March 2012

INTRODUCTION

Dear readers,

It is a pleasure to present you with the latest annual report of the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education—ASHE.

Last year, 2011, was marked by the recognition of the international credibility of ASHE – our agency was admitted to full membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in October, and listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in November. This proved that ASHE fulfilled the criteria to be included in the list of agencies which work in the whole European Higher Education Area (EHEA), many of them responsible for external quality assurance processes in their national higher education systems. The recognition of ASHE work not only confirmed our credibility and independence, but also served as evidence that external quality assurance procedures in Croatian higher education were set up in accordance with best international practices, thus guaranteeing the quality of our work to all stakeholders in Croatian higher education and science.

ASHE was admitted to ENQA full membership and listed in EQAR primarily owing to its five year work on developing legal, professional and administrative platform for establishing the external quality assurance system in Croatian higher education and science. The ASHE efforts were recognized by the international review panel, presided by Dr. Seamus Purseil, former Irish Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) president and ENQA vice president. The panel completed the external review of ASHE in August 2011, producing a very positive report on our work and processes. The Report stated that ASHE was compliant with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

At the national level, ASHE completed the first year of the re-accreditation process of higher education institutions in Croatia, which attracted a great interest of the national academic community, as well as the general public, thus confirming the importance of the ASHE role as the promoter of quality culture in higher education and science.

The re-accreditation procedures, as well as other external quality assurance processes – such as the thematic review of public research institutes – marked the beginning of a project which is quite unique in the recent history of Croatian higher education. It is unique primarily because it proves that external quality assurance in Croatian higher education is now fully functional and aligned with the highest European standards. However, the importance of this project lies primarily in the fact that it started a demanding five year re-accreditation cycle of all higher education institutions in Croatia and will ultimately result in a comprehensive and objective assessment of the quality of the system.

In order to best implement the necessary changes, the system will require full responsibility of all stakeholders, as well as their mutual partnerships, which ASHE has been building with the academic and research community from the very beginning.

In the following period we will continue with external quality assurance processes in higher education and science; these are complex processes which require dedication and a high level of professionalism of all ASHE staff. I would like to use this opportunity to thank them, as well as all the representatives of the higher education institutions and scientific organisations which participated or will participate in our procedures, all international and Croatian panel members and students who have participated in many of our procedures, always very responsibly.

We are fully prepared to face the challenges ahead, remaining dedicated to our mission and the objectives we have set: to strongly support the Croatian system of higher education and science in improving its quality culture and positioning Croatian institutions on the global map of higher education and science.

Prof. Dr. Jasmina Havranek
Agency for Science and Higher Education Director

1 The Agency for Science and Higher Education Management Board adopted the Report at their session held on March 6th, 2012
AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRIEF

AGHE defined its mission and vision, as well as its strategic goals, in documents available on its website at www.azvo.hr/en.

ASHE mission is to continuously support quality improvement of science and higher education, by applying European and international best practices.

Organisational chart

ASHE contributes to achieving global competitiveness of Croatian higher education and science.

ASHE supports to students, higher education institutions' collaboration, and vice president of the European Association for Quality of Science, Education and Sports, the National Council for Science and higher education, the Rectors' Conference, students, etc.

Vision

The quality of Croatian higher education and science is recognised and acknowledged in the international context. Through continuous improvement of quality culture and participation in the development of science and higher education, ASHE contributes to achieving global competitiveness of Croatian higher education and science.

quality improvement of higher education and science, as well as opportunities to attain specific educational levels; comparing the standards and quality levels achieved with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and science.

quality assurance system in science and higher education in Croatia; disseminating reliable information on quality of academic standards to students, higher education institutions management and the public.

During June 2011, ASHE was visited by the international review panel, presided by Dr. Seamus Puirseil, former president of the Irish Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC). The reports specifically stressed the fact that ASHE, although a relatively new institution, managed very successfully and in a very brief period to build the legal, professional and administrative platform for the development of the quality assurance system in science and higher education in Croatia. The report also mentioned the professional attitude and knowledge of the staff and management.

Based on the report, ASHE was admitted to ENQA full membership in October 2011, and listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in November 2011. ASHE fulfilled its legal obligations and confirmed the capability of its processes, now formally recognised within the whole European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

INTERNATIONAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

During June 2011, ASHE was visited by the international review panel, presided by Dr. Seamus Puirseil, former president of the Irish Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and vice president of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). During the site visit, the panel talked with the ASHE management and staff, as well as representatives of Croatian higher education institutions, scientific organisations, experts from Croatia and abroad, representatives of the business community, the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, the National Council for Higher Education, the National Council for Science, the Rectors' Conference, students, etc.

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REPORT ON THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES IMPLEMENTED IN 2011

In 2011 ASHE appointed expert panels for re-accreditation of higher education institutions within universities, colleges and polytechnics. In line with the Accreditation Council decision, 20 higher education institutions in the field of economics were selected for re-accreditation. All six visits to the institutions were completed in 2011.

By the end of the year, the Agency issued accreditation recommendations for 20 universities, while the remaining nine were still under review. The recommendations include four confirmations of fulfillment of the necessary conditions, two letters of expectations, four letters of expectations which include a prohibition of student enrolment, and altogether 10 letters of expectations announcedации дальнейших корректировок.

