteria on which decisions are based are publicly available and sent to the evaluated institutions on the one hand and to the panel members on the other hand before the procedures start. The criteria are defined by national laws and ordinances (minimum national standard) as well as by means of additional criteria the Agency considered (based on the ESG) and which are approved by the Accreditation Council. ASHE also developed procedures for all the processes which elaborate all stages of the various quality assurance processes.

The Initial accreditation of study programmes and HEIs leads to a formal decision, which includes quality-related recommendations to the higher education institution concerned but – with the exception of reaccreditation of doctoral programmes – not a recommendation as to what decision the Accreditation Council should take. This decision is then passed on by the panel to the Accreditation Council which provides an independent opinion based on the external report of the panel and, as the latter relates to it, the self-evaluation report and information on quantitative data. On the basis of this opinion, the Ministry issues a license for the implementation of a proposed study programme or HEI or a denial of license for the implementation of a proposed study programme or HEI.

The Re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes as well as the Re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes leads to three different possibilities in terms of recommendations, which to endorse is in the remit of the Ministry:

- The issuance of a positive compliance decision with the corresponding follow-up on any recommendations given;
- The issuance of a letter of expectation with a one-to-three years follow-up. This result is applied when it is considered that the Institution, in order to continue its activity, should act on a series of deficiencies which are serious enough to expect remedies to be implemented within a given period of time while not so serious as to require closure of the programme or institution. If after this period the Institution does not solve the problematic issues raised, the consequence is the denial of license. This kind of recommendations can include stopping the admission of new students on a certain study programme in a period in which improvements are expected.
- The denial of license for higher education or a specific part of the activity, which would be the equivalent of closing a higher education Institution or specific study programme.

In the latter case, the panel states its opinion in its report, on what it considers to be the adequate accreditation decision, based on the panel's grading for each criterion assessed; the actual recommendation on accreditation outcome, which is relevant for the ministerial decision is then made by the Accreditation Council.

The Audit Procedure leads to a certification of the Institution in the case of a positive assessment by the panel and Accreditation Council or else to a no-certification, both so based on the panel's recommendation.

All the decisions or recommendations are made first by the panel and then by the Accreditation Council, both – as a rule – through consensus. In practice, as stated in the interviews with experts and staff, there are no problems in arriving at agreement among the panel members and the

Accreditation Council, notwithstanding the right to decide by majority vote. The recommendations are sent to the Ministry who ratifies the decision, except in the case of the Audit Procedure in which final certification is an exclusive competence of ASHE.

Regarding the consistency of the process, ASHE involves, in all its procedures, a coordinator (staff of the Agency) who has an important role as to safeguarding correct interpretation of the criteria throughout the accreditation or audit processes. The experts and stakeholders were clear about the usefulness of this role. The coordinator also acts as a technical support to ensure that the process is run according to the Agency's procedure and that the criteria are applied consistently. He or she has no voting rights, neither on the content nor the judgement or grading in the context of panel findings.

### **Analysis**

The panel considers that the procedures and criteria used by ASHE for its processes are defined, and they are publicly available on the ASHE website and in published legislation.

Moreover, in the interviews held the ENQA panel could raise another problematic issue concerning the threshold applied in the Re-accreditation of higher education institutions and Study programmes in order to distinguish between (in terms of a recommendation passed on to the Ministry) positive judgement of compliance and the issuance of a letter of expectation in cases where accreditation is granted while certain deficiencies need to be remedied within a specified period.

These judgements, in terms of recommendations of the Accreditation Council based on the opinions stated by the expert panel established in the given case, is based on a minimum degree of compliance with the stated quality criteria. As to this degree of required compliance, the Accreditation Council has an internal policy according to which a letter of expectation is issued if any of the criterion is non-compliant or if the first three criteria of the procedure – these are: "Higher education institution management and quality assurance", "Study programmes", and "Students" – are graded as being inferior to the required minimum. However, the interviews confirmed that the different stakeholders, those subject to the accreditation and experts who take part in the quality assurance processes and submit the report, are not aware of such a policy. Therefore, the panel recommends to ASHE to disseminate the information on the overall policy of the criteria used by the decisional body of the Agency and to communicate the existing threshold.

