

Quality Assurance in Building a Culture of Quality in Croatia

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Academic quality is...



- Multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline.
- *Excellence;*
- *Fitness for purpose;*
- *Fitness of purpose;*
- *Enhancement or improvement.*



Building a culture of quality in HE



- Complex concept still lacking a generally accepted approach.
- Understood as a set of elements: shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment toward quality (EUA)
- External evaluation procedures in science and higher education **protect** the system from low-quality institutions and contractors; it is aimed at **improving** each institution, and thus the entire system of higher education and science.

QA System in Croatia



- By signing the **Bologna Declaration**, Croatia committed to build a quality assurance system in higher education and science.
- **The Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE)** was established in 2005 by the **Decree of the Government of the Republic of Croatia**, in accordance with the **European Council Recommendation (98/561/EC)** on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education and the **Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (2006/143/EC)** on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education, as well as the European model of agencies for external quality assurance in higher education based on implementation of the **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2005 and 2015)**.



Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (2009)



- Following the first ***Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education***, adopted by the Croatian Parliament in 2009, the ASHE was appointed as the sole national authority for quality assurance in higher education in Croatia.
- The ***Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education*** enabled the Agency (**ESG 3.2**) to achieve its **full independence (ESG 3.3)** and bring its QA activities into compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*.



The Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Scientific Activity (2022)



- **The new Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Scientific Activity**, adopted in **2022**, regulates the area of quality assurance in science and higher education in the Republic of Croatia.
- It governs the **internal quality assurance** and enhancement of higher education institutions and research institutes, the **external quality evaluation** of higher education institutions and research institutes, and the **organisation and powers of ASHE**.



ENQA and EQAR full membership



- The Agency is accredited and periodically evaluated by the **European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)**, and entered in the **European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)**.
- ASHE obtained full membership of ENQA and was included in EQAR in 2011.
- ASHE's membership in ENQA and EQAR was renewed twice – in 2017 and 2022; graded with the high-level scores in the 2022 international evaluation, ASHE was one of the best-rated quality assurance agencies in the EHEA.



International context and regional impact



- ASHE is part of the international system of quality assurance in science and higher education, being its recognized and active member (ENQA, EQAR, INQAAHE, CEENQA, CHEA, ECA, ENIC/NARIC Network, etc.).
- Through numerous initiatives and activities ASHE assumed a leading partnership role in the region.



The role of ASHE in the Croatian system of science and higher education



- In a system of HE and science that faces many challenges, ASHE has been recognised as a **factor of stability** that **brings together and connects all the stakeholders** in the system, and encourages them to **work together and agree on common development policies**, while **ensuring the conditions** for their achievement.
- This is demonstrated primarily through the Agency's **external evaluation procedures**, but also through other activities being conducted by ASHE.
- Through a **long-term partnership with the academic community**, ASHE strives to raise the level of awareness of the importance of a culture of quality in higher education and science, organizing **educational activities, seminars, workshops and conferences**, opening up numerous current topics in the field of higher education and science.



The importance of ASHE external evaluation procedures



- **Assuring** the quality of higher education institutions and study programmes and verification of higher education qualifications.
- **Improving** the quality of higher education institutions and study programmes.
- **Informing** the general public on the quality of higher education institutions and study programmes.



External quality evaluation of higher education institutions and research institutes



- The external quality evaluation system in the Republic of Croatia includes quality evaluation in the processes of
 - **initial accreditation of institutions and/or study programmes**
 - **re-accreditation,**
 - **thematic evaluation.**
- The new Act also provides the legal basis for ASHE to conduct **evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes abroad** as well as **evaluations of joint study programmes** offered by Croatian and foreign higher education institutions.



Positive effects of ASHE external evaluations



- Croatian higher education institutions **confirm usefulness of external evaluation procedures (post-visitation questionnaires)**
- External evaluation procedures led to changes on:

1. Institutional level

- ✓ recommendations for quality improvement,
- ✓ establishing indicators of the implementation of goals,
- ✓ improving the quality of teaching,
- ✓ more intensive monitoring of scientific productivity,
- ✓ decision making based on data and evidence,
- ✓ raising awareness of the quality culture.

2. Higher education system as a whole

- ✓ reaccreditation as a mechanism of diversification of institutions,
- ✓ credibility of the national education system,
- ✓ improving national and international mobility,
- ✓ better visibility of Croatian HEIs,
- ✓ evidence-based policy making,
- ✓ public financing based on quality evaluation.



ASHE support to the QA activities of HEIs



- IT support tools for evaluation procedures (**Mozvag, CEP**)
- Delivering information about the quality of HEIs (**Directory of Study Programmes**); all reports and accreditation recommendations from evaluations of higher education institutions in Croatia are available on www.azvo.hr
- Educational activities for HEI staff, seminars, workshops, conferences
- Informing the public about the QA-related issues
- General communication goal: **promoting a culture of quality in science and HE as widely accepted values (...)** (*ASHE Communication Strategy, 2019*)



Positive examples of HEI



- PDCA in the internal quality system
- Recommendations used for continuous improvement, considered when developing strategies and action plans
- Higher mobility rate (students and staff)
- Internationalisation of study programmes (mainly in English)
- Education of teaching staff
- More project proposals (as partners or leaders)
- Development of special services at HEI level (office for projects, internationalisation, career and psychosocial counselling)

Other activities of ASHE (I)



- ASHE also:
 - carries out the procedures for recognition and validation of foreign higher education qualifications (ENIC/NARIC),
 - collects and processes data on the higher education system, scientific and artistic activity,
 - educates members of expert panels participating in external evaluation procedures,
 - provides information on the conditions for enrolment in HEIs in Croatia, and aggregates data on fulfilment of requirements for enrolment in higher education institutions,
 - performs twinning and integration activities in international associations and networks dealing with QA in the higher education system and scientific activities.

Challenges and perspectives



- ✓ Development of a **new model** for the next cycle of external QA due to changes in the national legislative framework
- ✓ Management of the **Croatian Qualifications Framework Register**
- ✓ **EU funded projects**
- ✓ Implementation of **various activities and procedures** aiming at further developing the quality of higher education and science:
 - ✓ monitoring **student employability**,
 - ✓ **internationalization** of higher education,
 - ✓ **educational activities** for higher education, etc.



Final remarks



- The Culture of Quality can be defined as *the ability of the HEI to incorporate QA into its daily work and thus achieve continuity.*
- At Croatian HEIs, QA related to ESG standards is successfully implemented (seen through internal and external evaluations, at the national and international level, and through the satisfaction of the stakeholders, especially students).
- As described in the EUA CASE STUDIES 2007:
“adopting a Culture of Quality requires a stable structure consisting of strong management and an active role of external stakeholders”
- Croatian HEIs exist for a long time and certainly have their peculiarities; it is not sufficient to take over someone else's model of quality system, but it is necessary to adjust it to your institution - to identify the historical, cultural and professional characteristics that define the HEI and to develop strategic goals accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Building a culture of quality together!



agency for science and higher education

Thank you





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