The Accreditation Council also adopted the Re-accreditation Plan for 2011/12, which covers 32 institutions in the field of technical sciences. The procedure will also include re-accreditation of research activities for those 20 higher education institutions that are also listed in the Register of Scientific Organisations.
During 2011, all audit procedures of higher education institutions included in the 2010 plan were completed. The procedures, looking at internal quality assurance systems at higher education institutions, were carried out within the agreed dates, and there were no appeals on the procedures. The final grades for the institutions are shown in Table 2.

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In 2011 and in cooperation with the European Training Foundation (ETF), ASHE prepared and coordinated two sessions of the Interdepartmental Working Body for Labour Market Monitoring. The Body was established following an ETF recommendation (2006 Review of VET Systems, Croatia, 2008) which called for a powerful inter-ministerial Working Body with a strong voice in society which would promote effective policy interlinkages and working relationship between the tertiary education and other important policy areas, such as responding to labour market needs. The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports tasked ASHE with supporting the work of this body.

At the sessions, participants presented the activities of the institutions represented in the body which are connected to monitoring and anticipating labour market needs and matching skills supply and demand. International experts also presented relevant experiences and best practices from several EU countries.

All of this enabled useful information exchange and provided a clear insight into the ongoing activities in Croatia related to establishing connections between the education labour market, and helping define coordinated activities necessary in the future. The work of the interdepartmental body was a basis for the 2012 Activity Plan sent to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.

Office staff participated in the activities of the Committee for Monitoring the State Matrix and the National Information System for Applications to Higher Education (NISpVU), and ASHE and the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education developed a Draft Agreement stating the conditions, procedures and methods of testing and ranking applicants to study programmes. Moreover, the ASHE Management Board adopted a decision on establishing the Body for Improvement of the Application Procedure, aimed at enhancing cooperation with higher education institutions. The Body includes representatives of all public universities, mostly Vice-Rectors for student issues, as well as representatives of polytechnics and colleges. The Body held two meetings in 2011.

The Central Applications Office regularly publishes the latest news related to the applications to higher education institutions on the website Study.hr, which also contains software enabling prospective students to compare different study programmes with a multi-criteria tool. Helping them to make an informed choice of a future programme. The Office is currently developing additional applications to help prospective students, which should also indicate the success rates in the application process, enabling students to do a more accurate application which simulates the whole procedure, from application to ranking.

The Office also cooperates with the International Association of Administrations Organisations, the membership in which enables its corporate with and meet similar institutions and offices.

Finally, the Central Applications Office continuously invests in the development of the quality of its services. One of the steps was to implement a system of recording documentation sent by applicants directly via the NISpVU system, as well as a customer support system which significantly improved quality of communication with the applicants. Since the volume of work is expected to increase, further investment is planned in this direction. Additionally, due to the specifics of the application procedure, the Office staff organised their work in new shifts, and during weekends and holidays in the periods of greatest demand on their support.

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In 2011, ASHE continued its work as a full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Forum for Institutional Management in Higher Education (OECD-IMHE), and made preparing steps for cooperating with the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECQA).

In line with the ASHE strategy of regional and European cooperation, ASHE continued its work in the Management Board of the Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CENTRAQA), and in May hosted the general assembly of the network. In July 2011 ASHE also actively cooperated with the regional initiatives, Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (EIRESE) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), in the topics of quality assurance in education, qualifications frameworks and evidence-based policy making.

Furthermore, ASHE represented and held presentations at numerous international seminars and conferences. To mention just a few: the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) annual conference in Washington, OECD IMHE (NVAO) conference within the pilot project “Institutional audits document – the Manual (which includes information on the quality assurance in education, qualifications frameworks and QMS, charts, presentations, etc.) linked to various databases Quality Management System (QMS) is effective.

In the period between June 28th and July 16th 2011, 16 internal audits were carried out in different ASHE offices. The results of the audits were analysed in the Management Assessment, issued on July 27th, 2011, which was sent to all ASHE employees. The ASHE Quality Management System (QMS) is effective.

In 2011 the DMS was improved with a new Dashboard application, which made the system fully transparent, enabling each staff member to search the DMS by using a single document – the Manual (which includes information on the DMS, charts, presentations, etc.) and various databases and applications.

A Quality Assurance System was established, based on ASHE Strategic plan for the current period, the implementation and the analysis of the effectiveness of the quality assurance system, as well as the achievement of the indicators and in the future, at the level of individual higher education institutions and those related to the institutional level itself. ASHE was the first institution in Croatia which completed the self-assessment of the system of science and higher education. The report was adopted and made available to ASHE staff via the ASHE intranet.

In 2011 ASHE continued to collect and analyse data on the system of science and higher education. On its website, ASHE regularly published statistical data on higher education institutions, study programme type, scientific area and field of study, results of the 2012 Audit Plan for higher education institutions, the 2011 Re-accreditation Plan, improvement of scientific activity and higher education, and integrated (undergraduate + graduate) study programmes at the European level.

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In 2011, ASHE continued to develop the project of the National Information System for Higher Education and Science.
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