With regard to the consistent application of the criteria, problems were voiced. However, ASHE does have mechanisms to ensure consistent application as much as possible. Firstly, the coordinator (staff member of the Agency) plays a crucial role in supervising that the panel members apply the criteria in a correct and consistent way. In addition, ASHE is trying, insofar as possible, to have a sectoral approach, appointing the same panel to see different study programmes at a same Institution or the same type of programme in different institutions, thus allowing for comparison of cases carried out by the same expert panel and thus guaranteeing linear assessment. That said, the panel could see, during the interviews that the criteria are determined but there is still room for improvement regarding their interpretation and consistency when a different panel goes to the same Institution. The interpretation from one experts' committee to the other seems to be different as the panel could verify in the meetings with the stakeholders. ASHE is conscious of this issue as its stakeholders underlined, through the conclusion drawn with the different feedbacks received, the question of the clarity and applicability of the criteria. One reason the panel detected as a probable cause for this problem related to the criteria and its clarity and interpretation is that there is no specific training of experts for the Initial and Re-accreditation procedures on the context and criteria used (please refer to ESG 2.4); moreover, the documents provided to the panels for Initial and Re-accreditation

procedures seem to be insufficient to fully interpret the criteria, it rather offers general explanation and tends to focus on indicators.

ASHE is conscious of the majority of its aforementioned weaknesses regarding consistency in applying the criteria, and so ASHE took action. In particular, the Agency is now working with the stakeholders on the improvement of understanding of criteria through, for example, the organization of workshops with Deans and Quality Assurance staff of higher education institutions – for instance, the case of a workshop with Polytechnics was highlighted – in order to discuss the new criteria to be applied for the Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions’ in the next cycle, or by means of running meetings with different stakeholders involved in the different processes. In particular, the ENQA panel took positive note of the ASHE experts’ statement that ASHE has, over time, continued to sharpen its information material on the criteria, thus in effect moving steadily forward in clarifying the understanding and applicability of the relevant quality criteria.

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel commends ASHE for the role of the coordinator as a person who ensures consistency of the process and helps experts with interpretation the relevant criteria as consistently as possible. This should be considered to be good practice and deserves to be highlighted and supported.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends ASHE to be more transparent as regards information on the overall policy of the criteria used by the Accreditation Council, as the decision-making body of the Agency, with a view to clarifying in which cases unconditional accreditation or accreditation accompanied by a letter of expectation is to be expected.

ASHE is recommended to iterate its endeavours to clarify the interpretation and implementation of the quality criteria, both by means of interpretative documents and through schooling.

#### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

#### **ESG 2.6 REPORTING**

Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

#### **Evidence**

Reports produced by the expert teams involved in ASHE’s procedures are, in principle, all published on the website in full, along with a summary and the final decision issued at the end of the process. However, this does not apply to the reports on initial accreditation, in which case only the accreditation decision as such is published.

All the reports are elaborated based on a template provided by ASHE to the experts’ panel members. Following the given structure is supervised by the coordinator of the process in order to ensure linearity of format within the same type of process.

The full reports for the Re-accreditation of HEIs and study programmes contain an introduction, a short description of re-accreditation procedure, conclusions of the panel, strengths of the HEI, weaknesses of the HEI, examples of good practice, recommendations, and a detailed analysis on the compliance of the HEI against the criteria.



The full reports for the Audit Procedure contain a preface, an introduction, a description of the HEI, the description of internal quality assurance system and its mechanisms, the effectiveness of the QA system through the reflections on each ESG standard, a conclusion and annexes.

The full reports for the Initial accreditation contain a brief presentation of the study programmes through data, an assessment of the criteria, additional remarks and final recommendation of the panel.

The interviews and reports highlighted the fact that the content and recommendations of the report are not always as in-depth as expected.

The reports are forwarded to the Higher Education Institutions to formulate comments on possible factual errors before issuing the final version to be published.

Regarding the usefulness, understanding and visibility of the reports, since the 2011 review ASHE practice has significantly evolved thanks to ASHE's participation in the EQArep Project (coordinated by ENQA). Public accessibility and understanding of the different survey results has been improved by the introduction of a summary to each report and by easier access to reports on the ASHE webpage. The interviews allowed checking that the stakeholders and particularly students consider that the reports are both sufficiently comprehensive, even though not necessarily deep enough in explicit analysis, and also easily accessible.

### **Analysis**

The panel recognizes the successful effort made by ASHE throughout the recent years to improve its report publishing policy. In fact ASHE has been working with ENQA and its stakeholders to make the reports more clearly structured and to ensure their visibility on the website; the decision to publish a summary report together with the full reports and accreditation decisions is helpful in that respect. The Agency went even a step further by publishing these summaries on the system of centralised admission to study programmes, thus enabling students to have the information when enrolling in a study programme.

Even if the general characteristics of reports are satisfactory, the panel would like to put emphasis on the fact that the information provided in the reports does not always present an in-depth view of the study programme or Higher Education Institution. This is partly also due to a tendency to focus more on inputs than on outputs (developed under ESG 2.1), while the analytical part, considered as the most useful for the Institutions to put in place their follow-up actions, should be enhanced. The panel believes that ASHE should address this issue in the next accreditation cycle in order to publish reports which contain deeper analysis, principally for the Initial Accreditation procedure but also in re-accreditation cases.

The panel took note of the fact that on the other hand, the reports of the Initial accreditation procedure are not published; however, at least – yet only – the accreditation decision as such is publicly available. Abstaining from publishing these reports can be justified by the fact that these reports are forwarded to the Ministry to serve as a base for the ministerial decision to admit the HEI or programme to be established and that therefore these reports do not carry information directly addressed to the general public; moreover, if the report is negative, the HEI or programme concerned will not be launched and so there is no tangible public interest in reading these reports. Nevertheless, the panel recommends ASHE to publish the full reports in these cases, too.

Efforts have been undertaken as regards the wording of the reports in order to make them accessible to a wider public, which is thanks to the work of ASHE in collaboration with the Higher Education Institutions and experts and the results of the last survey in 2015 on the process. This has

led to stakeholders' statements that they were sufficiently satisfied with the readability of the reports.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends ASHE to include a more in-depth analysis of the compliance of the HEI or study programme against the criteria in its published reports.

The panel recommends ASHE to publish the full reports of the Initial Accreditation procedure.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

#### **ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

#### **Evidence**

The "Procedure of re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions" and the "Re-accreditation of postgraduate University Programmes in Croatia: Principles and Criteria", both published on the website, allow Higher Education Institutions to contest or object to re-accreditation decisions. The Institution, if in disagreement with the decision made by the Accreditation Council, is entitled to appeal within the two weeks following receipt of the report. The ad-hoc appeal committee, formed by the Accreditation Council and consisting of three of its members, revises the case and submits its decision to the other members of the Accreditation Council, within one month after the appeal has been recorded.

For audit processes, the Audit appeal procedure is detailed by the Ordinance on Audit (art. 8), published on the website and therefore publicly communicated to the institutions taking part in audits. The appeal should be filed with ASHE within two weeks after receipt of the report, revised by the audit committee, i.e. panel which was called to run the audit; the panel is expected to issue an official response to the appeal within 15 days. Both the appeal and official response of the audit committee are forwarded to the Accreditation Council, which then decides if the appeal is admissible; if so, the appeal procedure is continued. The Accreditation Council establishes another panel of three persons, among whom there is to be one student, to revise the case in order to prepare the final decision which will eventually be taken by the Accreditation Council.

In the case of the Initial accreditation for the implementation of a study programme the legal framework provides the information that the applicant shall have no right of appeal against the decision, but may initiate an administrative dispute.

After every accreditation procedure run by ASHE, a complaint system is available through questionnaires which are provided to the Higher Education Institutions in which they can express their discontentment with any step of the process.

#### **Analysis**

As regards the re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and study programmes and Doctoral study programmes there is a clear appeal procedure which is defined in the published accreditation procedure and communicated to the Institutions concerned. The appeal committee is formed ad-hoc and composed of three members of the Accreditation Council, with the latter being the body which also took the accreditation decision which was appealed against. The panel is of the opinion that the

body which takes the decisions against which the appeal is filed should ideally not be identical with the one in charge of decisions on appeals against its own decision. This is the case here.

The panel believes that the appeal process for Audit procedure is adequate as it is public and in place for the Institutions or Faculties subject of the evaluation to formally communicate on unsatisfactory report and result. When an appeal procedure is admitted, an ad-hoc appeal committee is formed. It is composed of three experts (one of them being a student) different from those of the panel in charge of the evaluation, while eventually the appeal is decided – based on a report produced by the aforesaid group – by the Appeal Committee which had not taken a prior decision in the case. Based on the Appeal Committee's evaluation, the Accreditation Council takes a final decision.

With regard to the Initial Accreditation of study programmes and Higher Education Institutions, there is no appeal process at the level of ASHE, i.e. internally. Although the panel realizes that institutions can appeal in the ordinary legal way by filing a lawsuit against the administrative decision in these cases, the panel is of the opinion that this legal situation does not legally bar ASHE from having an internal appeals process – at least on an optional base and without hindrance or prejudice for court proceedings thereafter –, and that it would be expedient, if not even necessary in the light of the ESG standards considered here, to also provide an internal appeals process in these cases. Providing such a process will help ASHE and the Ministry with settling disputes at a relatively early stage before the case is filed in a court, and the threshold for revision of an ASHE decision, even though this may be a mere recommendation to the Ministry, may be duly lowered to the benefit of the applicant. Therefore, in this case the panel is of the opinion that the absence of an appeal process does not allow to safeguard the rights of the institutions concerned adequately.

#### **Panel recommendations**

The panel recommends in the case of the re-accreditation procedure for Higher Education Institutions and study programmes, to provide a separate and standing Appeal Committee in order to dissociate the decision on the appeal from the Accreditation Council that has made the initial decision which is being appealed against. ASHE may also consider to establish the Appeal Committee as a standing committee, or to consider other modes of precaution to safeguard against any undue influence which may occur when installing it ad hoc in view of the concrete case.

Regarding initial accreditation of study programmes and Higher Education Institutions, the panel recommends ASHE to provide an appeal procedure within the Agency.

#### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

## ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

### **CROATIAN QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK - CROQF**

The panel observed that ASHE's activities in terms of process and criteria are widely pre-determined by laws and ordinances. In particular, the legislative background appears to be over-extensive and, in some aspects, overlapping and in need of streamlining. Moreover, and possibly more essential, the overall concept of accreditation of institutions and programmes, initial and iterative (i.e., re-accreditation, and audit), should undergo a basic review. Such a review should be fundamental and holistic: the system should be reconsidered as a whole, i.e. by considering its compilatory and repetitive effects, by identifying identical issues permeating all these processes, and with a view to improving articulation of all these processes (while, ideally, reducing them).

The imminent establishment of a separate process for certifying compliance of programmes with the Croatian Qualification Framework (CROQF) is not advisable. Taking this issue out of accreditation processes seriously jeopardizes compliance with the ESG and, if not ascertained in accreditation processes, recognition of Croatian qualifications.

The link between CROQF and academic and occupational qualification standards, which are being developed at present, should be (re-)considered. This concerns, in particular, (1) matters of realistic manageability of the processes to be implemented for their development, (2) the status (i.e. legal relevance) of such standards (the issue is: reference points, or binding prerequisites to comply with), and (3) the limited validity and scope of any such endeavour in view of innovation, variants and combinations of programmes (at all levels, but specifically at master and doctoral levels) which may not be captured by any academic and occupational qualification standards.

### **CROSS-BORDER ACCREDITATIONS AND ACCREDITATION OF JOINT PROGRAMMES**

The panel understands ASHE's present position not to run accreditation procedures requested by foreign higher education institutions, even though ASHE would be entitled to run these as an EQAR listed agency. ASHE's policy in this respect is mainly taken due to overload of capacities by different procedures in Croatia and in view of the current Croatian legal framework which defines ASHE's role. However, the panel advises ASHE to take a strategic approach to the issue of cross-border accreditations, in the light of the EHEA Ministerial Communiqué from Yerevan 2015. It includes not only conducting external quality assurance activities abroad, but also matters regarding the accreditation decisions by other EQAR listed agencies in cases of accreditation of Croatian higher education institutions and the issue of the accreditation of joint programmes. The aforementioned issues should be discussed with ASHE's stakeholders, and suitable procedures might be developed and implemented in the legal framework accordingly.

# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ASHE is to be commended for:

### ESG 3.5:

ASHE is to be commended for the quality of the staff, its involvement in the activity of the Agency and the level of knowledge of the national and international practices in quality assurance. The panel found the staff to be very committed and capable.

### ESG 3.6:

The panel would like to commend ASHE for its large collaboration with the different stakeholders involved in its activities and the attention paid to their opinions which are listened and transferred into adequate action.

### ESG 2.4:

ASHE is to be commended for the high participation of international experts in the panels of the different procedures.

### ESG 2.5:

The panel commends ASHE for the role of the coordinator as a person who ensures consistency of the process and helps experts with interpretation the relevant criteria as consistently as possible. This should be considered to be good practice and deserves to be highlighted and supported.

## OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The panel considers ASHE to be in full compliance with the following standards: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7.

The panel also considers ASHE to substantially comply with the following standards: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.6.

Finally, the panel considers the Agency to be partially compliant with the following standards: 2.5 and 2.7.

The panel recommends ASHE to:

### ESG 3.1:

The panel recommends – as is also envisaged and stated in the SAR – to strengthen the participation of international experts in its governance body and/or, if such should be established in the future, its advisory bodies, thus adding an international perspective to its operations at the level of institutional decision-making.

### ESG 3.5:

The panel suggests ASHE to study the possibility of assigning more resources to the Audit processes in order to finalize the first cycle of evaluations at the present qualitative and quantitative levels, and to run the procedure in its entirety, namely by including colleges which have not been subjects to audits yet.

The panel recommends ASHE, in particular also in the view of the increase in the number of accreditation procedures and to reflect on the workload it will entail for the present staff structure, and to take action if necessary.

**ESG 2.1:**

The panel recommends ASHE, within the new accreditation models to be used in the next cycle, to focus on a more qualitative analysis of the criteria, which is, at this time, more quantitative-focused, taking particularly in account the specific qualitative features in ESG Part I mentioned above.

The panel recommends a follow-up report in 2018 on the state of advancement and the impact of SKAZVO Project on the criteria of all the accreditation procedures referring to ESG part I and particularly on learning outcomes and reference to the Qualifications Framework.

**ESG 2.2:**

The panel recommends ASHE to run Doctoral study programmes' accreditation through a unique procedure rather than two separate ones, and to take this objective into account during future legal negotiations.

The panel recommend considering possibilities to introduce concepts of "self accreditation rights for programmes" to the benefit of HEI's who have shown strong evidence for the existence of a robust internal quality management and quality assurance system. It could be conected with audit in future development of ASHE procedures and policies and should involve regular self-evaluation of study programs by internal QA systems at higher education institutions.

The panel recommends ASHE to reflect on a way of encouraging the HEIs to participate in the future Audit procedure, if it were to be voluntary, and to optimize its articulation with accreditation processes in order to avoid overlap, to foster the quality culture and to help improving Institutional internal quality assurance processes.

The panel strongly recommends ASHE to ensure a link of the new CROQF procedure to be launched in 2017 with accreditation procedures of any kind. In doing so, ASHE should also ensure provision of a more flexible approach to capture specificities of certain programmes which differ from the usual academic features, such as the arts, in a more adequate, flexible manner.

**ESG 2.3:**

The panel recommends ASHE to look at the over-burdening effects to be witnessed in its Re-accreditation Procedures, and it encourages the Agency, when possible, to extend the site-visit duration in order to allow the panels to carry out more in-depth analysis, resulting in more concrete recommendations in the reports, and to ask HEI's for providing more evidence before the visit.

The panel recommends ASHE to consider the inclusion of a follow-up procedure in the Initial Accreditation of study programmes, thus allowing applicants to remedy any shortcomings of minor significance.

**ESG 2.4:**

The panel recommends ASHE to automatize, if possible, the presence of a representative of society, e.g. a business sector representative, in all its re-accreditation panels.

It is also recommended to organize a training (presencial or virtual) in the national context (due to the high number of international experts involved in the processes) but also on the interpretation of the criteria for the procedures the experts are expected to apply in the initial and re-accreditation processes.

**ESG 2.5:**

The panel recommends ASHE to be more transparent as regards information on the overall policy of the criteria used by the Accreditation Council, as the decision-making body of the Agency, with a view to clarifying in which cases unconditional accreditation or accreditation accompanied by a letter of expectation is to be expected.

ASHE is recommended to iterate its endeavours to clarify the interpretation and implementation of the quality criteria, both by means of interpretative documents and through schooling.

**ESG 2.6:**

The panel recommends ASHE to include a more in-depth analysis of the compliance of the HEI or study programme against the criteria in its published reports.

The panel recommends ASHE to publish the full reports of the Initial Accreditation procedure.

**ESG 2.7:**

The panel recommends in the case of the re-accreditation procedure for Higher Education Institutions and study programmes, to provide a separate and standing Appeal Committee in order to dissociate the decision on the appeal from the Accreditation Council that has made the initial decision which is being appealed against. ASHE may also consider to establish the Appeal Committee as a standing committee, or to consider other modes of precaution to safeguard against any undue influence which may occur when installing it ad hoc in view of the concrete case.

Regarding initial accreditation of study programmes and Higher Education Institutions, the panel recommends ASHE to provide an appeal procedure within the Agency.

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, the Agency for Science and Higher Education, ASHE, is in compliance with the ESG.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

### Monday, 03/10/2016

SESSION	TIME	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
	Morning	Review panel kick-off meeting	
S1	14:00 – 14:45	Presentation about the Croatian higher education system (ASHE staff)	1. Prof. dr. sc. Jasmina Havranek, Director 2. Dr. sc. Vesna Dodiković Jurković, Deputy Director 3. Mr. sc. Sandra Bezjak, Assistant Director for Higher Education
S2	14:45 – 15:45	Meeting with the CEO and the Management Team	1. Prof. dr. sc. Jasmina Havranek, Director 2. Dr. sc. Vesna Dodiković Jurković, Deputy Director 3. Mr. sc. Sandra Bezjak, Assistant Director for Higher Education 4. Nada Matjanovski, dipl. oec., Assistant Director for Finances 5. Mirjana Gopić, dipl. iur., Assistant Director for Legal Matters 6. Mr. sc. Emita Blagdan, Assistant Director for International Cooperation
	15:45 – 16:00	Review panel's private discussion	
S3	16:00-open end	Meeting with the team responsible for the preparation of the self-assessment report	1. Dr. sc. Vesna Dodiković Jurković, Deputy Director 2. Mr. sc. Sandra Bezjak, Assistant Director 3. Đurđica Dragojević, Department for International Cooperation 4. Ivana Borošić, Department of Accreditation in Higher Education 5. Goran Briški, External QA Audit Department

### Tuesday, 04/10/2016

	08:30 – 08:45	Review panel's private discussion	
S4	08:45 – 09:45	Meeting with the Governing Board	1. Prof. dr. sc. Mile Dželalija, President of the Board 2. Prof. dr. sc. Damir Markulak, member 2. Prof. dr. sc. Aleksandra Deluka Tibljaš, member
	09:45-10:00	Review panel's private discussion	
S5	10:00 – 10:45	Meeting with HEI representative bodies (Rectors' Conference and the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges)	1. Prof. dr. sc. Damir Boras, Rector, University of Zagreb 2. Prof. dr. sc. Ivana Čuković-Bagić, Vice-Rector, University of Zagreb 3. Prof. dr. sc. Mirjana Hruškar, Vice-Rector, University of Zagreb 4. Prof. dr. sc. Mario Vinković, Vice-Rector, University of Osijek 5. Prof. dr. sc. Snježana Prijic Samaržija, Vice Rector, University of Rijeka 6. Prof. dr. sc. Vlatko Cvrtila, President of the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges
	10:45-11:00	Review panel's private discussion	
S6	11:00-11:45	Meeting with the Audit Department	1. Davorka Androić, External QA Audit Department 2. Goran Briški, External QA Audit Department 3. Ivan Biščan, External QA Audit Department
	11:45-13:00	Review panel lunch	
S7	13:00-14:00	Meeting with the Accreditation Council	1. Prof. dr. sc. Karmela Barišić, President 2. Prof. dr. sc. Sonja Vila, Vice-President



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Prof. dr. sc. Tomislav Kilić, member</li> <li>4. Prof. dr. sc. Radojka Kraljević, member</li> <li>5. Prof. dr. sc. Vlasta Vizek Vidović, former President (2009-2013)</li> <li>6. Prof. dr. sc. Renata Mažuran, former Vice-President (2009-2013)</li> </ul>
	14:00-14:15	Review panel's private discussion	
S8	14:15-15:15	Meeting with the Department for Accreditation and Reaccreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ivana Borošić, Department of Accreditation in Higher Education</li> <li>2. Viktorija Juriša, Department of Accreditation in Higher Education</li> <li>3. Mia Đikić, Department of Accreditation in Higher Education</li> <li>4. Vlatka Šušnjak Kuljiš, Department of Accreditation in Higher Education</li> <li>5. Frano Pavić, Department of Accreditation in Higher Education</li> <li>6. Davor Jurić, Department of Analytics and Statistics</li> <li>7. Maja Šegvić, Department for Higher Education</li> <li>8. Dr. sc. Marina Matešić, Department of Accreditation in Science</li> </ul>
	15:15-15:30	Review panel's private discussion	
S9	15:30-16:15	Meeting with heads of HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prof. dr. sc. Boris Trogrlić, University of Split, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Geodesy, Dean</li> <li>2. Prof. dr. sc. Damir Jugo, Edward Bernays College of Communication Management, Zagreb, Dean</li> <li>3. Prof. dr. sc. Aleksandra Čižmešija, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb, Vice-Dean</li> <li>4. Prof. dr. sc. Pero Vidan, Faculty of Maritime Studies, University of Split, Vice-Dean</li> <li>5. Prof. dr. sc. Hrvoje Brkić, School of Dental Medicine, University of Zagreb, Dean</li> <li>6. Doc. dr. sc. Vesna Bedeković, College for Management in Tourism and Informatics in Virovitica, Dean</li> <li>7. Prof. dr. sc. Tomislav Rukavina, University of Rijeka School of Medicine, Rijeka, Dean</li> <li>8. Doc.art. Davor Švaić, Academy of Dramatic Art, University of Zagreb, Vice-Dean</li> </ul>
	16:15-16:30	Review panel's private discussion	
S10	16:30-17:30	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prof. Robert Wallace Vaagan, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences</li> <li>2. Prof. Frank Witlox, Department of Geography, Ghent University</li> <li>3. Prof. Monika Metykova, School of Media, Film and Music, University of Sussex, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland</li> <li>4. Prof. dr. sc. Janoš Terzić, University of Split School of Medicine</li> <li>5. Prof. dr. sc. Maja Martinović, Zagreb School of Economics and Management</li> <li>6. Prof. dr. sc. Bojan Jerbić, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture</li> <li>7. Prof. dr. sc. Diana Tadić Plantić, VERN' Polytechnic</li> <li>8. Prof. dr. sc. Leo Rafolt, Faculty for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb</li> <li>9. Prof.dr.sc. Suncica Oberman Peterka, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Economics, J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek</li> <li>10. Doc. dr. sc. Sanja Kalambura, Velika Gorica Polytechnic</li> </ul>

### Wednesday, 05/10/2016

S11	08:30 – 09:15	Meeting with ASHE support departments for EQA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tomislav Tomljenović, IT Department</li> <li>2. Mr. sc. Irena Petrušić, Department of Research and Development</li> <li>3. Marina Grubišić, Department of Analytics and Statistics</li> <li>4. Marina Cvitanušić, Department of Analytics and Statistics</li> <li>5. Mina Đorđević, Department of Research and Development</li> <li>6. Marija Križanec, dipl. iur., Department for Higher Education</li> <li>7. Martina Francetić Đurašević, dipl. iur., Department for Legal and Personnel Issues</li> </ul>
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			8. Željka Plužarić, Department for Public Relations
	09:15-9:30	Review panel's private discussion	
S12	9:30 – 10:15	Meeting with employer representatives	1. Katarina Gaži-Pavelić, Podravka d.d. (reviewer) 2. Dr. sc. Ernest Meštrović, Pliva 3. Goran Kožulj, Deloitte Advisory Services Ltd. 4. Mislav Balković, Croatian Employers' Union and Algebra College 5. Ivan Miloloža, Munja d.d. (also member of the ASHE Accreditation Council) 6. Dr.sc. Dražen Vrhovski, Wawa Croatia d.o.o. (reviewer)
	10:15-10:30	Review panel's private discussion	
S13	10:30-11:15	Meeting with the Ministry Representative(s) and of the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development	1. Prof. dr. sc. Vedran Mornar, former Minister (2014-2016), former President of National Council for Higher Education (2009-2013) 2. Prof. dr. sc. Radovan Fuchs, former Minister (2009-2011) 3. Prof. dr. sc. Dragan Primorac, former Minister (2003-2009)
	11:15-11:30	Review panel's private discussion	
S14	11:30-12:45	Meeting with student representatives	1. Marko Dubroja, VERN' Polytechnic (reviewer) 2. Ana-Marija Ladiš, Health Polytechnic, (reviewer) 3. Maja Kos, Baltazar Polytechnic, (reviewer) 4. Janja Sačić, University of Zagreb Academy of Fine Arts (reviewer) 5. Karlo Kolesar, President of the Student Council of Polytechnics and Colleges 6. Sandro Gašpar, representative of the Croatian Student Union
	12:45	Review panel lunch	
Extra		Additional requested session with ASHE's staff	- Accreditation and re-accreditation staff - Self assessment team

### Thursday, 06/10/2016

S15	09:00 – 09:30	Meeting with ASHE Management and Board members to clarify and pending issues	1. Prof. dr. sc. Jasmina Havranek, Director 2. Dr. sc. Vesna Dodiković Jurković, Deputy Director 3. Mr. sc. Sandra Bezjak, Assistant Director for Higher Education 4. Nada Matjanovski, dipl. oec., Assistant Director for Finances 5. Mirjana Gopić, dipl. iur., Assistant Director for Legal Matters 6. Ivana Borošić, Department of Accreditation in Higher Education 7. Prof. dr. sc. Karmela Barišić, Accreditation Council President
	09:30-10:30	Review panel's private discussion	
S16	10:30-11:00	Final de-briefing meeting	1. Prof. dr. sc. Jasmina Havranek, Director 2. Dr. sc. Vesna Dodiković Jurković, Deputy Director 3. Mr. sc. Sandra Bezjak, Assistant Director for Higher Education 4. Mirjana Gopić, dipl. iur., Assistant Director for Legal Matters 5. Ivana Borošić, Department of Accreditation in Higher Education 6. Prof. dr. sc. Karmela Barišić, Accreditation Council President

## **ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW**

External review of the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

### **Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

February 2016

#### **1. Background and Context**

ASHE was established by the Government of the Republic of Croatia as an independent public body and the only institution tasked with accreditation procedures in higher education and research in the Republic of Croatia. It is independent of both the ministry and the higher education institutions.

It is funded from the state budget and international project funding; it has the legal possibility of charging for its procedures, however, it is currently not doing so for institutions and programmes in the Republic of Croatia.

ASHE's roles are external quality assurance and quality improvement of higher education and research through evaluation procedures, professional recognition of foreign higher education qualifications, collecting and processing data on Croatian higher education, science and related systems, providing information and unifying data on the conditions of enrolment to higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia, and supporting the activities of a number of national bodies. While it is currently the only agency whose accreditation recommendations are accepted by the Croatian Government for Croatian institutions and programmes, in 2015 it launched an evaluation procedure in Slovenia, at the request of a private HEI, and it plans to develop international activities in the future.

The external quality assurance procedures carried out by ASHE in higher education are initial accreditation and reaccreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions, and audit of higher education institutions. In addition to this, ASHE performs thematic evaluations.

ASHE has been a full member of ENQA since 2011 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership. ASHE has been registered on EQAR since 2011 and is applying for renewal.

#### **2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent ASHE fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of ASHE should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support ASHE application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

##### **2.1 Activities of ASHE within the scope of the ESG**

In order for ASHE to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities ASHE that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of ASHE have to be addressed in the external review:

- **Initial accreditation** (of higher education institutions and programmes in all three cycles);
- **Reaccreditation** (of higher education institutions and programmes in all three cycles);
- **Audit** (of higher education institutions);
- **Thematic evaluations.** This activity might be within the scope of the ESG as far as such evaluations are used as a basis for a reaccreditation procedure. Since it cannot be ultimately decided based on the information available to what extent thematic evaluations are within the scope of the ESG, ASHE's self-evaluation report and the external panel's report should further elaborate on this matter.
- **Evaluations in science.** These evaluations might be within the scope of the ESG as far as they include reviews or assessments of doctoral study programmes and thus related to learning and teaching in higher education, including the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation. ASHE's self-assessment report and the external review report should address whether this is the case.

Furthermore, the self-assessment report and external review report should also address how ASHE ensures that decisions on basis of reviews carried out by other agencies are in line with the ESG, especially in case the other agency is not registered on EQAR.

### 3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by ASHE including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to ASHE;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

#### 3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide ASHE with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards ASHE review.

### **3.2 Self-assessment by ASHE, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

ASHE is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which ASHE fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

ASHE will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to ASHE at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by ASHE in arriving in Zagreb, Croatia.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and ASHE.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to ASHE within 11 weeks of the

site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If ASHE chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by ASHE, finalise the document and submit it to ASHE and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

ASHE is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which ASHE expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

#### **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

ASHE will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. ASHE commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by ASHE. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

#### **5. Use of the report**

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether ASHE has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to ASHE and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by ASHE, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. ASHE may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

#### **6. Budget**

ASHE shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 2 other panel members	4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for follow-up visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit	1,600 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, ASHE will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to ASHE if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the follow-up visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

#### **7. Indicative Schedule of the Review**

Agreement on terms of reference	January/February 2016
Appointment of review panel members	May 2016
Self-assessment completed	June 2016
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	July 2016
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	August 2016
Briefing of review panel members	August/early September 2016
Review panel site visit	Late September/Early October 2016
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	November 2016
Draft of evaluation report to ASHE	December 2016
Statement of ASHE to review panel if necessary	December 2016
Submission of final report to ENQA	January 2017
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of ASHE	February 2017
Publication of the report	February/March 2017

### ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ASHE	Agency for Science and Higher Education
CROQF	Croatian Qualifications Framework
DNV	Det Norske Veritas Adriatica
ECA	European Consortium of Accreditation
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
MSES	Ministry of Science, Education and Sport
QA	quality assurance
SAR	self-assessment report
SER	self-evaluation report



## **ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW**

### **DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY ASHE (JOINTLY WITH THE SAR)**

- Self-Assessment report
- Law on Scientific activity
- Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education
- Ordinance on Licence content
- Ordinance on Audit
- ASHE Statutes
- Procedure for re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions
- Criteria for the re-accreditation of HEIs
- Principles and criteria for the re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes
- Procedure for the initial accreditation of HEIs and study programmes
- Report's template for the initial accreditation of study programmes
- Two examples of summary reports of audits

### **OTHER DOCUMENTS USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL**

- Sample of minutes of the Accreditation Council's meetings
- Sample of report of the appeal committee
- Samples of reports for all the procedures
- Survey to stakeholders on the impact of external evaluations procedures
- Staff satisfaction survey questions and results
- Examples of training agenda for auditors (Audit)
- ASHE annual report 2015
- ASHE Strategic plan 2016-2020
- Guidelines for the self-evaluation of Higher Education Institutions for the re-accreditation procedure
- Guidelines for drafting Proposals of new Study programmes
- Draft of the new improved re-accreditation model
- Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement
- Online access (onsite) to the training for foreign experts
- Rules of Procedure of the Agency for Science and Higher Education Accreditation Council
- Quality Manual
- Samples of call for experts
- Samples of e-mail sent to the experts with the documents sent previous to the accreditations
- Ethic codex
- SKAZVO project proposal
- Presentation on the Higher education System in the Republic of Croatia
- Example of action plan and annual report of an Institution in the re-accreditation process
- Accreditation recommendation with issuance of a letter of expectation and a positive result
- Sample of visit agendas for all the procedures



**THIS REPORT** presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) undertaken in 2016.

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agency for science and higher education

**2017 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW**