



agency for science and higher education

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ACTIVITY PLAN
2022

2021

AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION
2021 ANNUAL REPORT
AND 2022 ACTIVITY PLAN

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INTRODUCTION



Dear readers,

It is a great pleasure to greet you at the beginning of another Annual Report of the Agency for Science and Higher Education. Although I have been engaged at the Agency for many years, primarily on matters related to the accreditation of higher education institutions and I have had the opportunity to work with almost all higher education institutions directly and/or indirectly, the end of 2021 brought before me a new challenge and responsibility for leading the Agency and coordinating all its activities.

Therefore, before I look back on the past year, I would like to thank on my behalf and on behalf of all ASHE staff, our long-time director, prof. dr. sc. Jasmina Havranek, for her dedication, enthusiasm, leadership and vision she had for this institution, which she managed to achieve despite numerous obstacles. She has made a considerable contribution to the establishment of a quality assurance system, as well as to the promotion of the Croatian system of higher education and science. Her merits are also visible in the Agency's status in the national and international environment, especially in the main European quality assurance associations, ENQA and EQAR.



In addition to having a vision of the Agency's role in the Croatian context, as well as relationships with academia and stakeholders, she had the expertise, courage and strong will to make that vision a reality. Her career path was largely associated with quality assurance and the Agency for Science and Higher Education, and we hope that in the future, she will continue to take on new professional challenges in this area. We will continue to pursue our activities on the foundations she has laid for the benefit of the entire higher education and science system and the people within it.

The year 2021 was marked by the global pandemic, which has also affected our business activities. Given the fact that we already established the so-called hybrid model of work in 2020, we continued to apply it in 2021, in adherence to all the epidemiological measures. This primarily refers to evaluation procedures, but also to educational activities and sessions of scientific field committees and field committees, the Accreditation Council and other bodies, which were mostly held online.

In business terms, last year was one of the most successful years for the Agency. We started the year with preparations for the third review procedure for the purpose of regulating its status in ENQA and EQAR. As part of the review procedure, we prepared a Self-evaluation Report, and online meetings of the international expert commission appointed by ENQA with representatives of ASHE and various stakeholder groups, such as representatives of universities, reviewers, students, businessmen and the like were held in June. We are extremely satisfied with the preliminary findings, and the final report and the decision on the renewal of the status in the two associations is expected to be adopted in March 2022.

The year 2021 is also the beginning of a new strategic period for the Agency. The activities to be carried out in the next five years will be directed towards two goals: preserving the relevance of external quality assurance and strengthening the social role of ASHE as a promoter of the quality of higher education and science.

Within the first strategic goal, and in the context of international cooperation, ASHE recognized the opportunity to strengthen its cross-border activities. Therefore, last year we conducted several external evaluation procedures outside Croatia, which is a significant step forward for us and we plan to continue with these activities in the future.

Evaluation procedures in Croatia were conducted in accordance with the adopted plans. The novelty is that we have developed an improved model of initial accreditation of study programmes that contains elements of the Croatian Qualifications Framework and provides an integrated evaluation for the purpose of issuing a permit for the study programme and evaluation for enrolment in the CROQF Register.

Regarding the implementation of the CROQF, in line with the last year's amendments to the CROQF Act, ASHE took over the management of the Sub-Register of Qualifications Standards and the Sub-Register of Learning Outcomes Units within the CROQF Register, as well as additional activities that significantly expanded the scope of our work. In the coming months, we will therefore focus on optimizing the professional, personnel and infrastructural prerequisites within the ASHE, all with the aim of successfully implementing the CROQF.

Last year, we officially completed the implementation of the SKAZVO project funded by the European Union from the European Social Fund. This is a five-year project worth more than HRK 20 million, aimed at the development of new, and improving the existing external evaluation procedures and strengthening the competencies of higher education staff. We also held a series of training events for higher education institutions that we could not have realized within the regular budget of the Agency, the usefulness of which is evidenced by the excellent feedback we got from the participants in these activities.

Given the already mentioned pandemic, we continued to investigate its effects on the quality of higher education. Encouraged by the survey conducted in 2020 related to the lockdown circumstances, we conducted two more surveys among the student population and the higher education institutions staff. We believe that such surveys are important not only because they provide a picture of the real functioning of higher education during a pandemic from the perspective of users/students and service providers/teachers, but also because it can be a starting point for decision-making and higher education policy making.

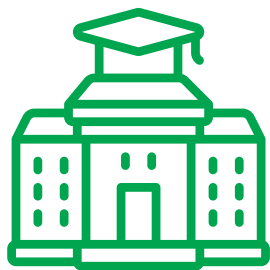
In these short introductory remarks, I commented on some of the activities performed, which are described in detail in the text below.

In the end, I would like to thank our current and future associates, colleagues from the academic and scientific community, and all those who support the work of the Agency. I hope that we will successfully cooperate in the years ahead.

Mr. sc. Sandra Bezjak

Acting Director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education

2021 IN REVIEW



Re-accreditation of

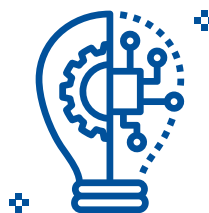
24

higher education
institutions



6

procedures of
initial accreditation
of new study programmes



10

procedures of initial
accreditation for
scientific activity



Audit of

5

higher education
institutions



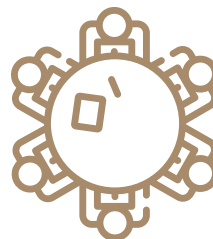
11

Accreditation
Council sessions



120

sessions of
scientific field
committees



7

sessions of
the Council of
Polytechnics and Colleges



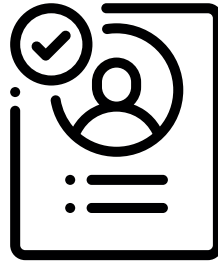
40

sessions of
field committees



11

sessions of the
National Council for Science,
Higher Education and
Technological Development



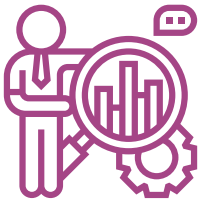
82%

of candidates secured
their right of enrolment
in a study programme
(the summer enrolment period)



1500

foreign higher education
qualifications for the
purpose of employment
recognized



8

international projects
financed from the
EU programmes
and other sources



3

publications published



27

education activities
for HEIs held



2

surveys
on effects of COVID
pandemic on
HE system



**QUALITY ASSURANCE
IN SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION**

RE-ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

In 2020, the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) published the Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2021¹, which included the following higher education institutions:

1. Polytechnic of Međimurje in Čakovec,
2. Police College in Zagreb,
3. Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb,
4. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb,
5. Faculty of Law, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
6. Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb,
7. Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb,
8. Faculty of Science, University of Split,
9. Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology of the University of Zagreb,
10. Faculty of Chemistry and Technology, University of Split,
11. Faculty of Textile Technology, University of Zagreb,
12. Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek – Department of Biology,
13. Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek – Department of Mathematics,
14. Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek – Department of Physics,
15. Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek – Department of Chemistry,
16. University of Rijeka – Department of Physics,
17. University of Rijeka – Department of Mathematics,
18. University of Rijeka – Department of Informatics.

Pursuant to the amendment to the Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2021² as of July 2020, the following was included in the Plan:

19. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split.

Re-accreditation of the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb and the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology, University of Zagreb, will be carried out in 2022.

In January 2021, in accordance with the ASHE's Accreditation Council's Decision on the method of implementation of external evaluation procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic, while taking into consideration the ENQA statement on external quality assurance during the COVID-19 pandemic and good practice of other quality assurance agencies, the Agency's Accreditation Council adopted the Decision on higher education institutions to which a hybrid model of conducting the re-accreditation procedure is applied, which are included in the Re-accreditation Plan in 2021³.

¹ Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2021 available at: https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/vrednovanja/Plan_reakreditacije_za_2021_godinu_-_AZVO.pdf.

² Amendment to the Re-accreditation Plan for 2021 available at: https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/vrednovanja/Odluka_o_dopuni_Plana_reakreditacije_za_2021.pdf.

³ Decision on higher education institutions to which the hybrid model of conducting the re-accreditation procedure is applied, and which are included in the Re-accreditation Plan for 2021 available at: https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/novosti/Odluka_o_primjeni_hibridnog_modela_2021.pdf.

Re-accreditation of the following HEIs was conducted according to the Plan adopted by ASHE's Accreditation Council:

1. Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb,
2. Faculty of Dental Medicine and Health Osijek, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
3. Polytechnic of Karlovac,
4. Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Zagreb,
5. University of Split – University Department of Professional study programmes,
6. Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Split,
7. Polytechnic Hrvatsko Zagorje in Krapina,
8. Polytechnic of Međimurje in Čakovec,
9. Police College in Zagreb,
10. Faculty of Law, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
11. Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek – Department of Mathematics,
12. Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek – Department of Physics,
13. Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek – Department of Chemistry,
14. Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek – Department of Biology,
15. University of Rijeka – Department of Mathematics,
16. University of Rijeka – Department of Informatics,
17. University of Rijeka – Department of Physics,
18. Faculty of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Zagreb,
19. Faculty of Textile Technology, University of Zagreb,
20. Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb,
21. Faculty of Chemistry and Technology, University of Split,
22. Faculty of Science, University of Split,
23. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split,
24. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb.

The procedure was conducted in the spring and autumn of 2021. Along with Croatian experts, international experts from the following higher education institutions also took part in the re-accreditation:

- School of Science and Engineering, University of Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
- Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of Bristol, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
- Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, Republic of Slovenia,
- Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, Republic of Finland,
- University Fernando Pessoa, Portuguese Republic,
- School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
- Institute for Slavic Studies, University of Vienna, Republic of Austria,
- Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Federal Republic of Germany,

- Humboldt University Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany,
- Social work department, School of Governance, Law and Society, Tallinn University, Republic of Estonia,
- Department of European, International and Comparative Law, University of Vienna, Republic of Austria,
- Universität Salzburg, Constitutional and Administrative Law,
- University of Graz, Faculty of Theology, Republic of Austria,
- Vytauto Didžiojo Universitetas, Republic of Lithuania,
- Ghent University, Kingdom of Belgium,
- Christian-Albrecht University of Kiel, Federal Republic of Germany,
- Charles University, Faculty of Science, Czech Republic,
- School of Physics, Dublin Institute of Technology, Republic of Ireland,
- School of Biochemistry and Cell Biology, University College Cork, Ireland,
- Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, University of Reading, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
- Lancaster University, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
- Prof. Stojan Petelin, Univerza v Ljubljani, Slovenia,
- Fakulta textilní, Technická univerzita v Liberci, Czech Republic,
- Institut für Botanik, Universität Innsbruck, Republic of Austria,
- Fakulteta za naravoslovje in matematiko, Univerza v Mariboru, Republic of Slovenia,
- University of Girona, Republic of Italy,
- Technological University Dublin, Ireland,
- Fakulteta za kemijo in kemijsko tehnologijo, Univerza v Ljubljani, Republic of Slovenia,
- Institute of Chemistry, Eötvös University, Hungary,
- University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, Republic of Slovenia,
- Department of Physics, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Kingdom of Norway,
- Faculty of Engineering and Natural Sciences, Tampere University, Republic of Finland,
- The Bristol Centre for Nanoscience and Quantum Information, University of Bristol, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
- Graz University of Technology, Republic of Austria,
- Faculty of Information Studies in Novo Mesto, Republic of Slovenia,
- Department of Mathematics, Aarhus University, Kingdom of Denmark,
- Institute of Mathematics, Stockholm University, Kingdom of Sweden.

A preliminary site visit to above-mentioned higher education institutions was organized in a standard way which lasted one or two days. Local members of the expert panels participated in the preliminary site visit to the higher education institutions in person. In addition to the local members of the expert panels, the coordinator of the Agency and, if necessary, an employee from ASHE's IT Department participated in the preliminary site visit to the higher education institution. The preliminary site visit to the higher education institution was performed according to a pre-established protocol, which included an obligatory meeting with the higher education institution's management board, a tour of the higher education institution and attending classes, and reviewing evidence and documents prepared by the higher education institution in hardcopy and in digital form. Due to epidemiological situation, foreign members of the expert panels could not participate in the preliminary visit on site, but via video link.

All members of the expert panels were provided in advance with a video of the space/equipment mentioned in the Self-evaluation Report (classrooms, laboratories, library, work facilities, IT classroom, student administration office, etc.) and with a link to the documentation mentioned in the Self-evaluation Report.

The main site visit was conducted via video link (online; lasting 1 to 3 days). All meetings were held through Zoom Meetings application, which enabled interpretation from Croatian into English.



Preliminary site visit to the Faculty of Law, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek



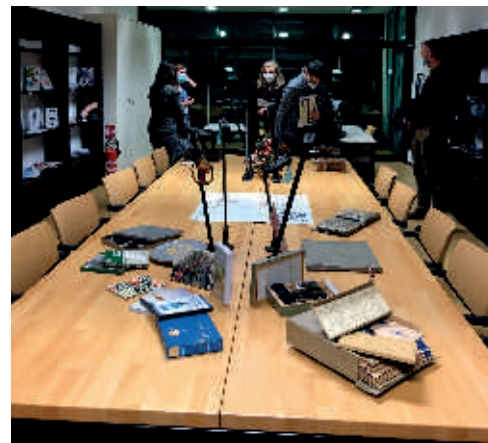
Preliminary site visit, tour of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb



Preliminary site visit, tour of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb



Preliminary site visit, tour of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb



Preliminary site visit, tour of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb

Reviewers' comments from anonymous surveys

In order to improve its work, ASHE collected feedback on the satisfaction of users with the Agency's services. We received the following comments from various stakeholders:

- *I find the procedure very good.*
- *Communication was very pleasant, the panel could ask any question, the higher education institution was very cooperative, the Agency provided the necessary support, the panel was able to hold internal consultations as needed.*
- *I am very satisfied with the quality of the discussion, the distribution of work and the preparations for the preliminary online visit to the higher education institution.*

Follow-up procedure in the re-accreditation of higher education institutions

The Follow-up Committee is an advisory body of the ASHE Accreditation Council. The task of the Follow-up Committee is to provide expert assistance to the Accreditation Council on all follow-up issues in the case when a higher education institution or a scientific organization is issued a certificate confirming that it meets all conditions for conducting higher education and/or scientific activities or part of activities after the completed re-accreditation procedure.

Within its scope of work, in addition to providing expert assistance to the Accreditation Council, the Committee also issues opinions on compliance or non-compliance of the action plan with the recommendations of the expert panel, which are contained in the expert panel's final report. The Committee also issues an opinion on compliance or non-compliance of the report on the implementation of the action plan with the action plan submitted by the higher education institution.

In 2021, the Follow-up Committee held four sessions. In total, 17 procedures were completed, 8 of which in relation to action plans, and 9 in relation to the reports on the implementation of action plans in the process of re-accreditation of higher education institutions. Of those, 16 cases received a positive opinion of the Follow-up Committee, while it issued a request for amendment for one case.

Educational activities for higher education institutions

An online training event for drafting the self-evaluation report was held for representatives of higher education institutions participating in the procedures of re-accreditation according to the Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2022.

On 14 October 2021, ASHE organized training events for drafting self-evaluation reports for representatives of higher education institutions scheduled to undergo re-accreditation procedure in 2022.

The event was organized for the purpose of preparation of higher education institutions for the upcoming re-accreditation and to provide them with important information for preparing the self-evaluation report.

The following employees of the Agency for Science and Higher Education talked about the procedure of re-accreditation of higher education institutions, system of grading and assessment of the quality of higher education institutions, evaluation standards and the information system: Matan Čulo, Marina Grubišić, Vlatka Šušnjak Kuljiš and Iva Žabarović.



Workshops on drafting self-evaluation report

The procedure of re-accreditation was presented from three different perspectives: the perspective of the Accreditation Council was presented by Prof. Sonja Vila, PhD, president of the Accreditation Council, while Prof. Bruno Zelić, PhD, from the Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology of the University of Zagreb presented the perspective of the expert panel members. Associate professor Martina Jakovčić, PhD, from the Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb, talked about the experience of re-accreditation from the perspective of a higher education institution.

The participants commended the organization and usefulness of the workshop:

- *I commend the efforts invested in the preparation of the training and thank the Agency for the information provided.*
- *Availability of training to the general public.*
- *Excellent.*

RE-ACCREDITATION OF POSTGRADUATE UNIVERSITY (DOCTORAL) STUDY PROGRAMMES

After it analysed the outcomes of the procedure of re-accreditation of part of activities of HEIs related to postgraduate university (doctoral) study programmes and published them in the *Overview of re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes in the Republic of Croatia* and presented them at the conference *Evaluation of doctoral study programmes in the Republic of Croatia - overview of re-accreditation* in 2020, the Agency continued monitoring the development of the evaluated doctoral study programmes.

In 2021, the Accreditation Council analysed around twenty reports on eliminating letters of expectation from the re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes. Prior to the expiration of a letter of expectation, a HEI delivering postgraduate university (doctoral) study programmes submits a report on having eliminated deficiencies identified by expert panels in the re-accreditation process to the Agency. Based on the report and evidence supporting the statements made in the report, the Agency's Accreditation Council considers to what extent and in what ways the higher education institution implemented the recommendations for improvement. If necessary, the Accreditation Council may send the whole panel or part of the panel to another visit to a higher education institution to establish the extent to which the deficiencies were eliminated by the HEI. After the expiry of the letter of expectation, the Accreditation Council issues the opinion on whether to:

- Issue a confirmation on the fulfilment of conditions for performing higher education and/or scientific activities, or parts of activities or
- Deny the license for performing higher education and/or scientific activities, or parts of activities.

Based on the opinion of the Accreditation Council, the Agency submits a recommendation to the minister responsible for higher education and science to issue or deny of a license for performing higher education and scientific activities, or part of the activities. The accreditation recommendation is published on the ASHE website.

In 2021, ten doctoral study programmes successfully proved they had eliminated the deficiencies identified by expert panels in the re-accreditation procedures. After the Ministry of Science and Education issued a confirmation on the fulfilment of conditions for performing part of activity these doctoral study programmes are to be further monitored:

- Submitting a five-year action plan adopted for the purpose of quality improvement (within six months from the issuance of confirmation);
- Annual reporting on the implementation of the five-year action plan.

Follow-up procedure in the re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes

The follow-up matters in the procedures which resulted with the issuance of a confirmation on fulfilment of conditions for conducting part of activities are considered by the advisory board of the Accreditation Council – the Follow-up Committee. In 2021, the Accreditation Council of the Agency adopted 65 opinions of the Follow-up Committee in the procedure of re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes.

Four doctoral study programmes that received letters of expectation in 2021 were terminated and the re-accreditation procedure of these study programmes was stopped.

INITIAL ACCREDITATION

Initial accreditation of study programmes

ASHE carried out the procedures of initial accreditation of study programmes in 2021 pursuant to Article 20 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (OG 45/09) and Article 15 and 16 of the Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out a Study Programme and Re-Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (OG 24/2010).

In 2020, ASHE worked towards improving initial accreditation procedure and developed new standards for the evaluation of the study programme quality as well as the tables for entering data into information system. The standards have been aligned with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area revised in 2015 (ESG), the Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out a Study Programme and Re-Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (OG 49/10) and with the proposed concept of the Croatian Qualifications Framework. ASHE also developed the Procedure for initial accreditation and the expert panel final report template used in the initial accreditation procedure. The procedure went through a public discussion and it was adopted at the 122nd session of the Accreditation Council held on 15 December 2020.

The improved initial accreditation procedure came into force on 10 February 2021.

The procedure includes an assessment of compliance of a study programme with the strategic document the Network of Higher Education Institutions, the examination of received documents, a site visit of expert panels to the higher education institution, administrative and expert support provided by the Agency during the site visit, drafting of the final report and issuing the opinion of the Accreditation Council against which the HEI can lodge a complaint. On the basis of the conducted procedure and the Accreditation Council's opinion, the Agency issues the accreditation recommendation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in March 2020, and due to all prescribed epidemiological protection measures, it was impossible to conduct accreditation procedures in the usual way, so the Agency decided to start implementing online initial accreditation, which was continued throughout 2021. To that end, the improved initial accreditation procedure was adjusted to the new mode of work through the Zoom application.

In the past year, ASHE received six requests for initiating the procedure of initial accreditation of new study programmes from polytechnics, colleges and private universities. One evaluation procedure was carried out based on the previous initial accreditation model which had been applied up to 2020, because the request had been received before the new, improved procedure came into force. Based on the initial accreditation procedures carried out online, the Ministry of Science and Education received a recommendation to issue a licence for the evaluated specialist graduate professional study programme.

Three study programmes were evaluated as part of the pilot project of the new, improved initial accreditation procedure. The said three programmes are delivered in three different scientific fields (biomedicine and health, humanities and social sciences), which allowed better insight in the application of new standards with regard to scientific areas. For two study programmes, the Accreditation Council recommended denying the request for the issuance of a licence for performing the proposed study programmes.

New documents for carrying out initial accreditation were sent to independent international peer review during the implementation of pilot evaluations for further improvement of the procedure.

The Agency will include the recommendations resulting from the said peer review in the new documents, as well as recommendations obtained based on anonymous surveys completed by representatives of higher education institutions and members of expert panels who participated in the pilot evaluation procedures, for the purpose of improvement of the new initial accreditation procedure.

Two procedures of initial accreditation are ongoing.

Initial accreditation for performing higher education activities

Pursuant to Article 19 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (Official Gazette 45/2009) and the Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out a Study Programme and Re-Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (OG 24/2010), the Agency for Science and Higher Education carries out the procedures of initial accreditation for carrying out the higher education activity.

In 2021, the Agency received one application for initiating the procedure for performing higher education activities. During the procedure, the higher education institution withdrew the application and the procedure was terminated.

Initial accreditation for carrying out scientific activity

ASHE carries out the procedure of initial accreditation for carrying out scientific activity, that is, establishing a scientific organisation or entering an existing scientific organisation in the Register of Scientific Organisations in a new scientific area pursuant to Article 21 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (OG 45/09) and Articles 1–6 of the Ordinance on Conditions for Issuing Licence for Scientific Activity, Conditions for Re-Accreditation of Scientific Organisations and Content of Licence (OG 83/10).

Initial accreditation for carrying out scientific activity includes the following stages: examining the submitted documents, a site visit of the expert panel to a scientific organisation, writing the final report and issuing the accreditation recommendation. In 2021, the Agency received and solved 10 applications for initial accreditation for carrying out scientific

activity. Out of ten applications in total, six applications were submitted by public higher education institutions, two applications by private HEIs while one application was submitted by a public institution which is not a university, its constituent unit or a public research institute. Two applications were related to the field of technical sciences, two to the field of humanities, two to the field of biotechnical sciences, two to interdisciplinary field and one application was submitted for performing scientific activity in the field of natural sciences and social sciences, respectively. Out of ten received and solved applications, nine received a positive accreditation recommendation, while one procedure resulted in termination.

Positive accreditation recommendations in 2021 were issued to:

- Croatian Memorial Documentation Centre of the Homeland War in the field of humanities;
- Istrian Polytechnic in the field of technical sciences;
- The Catholic University of Croatia;
- Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb in the field of humanities, natural sciences and interdisciplinary field of science;
- University of Slavonski Brod in the field of social and biotechnical sciences;
- Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Split in the interdisciplinary field of science.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all initial accreditation procedures were carried out online, i.e. via the Zoom platform. The members of the expert panels met with the management and scientists of the institutions that submitted the applications via Zoom application, while the tour of the premises was replaced by photographs and video material.

JUSTIFIABILITY OF PUBLIC FUNDING OF NEW STUDY PROGRAMMES

Study programmes delivered by public universities are established and implemented by a university senate decision based on a prior assessment of an internal quality assurance system unit.

In accordance with the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education, the Agency provided opinion on the justification for financing of study programmes for which public universities require additional funds from the State Budget. From the beginning of 2021, pursuant to the decision of the Ministry of Science and Education, the Agency provides opinions for the study programmes for which additional funds from the State Budget are not requested.

In 2021, the Agency received 53 applications from the Ministry for checking compliance of the study programmes with the Strategic document Network of higher education institutions and study programmes in Republic of Croatia (September, 2011) out of which 7 negative opinions were issued because the study programmes were not aligned with the said document.

AUDIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The 2021 Annual Plan of Audits was adopted by the Agency's Accreditation Council at its session on 26 October 2020.

The Annual Plan included the following institutions:

1. Baltazar Polytechnic in Zaprešić,
2. Polytechnic of Zagreb,
3. EFFECTUS Entrepreneurial Studies – higher education institution.

On 11 December 2020, ASHE organised a preparatory workshop for the representatives of the mentioned higher education institutions at which they were introduced to the audit procedure. Participants gave the quality of this workshop an average grade of 4.75/5.

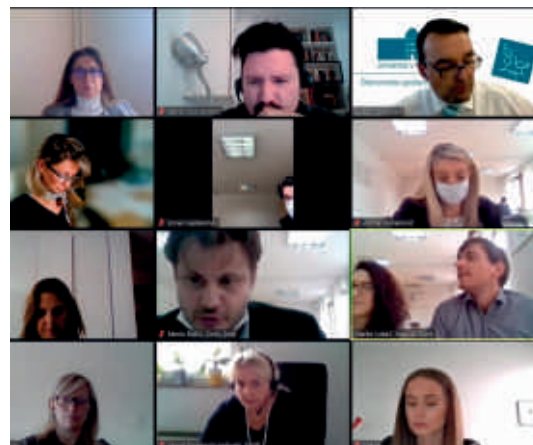
Audit visits by expert panels were scheduled for the autumn of 2021, while the site visit to Baltazar Polytechnic in Zaprešić was postponed for the spring of 2022.

Training of expert panel members was held on 23 March 2021 and on 14 October 2021.

Last spring, the expert panels visited two higher education institutions included in the Annual Plan of Audits for 2020, which were postponed for 2021 due to extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Site visit of the expert panel to Križevci College of Agriculture was carried out on 10-12 May 2021, while the site visit of the expert panel to the Polytechnic of Bjelovar was organized on 24-26 May 2021 in a hybrid form, partly via video-link and partly in person, in accordance with the Decision on the Method of Conducting External Evaluation Procedures During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Site visit of the expert panel as part of audit of EFFECTUS Entrepreneurial Studies – College was carried out on 15-17 November 2021 online, in accordance with the Decision on the Method of Conducting External Evaluation Procedures During the COVID-19 Pandemic, as well as the site visit of the expert panel as part of audit of Zagreb School of Business, which was carried out on 22-24 November 2021.

The expert panel produced the final report on the audit of the Polytechnic of Virovitica which started in 2020. The final report was adopted by the Accreditation Council on 1 April 2021. Based on the



Online visit of the expert panel
as part of audit of
EFFECTUS Entrepreneurial Studies – higher education institution

Accreditation Council's opinion, the Agency for Science and Higher Education issued a certificate for an efficient, developed and functional quality assurance system to the Polytechnic. The certificate, valid for a period of five years, was presented to the HEI on 26 May 2021.

Regarding satisfaction with the audit procedure, the evaluated HEI gave the procedure grade 4.84, while members of the expert panel gave the procedure an average grade 4.91/5.

Final expert panels audit reports for the Polytechnic of Bjelovar and Križevci College of Agriculture were adopted on 20 July 2021. Based on the expert panel's report and the opinion of the Accreditation Council, the Agency issued a certificate to the Polytechnic of Bjelovar. The certificate was presented to the HEI on 9 September 2021.

Regarding satisfaction with the conducted audit procedure, the evaluated HEI gave the procedure grade 4.9, while members of the expert panel gave the procedure an average grade 4.7/5.

Final reports of expert panels in the audit of EFFECTUS Entrepreneurial Studies – higher education institution and the Zagreb School of Business are expected early in 2022.



Presenting the Polytechnic of Bjelovar with an audit certificate

CROQANET

As part of the activities of the National network of quality assurance units at higher education institutions (CroQAnet), a three-day seminar on the topic "Internal quality assurance of higher education institutions: from observers to drivers of change" was held in Zadar on 10-12 November 2021.

The seminar brought together around a hundred representatives of higher education institutions who are responsible for performing activities and procedures of internal quality assurance systems at their higher education institutions. The aim was to exchange experiences and examples of good practice, encourage networking of employees of higher education institutions who deal with quality assurance and strengthen their competencies, as an incentive to further development of the quality of higher education and to building a culture of quality. During the three-day event, the participants discussed quality assurance from a national and European perspective, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), roles of qualifications frameworks in internal quality assurance, role of students, quality assurance of teaching process, examples of good practice and other topics.

The participants agreed that in Croatia there is a lack of training events for the so-called "quality managers at higher education institutions", which is why they expressed satisfaction with the organization of a seminar on this topic and networking with colleagues from all over Croatia.

ASHE'S ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

ASHE Accreditation Council held 11 sessions in 2021. At the sessions held, the Accreditation Council issued expert opinions in the following external evaluation procedures:

- 5 initial accreditation procedures for the delivery of new study programmes;
- 8 initial accreditation procedures for carrying out a scientific activity;
- 4 re-accreditations procedures of higher education institutions from the first cycle;
- 33 re-accreditation procedures of higher education institutions from the second cycle and adoption of action plans and reports on the implementation of the action plans following the issuance of letters of expectation in the re-accreditation procedures;
- 15 re-accreditation procedures of postgraduate university (doctoral) studies;
- 6 re-accreditation procedures of scientific organisations outside the system of higher education and public research institutes;
- 24 evaluations of submitted amendments to study programmes that exceed 20%;
- 3 audit procedures;
- One evaluation procedure of online study programme;
- Two external evaluation procedures of joint studies;
- One evaluation procedure of compliance with the EU Directive.

Moreover, documents for carrying out external evaluation procedures outside of the territory of the Republic of Croatia (Ukraine) were adopted at the sessions of the Accreditation Council in 2021 and expert opinions were issued with regard to six external evaluation procedures of study programmes delivered by a Ukrainian university.

The Accreditation Council also adopted the Re-accreditation Plan for 2022 and discussed opinions of the Follow-up Committee and instructions from the Ministry of Science and Education regarding the procedure of amendments to study programmes exceeding 20%.

COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

The Complaints Committee is an expert body of the Agency that decides on the complaints of higher education institutions to the opinion of the Accreditation Council in the procedures of evaluation of higher education institutions. Members of the Committee are appointed by the Agency's Management Board following a proposal of the Rectors' Conference and the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges in accordance with defined requirements. The Committee comprises three members, of which at least one is a legal expert. Two substitute members are also appointed. The members are appointed for a three-year term; they are independent in their work and do not represent their respective institutions, who adopt their decisions in adherence to the principles of impartiality and objectivity.

During 2021, the Committee held three sessions, at which it decided on the merits of higher education institutions' complaints to the opinion of the Accreditation Council in a total of five cases. In four cases the complaints were found to be unsubstantiated, while in one case they were found justified. In two sessions the Committee discussed the merits of the application for access to information.



**ASHE'S SUPPORT TO STRATEGIC
AND EXPERT BODIES
IN THE SYSTEM OF SCIENCE
AND HIGHER EDUCATION**

ASHE provides administrative and expert support to the activities of the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, scientific field committees, scientific area councils and field committees. All this represents an added value as it enables collecting and linking information and data related to the improvement of the quality of higher education and science in Croatia.

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE, HIGHER EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

As in previous years, in 2021, the Agency continued to ensure the successful work of the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development (NCSHETD), the highest advisory body responsible for the development and quality of overall scientific activity and the system of science, higher education and technological development in the Republic of Croatia.

ASHE provided administrative and expert support to the work of the Council by preparing the necessary materials and providing information for Council sessions, as well as drafting minutes, proposals, comments, decisions and conclusions with regard to the research centres of excellence, amendments to the Ordinance on the Conditions of Appointment to Scientific Grades, Decisions of the NCSHETD expert committee for determining the criteria of teaching excellence (65+); appointments and dismissals of members of scientific field committees and area councils, proposals for consent to delivery of professional study programmes at universities, consent for conducting part of the procedure of appointment to scientific grades, providing prior consent for the delivery of integrated undergraduate and graduate university study programmes, providing consent for the delivery of undergraduate professional studies, providing consent for the delivery of specialist professional graduate study programmes, presentation on professional studies in the Republic of Croatia today, providing consent to institutional statutes, issuing other statements, opinions, recommendations, approvals, etc.

During 2021, the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development held 10 regular and one thematic session. Also, there were sessions of working groups and expert panels established by the National Council such as: Expert committee for opinions on meeting criteria for teaching excellence with regard to the extension of the employment contracts (for employees over the age of 65); working group for prior opinions on statutes; working group for proposals of minimum work requirements for the re-appointment to scientific, scientific-teaching, artistic-teaching, teaching and professional positions; working group for proposals of amendments to the Ordinance on Scientific and Artistic Areas, Fields and Branches (part related to arts), the Croatian Bologna Follow-up Group and Croatian Strategic Forum for Research Infrastructures.

SCIENTIFIC AREA COUNCILS AND COUNCIL FOR ARTS

Scientific area councils are responsible for the matters within the competence of the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, in relation to certain scientific and artistic areas. NCSHETD appointed seven scientific area councils: Scientific Area Council for Natural Sciences, Scientific Area Council for Technical Sciences, Scientific Area Council for Biomedicine and Health, Scientific Area Council for Biotechnical Sciences, Scientific Area Council for Social Sciences, Scientific Area Council for Humanities and the Council for Arts.

ASHE provided administrative and expert support to scientific area councils by preparing materials and information for sessions, by writing invitations, minutes, proposals, comments and/or opinions related to; issuing opinions on the way of indicating fields, i.e. scientific fields or artistic field for the study programme delivered in two or more scientific areas i.e. fields according to the university senate decision. Furthermore, they discussed the European Commission document: *Towards a reform of the research assessment system - Scoping report*; Draft version of the Croatian National Development Strategy until 2030, categorization of journals in the field of humanities, amendments to the Ordinance on Scientific and Artistic Areas, Fields and Branches (related to the artistic area) and other topics.

Scientific Area Councils held 12 sessions in 2021.

SCIENTIFIC FIELD COMMITTEES

Last year, the Office for Scientific Field Committees continued providing support to the work of the 22 scientific field committees that participate in the appointments to scientific grades, the work of the Scientific Field Committee for Arts that decides on the art component in the appointment to the artistic-teaching grades, as well as carrying out the process for determining criteria for scientific/artistic excellence in the selection process for employments of employees over the age of 65.

During 2021, a total of 120 sessions were held, with a total of 1358 decisions passed, of which 1322 were positive and 36 were negative.

The data shows that scientific field committees with the highest number of conducted procedures for appointment to grades are as follows:

1. Scientific Field Committee for Biomedical Sciences and Healthcare - Fundamental Medical Sciences, Clinical Medical Sciences, Public Health and Health Protection, Dentistry and Pharmacy,
2. Scientific Field Committee for Biotechnical Sciences - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry, Wood Technology, Biotechnology, Food Technology and Nutrition,
3. Scientific Field Committee for Technical Sciences - Mechanical Engineering, Shipbuilding, Traffic and Transport Technology, Aviation, Rocket and Space Technology.

In 2021 there were:

- a) 1085 appointments to scientific grades upon individual request or the request of a scientific institution, while those
- b) conducted on the basis of a public call amounted to 273.

The data shows that in 2021 the following were appointed to scientific grades:

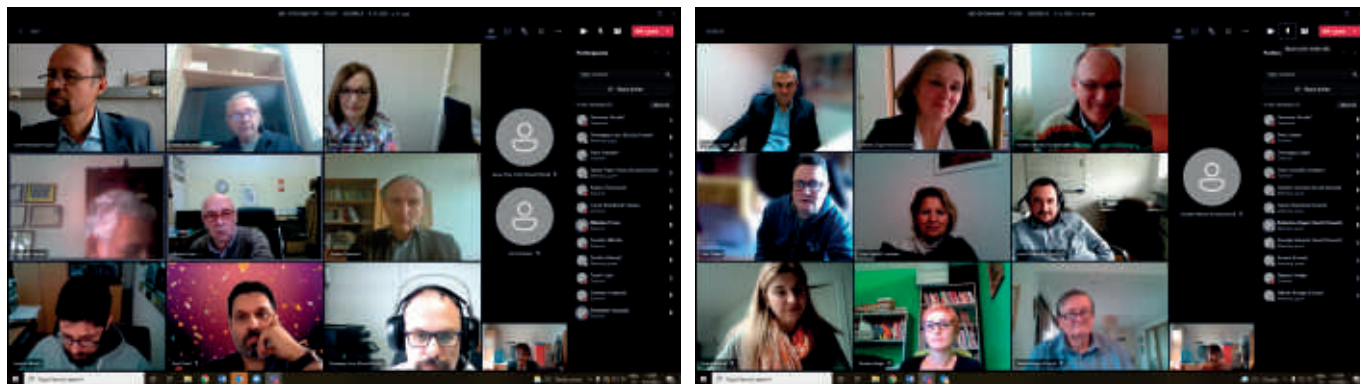
- a) 431 research associates,
- b) 494 senior research associates,
- c) 195 scientific advisors,
- d) 132 research staff advisors with tenure.

The Scientific Field Committee for Arts - field of Dramatic Arts (theatre and media), Film Arts (film, electronic and media art of motion pictures), Music Art, Visual art, Applied Arts, Dance Art and Art of Movement confirmed the artistic segment in the appointment to artistic-teaching grade for 37 assistant professors, 15 associate professors, 17 full professors and 1 full professor with tenure.

Within the procedures for determining criteria for scientific/artistic excellence in the selection procedure for the conclusion of employment contracts for employees over the age of 65, scientific field committees issued 30 positive decisions in 2021 (of which 15 in the field of arts) and 1 negative decision on meeting the criteria for scientific excellence.

Last year, administrative procedures of appointment into scientific grades continued to be conducted in accordance with special epidemiological measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Scientific field committees continued to hold online sessions using MS Teams or Zoom platforms. The Agency for Science and Higher Education provided administrative and technical support to committees in this aspect as well.

On 26 April 2021, the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development appointed new scientific field committees for a term of four years.



Online sessions of scientific field committees

Table 1: Number of conducted procedures and results of appointments to scientific grades by scientific field committees in 2021

Scientific Field Committee	No. of sess. held	Excellence criteria	Positive decisions				Negative decisions				Total positive	Total negative	Total
			Research associate	Senior research associate	Scientific advisor	Scientific advisor with tenure	Research associate	Senior research associate	Scientific advisor	Scientific advisor with tenure			
Biology SFC	4	0	10	9	5	5	0	0	0	0	29	0	29
Physics (+ Geophysics) SFC	6	0	18	17	9	4	0	1	0	0	48	1	49
Geology (+ interdisciplinary natural sciences) SFC	4	0	9	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	15
Chemistry SFC	6	0	14	10	8	5	1	0	0	0	37	1	38
Mathematics SFC	6	1	6	9	7	7	1	0	1	0	29	2	31
Architecture and Urban Planning, Geodesy and Civil Engineering SFC	5	2+1 neg.	18	21	6	4	0	0	0	0	49	0	49
Electrical Engineering and Computing SFC	4	0	21	17	12	13	0	0	0	0	63	0	63
Chemical engineering, Mining, Geology and Petroleum Engineering, Metallurgy, Textile Technology and Printing Technology SFC	5	2	12	26	6	10	0	0	0	2	54	2	56
Mechanical Engineering, Naval Architecture, Traffic and Transportation Engineering, Aviation, Rocket and Space Technology SFC	5	0	28	29	10	17	0	0	0	0	84	0	84
Fundamental Medical Sciences, Clinical Medical Sciences, Public Health and Health Protection, Dentistry and Pharmacy SFC	9	4	126	98	36	19	0	1	1	0	279	2	281
Veterinary Medicine SFC	4	0	4	8	1	5	0	0	0	0	18	0	18

Scientific Field Committee	No. of sess. held	Excellence criteria	Positive decisions				Negative decisions				Total positive	Total negative	Total
			Research associate	Senior research associate	Scientific advisor	Scientific advisor with tenure	Research associate	Senior research associate	Scientific advisor	Scientific advisor with tenure			
Agricultural Sciences, Forestry, Wood Technology, Biotechnology, Food Technology and Nutrition SFC	4	0	34	45	11	10	1	1	0	0	100	2	102
Economics SFC	6	0	25	32	17	7	0	0	0	0	81	0	81
Information and Communication Sciences SFC	6	0	10	16	4	3	1	0	0	0	33	1	34
Pedagogy, Educational and Rehabilitation Sciences, Logopaedics and Kinesiology SFC	5	0	17	20	10	2	0	0	0	0	49	0	49
Political Science, Sociology, Demography, Social Work and Security and Defence SFC	5	0	9	16	7	3	1	0	0	0	35	1	36
Law SFC	4	0	9	27	10	4	0	0	0	0	50	0	50
Psychology SFC	4	0	5	4	3	3	0	1	0	1	15	2	17
Philosophy and Theology SFC	6	2	7	8	1	2	3	1	0	0	18	4	22
Philology SFC	6	1	16	39	15	3	0	3	0	0	73	3	76
History, Art History, Art Science, Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology SFC	5	3	16	27	10	3	3	0	0	0	56	3	59
Interdisciplinary Field SFC	6	0	17	13	4	3	2	2	0	0	37	4	41
TOTAL	115	15+ 1 neg.	431	494	195	132	13	10	2	3	1252	28	1280

Table 2: Number of conducted procedures and results of determining the art component for the artistic-teaching grades by the Scientific Field Committee for Arts in 2021

Scientific field committee	Positive decisions						Negative decisions						
	No. of sessions	Excellence criteria	Assistant professor	Associate professor	Full professor	Full professor with tenure	Assistant professor	Associate professor	Full professor	Full professor with tenure	Total positive	Total negative	Total
SFC Arts	5	15	37	15	17	1	7	1	0	0	70	8	78

COUNCIL OF POLYTECHNICS AND COLLEGES

The Council of Polytechnics and Colleges (CPC) is a national body in charge of deciding on the issues of common interest for the activities and development of polytechnics and colleges. Its members are deans of all polytechnics and colleges in Croatia. A representative of the Rectors' Conference and a representative of the Students Council of Polytechnics and Colleges participate in the work of the Council without voting rights. The Council of Polytechnics and Colleges has 34 members, of which 17 are polytechnics and 17 are colleges. Out of the total number of members, 14 institutions are public and 20 are private.

The Agency for Science and Higher Education organised seven sessions of the Council in 2021, two of which were held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while five sessions were held live. Some of the main topics discussed at the Council sessions were amendments to the Decision on conditions for the assessment of teaching and expert activity in the procedure of appointment to teaching grades on which they worked intensively throughout the year. They discussed the fight against sexual harassment and to that end they adopted the document “Guidelines for polytechnics and colleges for defining protocols for dealing with cases of sexual harassment” and the epidemiological situation in polytechnics and colleges, as part of which they issued a public invitation to students and staff to receive vaccination and the amended recommendations for teaching delivery with regard to epidemiological situation.

In the previous year, the Council established cooperation with the ombudsperson for persons with disabilities, with the aim of improving the conditions of studying for persons with disabilities. In relation to the establishment of the Committee for Public Polytechnics and Colleges in 2020, the Committee for Private Polytechnics and Colleges and the Committee for Legal Affairs were established in April 2021, as permanent working bodies of the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges discussing issues within their competence.

The Council actively participates in all public debates related to the system of higher education, and especially in relation to professional study programmes, and appoints its representatives to a number of national bodies in the field of higher education.

At an international level, a representative of the Council was appointed as member of the Executive Board of the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the international association of higher education institutions delivering professional study programmes, of which the Council is also member.

In March 2021, the portal www.strucnistudiji.hr was launched as a platform for the promotion of polytechnics and colleges and professional study programmes in general, while an online campaign for the promotion of the portal and professional study programmes was conducted from June to October.

FIELD COMMITTEES

Field committees of the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges held 40 sessions, passing a total of 358 positive decisions on the fulfilment of criteria for appointment to teaching grades in the period from January to the end of December 2021. Sessions of the field committees were held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while one session was held live.

In this period, the Field Committee for Social Sciences passed the highest number of positive decisions (164). It is followed by the Field Committee for Biomedicine and Health, which passed 75 positive decisions, and the Field Committee for Technical Sciences, which passed 61 positive decisions.

The highest number of positive opinions in the said period in the procedures of appointment to teaching grades was passed in the field of Economics (98 positive decisions passed), followed by the field of Clinical Medical Sciences (60 positive decisions) and the field of Computing (35 positive decisions).

The teaching grade that resulted in the highest number of positive opinions is the teaching grade of lecturer, which resulted in 232 positive opinions, and the lowest number of positive opinions was reached for the teaching grade of tenured college professor - 17 positive opinions.

Furthermore, the field committees adopted a total of 19 negative opinions and asked for 76 amendments to the documents in 2021.

In the said period two sessions of the Field Committees Coordination Committee were held online. The Committee passed one positive opinion in the procedure of appointment to teaching grades in the interdisciplinary field of science. Furthermore, the Committee responded to five inquiries asked in relation to the procedures of appointment to teaching grades and interpretation of conditions stipulated in the Decision on the Conditions for Assessment of Teaching and Professional Activity in the Procedure of Appointment to Teaching Grades (OG 20/12, 85/13 and 4/15). The Committee members also participated in the work of the Committee on drafting of the new decision on the conditions for appointment to teaching grades. The Committee also submitted a proposal for amending the Ordinance on the Organisation and Functioning of the Field Committees and Administering the Procedure of Appointment (OG 118/2019) in relation to the amendments to Article 11 related to the submission of documents for field committees which was adopted by the Council. The Committee also passed an opinion in relation to public lectures held online and submitted it to the Council.

Table 3: Sessions held by field committees in 2021

Field Committee	Social Sciences	Technical Sciences	Humanities	Natural Sciences	Biotechnical sciences	Biomedicine and health	Arts	Field Committees Coordination Committee	Total
Number of sessions	8	6	5	5	6	6	2	2	40
Number of opinions	164	61	17	17	19	75	4	1	358
Number of opinions for tenured college professors	11	0	0	2	3	1	0	0	17
Number of opinions for college professors	24	3	0	2	1	7	0	0	37
Number of opinions for senior lecturers	30	15	6	4	3	13	0	1	72
Number of opinions for lecturers	99	43	11	9	12	54	4	0	232



APPLICATIONS TO STUDY PROGRAMMES IN CROATIA

APPLICATIONS TO UNDERGRADUATE AND INTEGRATED UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

Application for undergraduate and integrated undergraduate and graduate study programmes in the summer enrolment term began on 1 February and lasted until 21 July 2021, when the final ranking lists for study programmes were published. Out of a total of 32 090 candidates, 26 403 or 82% of them secured their right to enrol, while 5 687 i.e. 18% of them failed to secure their right to enrol in any study programme, when the final ranking lists for study programmes in the summer enrolment term were published. The Central Applications Office (CAO) received and processed documents from 391 candidates, who were required to submit documents, 138 of whom completed their secondary education outside of Croatia. Processing of the documents included filing of documents, making sure that documents are valid and complete, entering all candidates' high school grades, conversion of grades into Croatian grading system and a thorough check and verification of candidates' personal data and grades entered in the system. In the period of enrolment in study programmes in the autumn enrolment term which lasted from 23 July to 16 September 2021, out of a total of 6105 candidates, 4064 or 67% of them secured the right to enrol in a study programme, while 2041 or 33% of the candidates failed to secure their right to enrol in a study programme in the autumn enrolment term. The CAO received and processed documents from 181 candidates, who were required to submit the documents, 30 of whom completed their secondary education outside of Croatia.

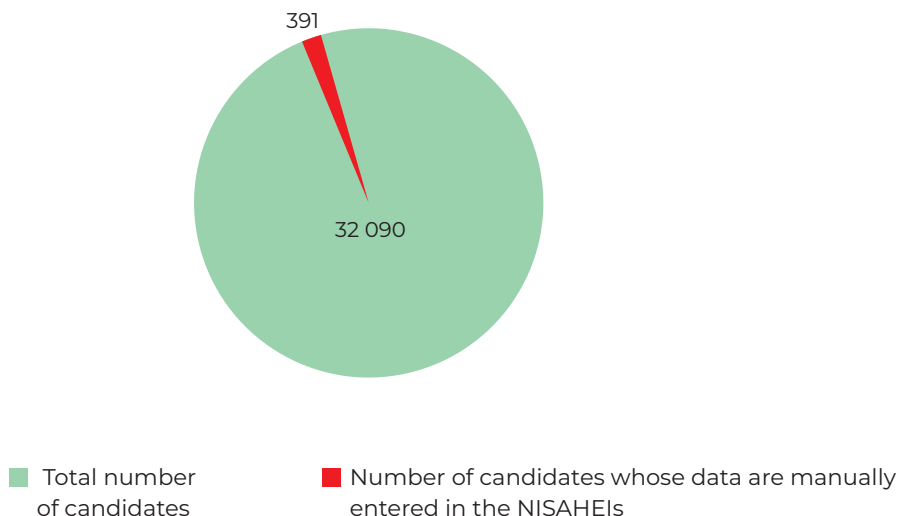


Chart 1: Number of candidates who were required to submit documents to the CAO in the summer enrolment term 2021

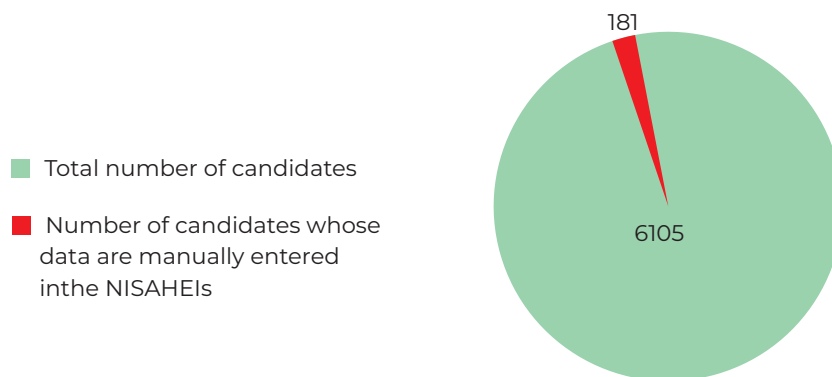


Chart 2: Number of candidates who were required to submit documentation to the CAO in the autumn enrolment period 2021

Out of the total number of candidates who completed their secondary education outside of Croatia during both terms (168), 82 (49%) of them finished high school in the EU Member States, while 86 (51%) of candidates finished high school in other countries.



Chart 3: Number of candidates, by country of completion of high school in 2021

The CAO also received 100 requests for the advanced enrolment, out of which 83 were granted and entered into the system. In the summer enrolment period, there were 894 study programmes and a total of 40.171 slots available in all Croatian higher education institutions. A total of 142.700 applications for enrolment in study programmes were registered (4,44 applications per candidate). In the autumn enrolment period, there were 749 study programmes and a total of 15.095 slots available in all Croatian higher education institutions. A total of 18.067 applications were registered (2,96 applications per candidate).

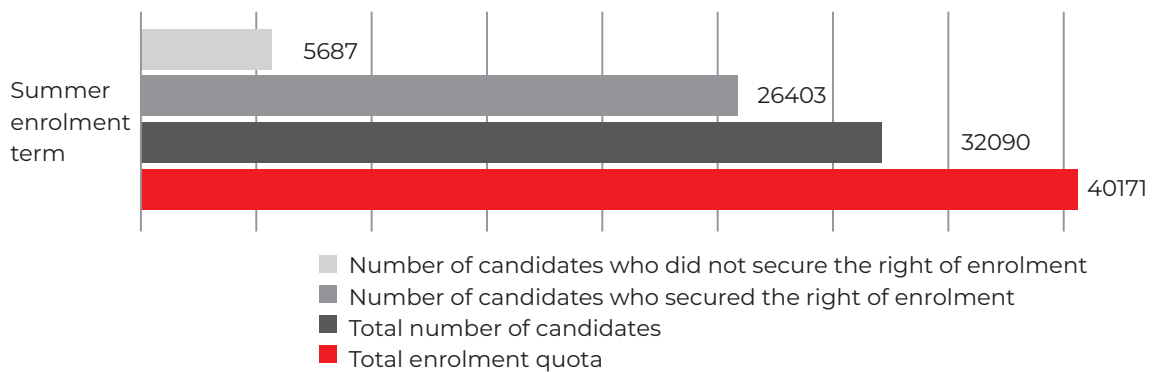


Chart 4: Number of candidates who secured their right of enrolment to undergraduate and integrated study programmes in the summer enrolment period in 2021

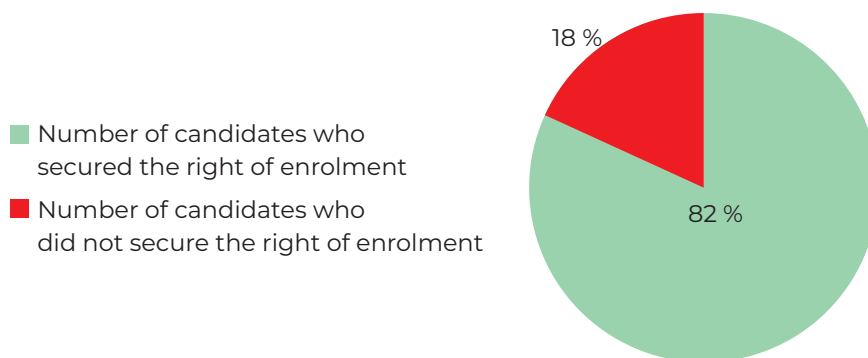


Chart 5: The percentage of candidates who secured their right of enrolment and candidates who did not secure their right of enrolment in a study programme in the summer enrolment period in 2021

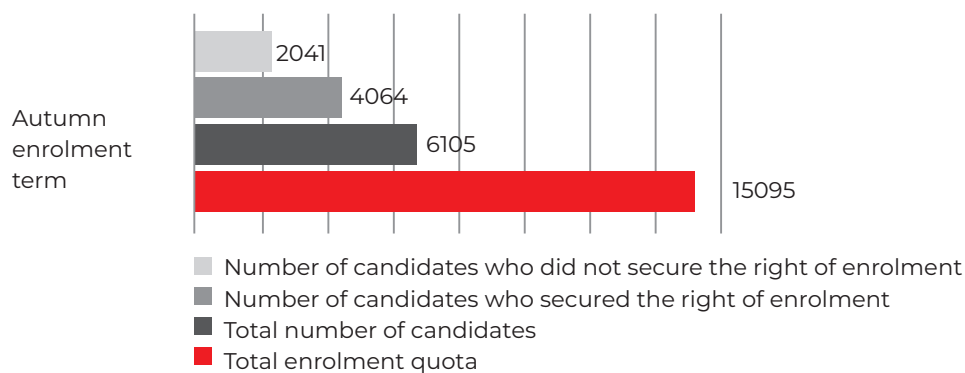


Chart 6: Number of candidates who secured their right of enrolment to undergraduate study programmes in the autumn enrolment period in 2021

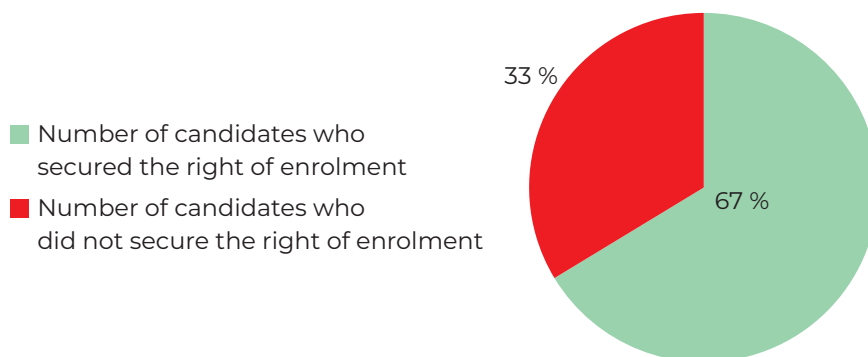


Chart 7: The percentage of candidates who secured their right of enrolment and candidates who did not secure their right of enrolment in a study programme in the autumn enrolment period in 2021

Throughout the year, the CAO replied to applicants' queries, responding to 1.913 telephone queries, 2.957 e-mail queries and 1.856 queries submitted via the form available on the website www.studij.hr. In order to provide full and prompt information to applicants, the CAO staff regularly updated the www.studij.hr website, both in Croatian and English.

APPLYING TO GRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

For the seventh consecutive year, the CAO continued to administer centralised applications to graduate studies through the National Information System of Applications to Graduate Studies (NISaGS). Applications were submitted in the period between 1 July and 30 September 2021, when the final ranking lists for enrolment in graduate study programmes were published. This year, the following HEIs participated in the central applications via NISaGS:

- 3 constituents of the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek:
 - Department of Chemistry;
 - Faculty of Economics;
 - Faculty of Civil Engineering;
- Juraj Dobrila University of Pula;
- Catholic University of Croatia;
- 6 constituents of the University of Rijeka:
 - Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences;
 - Faculty of Civil Engineering;
 - University of Rijeka (Polytechnics and Informatics);
 - Faculty of Health Studies;
 - Department of Informatics;
 - Department of Physics;
- 21 constituents of the University of Zadar:
 - Department of English Studies;
 - Department of Ecology, Agriculture and Aquaculture;
 - Department of Economics;
 - Department of Ethnology and Anthropology;
 - Department of Philosophy;
 - Department of French and Francophone Studies;
 - Department of Geography;
 - Department of German Studies;
 - Department of Information Sciences;
 - Department of Teachers and Preschool Teachers Education;
 - Department of Classical Philology;
 - Department of Croatian Studies;
 - Department of Linguistics;
 - Department of Pedagogy;
 - Department of History;
 - Department of History of Art;
 - Department of Psychology;
 - Department of Sociology;
 - Department of Italian Studies;
 - Department of Tourism and Communication Sciences;
 - Department of Religious Sciences.

- University of Slavonski Brod;
- University North;
- Polytechnic of Karlovac;
- Polytechnic "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar;
- Polytechnic ""Marko Marulić" in Knin;
- Polytechnic of Požega;
- Polytechnic of Šibenik;
- Polytechnic of Rijeka;
- Polytechnic of Međimurje in Čakovec;
- Istrian Polytechnic;
- College of Agriculture in Križevci;
- College for Information Technologies;
- Business College PAR.

There were a total of 4.586 open slots at higher education institutions conducting centralised applications to graduate study programmes through the NISaGS. Out of a total of 3.049 candidates who applied for at least one graduate study programme, 2 326 of them succeeded in securing the right to enrolment when the ranking lists were published. A total of 5.362 applications were registered (1,76 applications per candidate). The CAO received and processed the documents from 602 candidates who were required to submit the documents. Out of the total number of candidates, 76% of them secured the right of enrolment, while 723, i.e. 24% of them failed to do so.

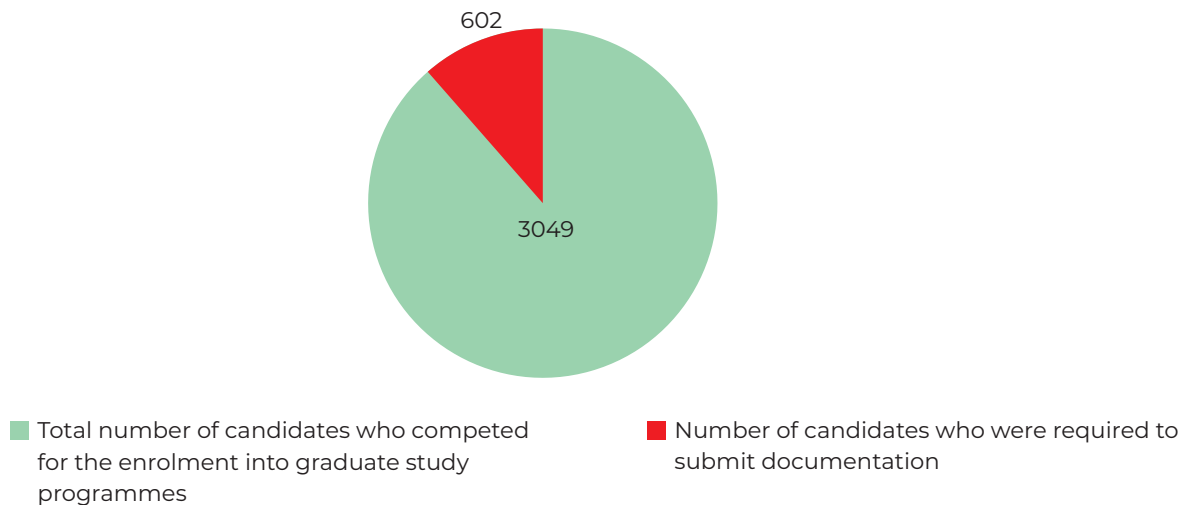


Chart 8: Number of candidates for enrolment into graduate studies in 2021

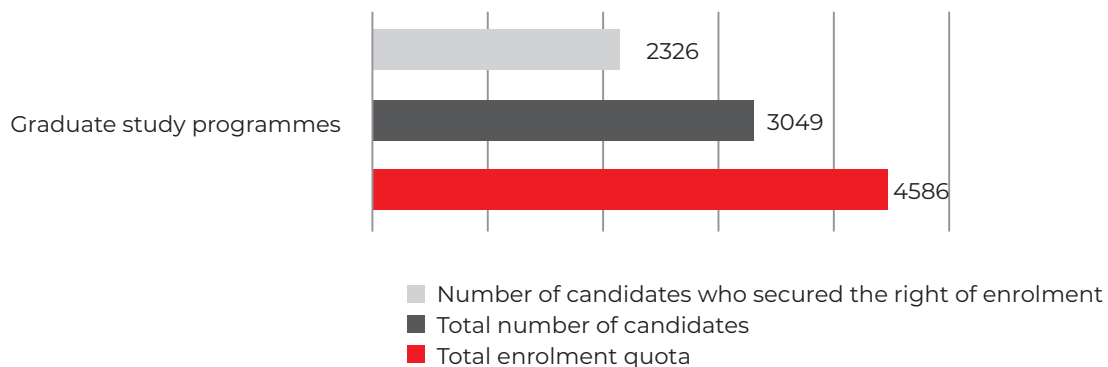


Chart 9: Candidates who secured the right of enrolment in graduate study programmes in 2021

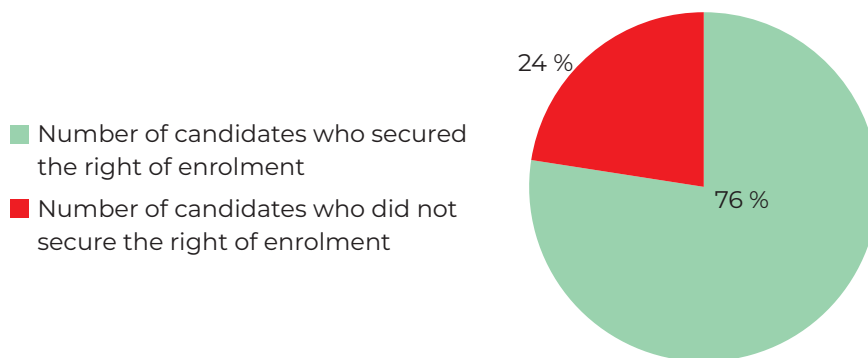


Chart 10: The percentage of candidates who secured their right of enrolment and candidates who did not secure their right to enrolment in a graduate study programme in 2021

Out of the total number of candidates who completed the undergraduate study programme outside of Croatia during both terms (38), 11 (29%) of them finished the undergraduate studies in the EU Member States, while 27 (71%) of candidates completed undergraduate studies in other countries.

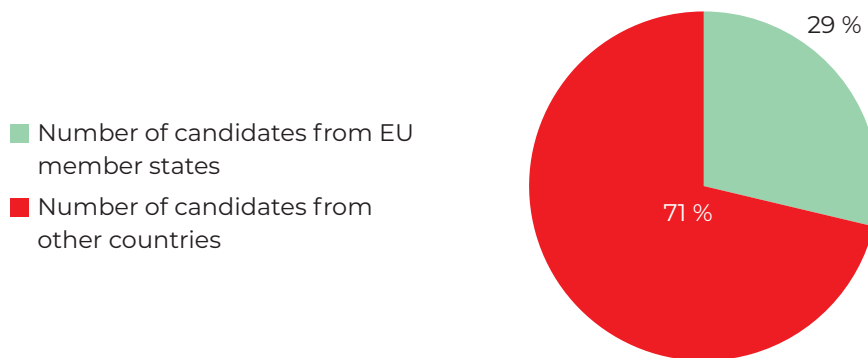


Chart 11: Number of candidates, by country of completion of undergraduate study programme in 2021

SUPPORT TO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Throughout 2021, the CAO continued to provide continuous support to higher education institutions within their competence, and duly informed coordinators about all necessary activities in NISaHEI and NISaGS. The CAO received and answered 621 telephone and 1925 email queries from coordinators.

APPLICATIONS OF CANDIDATES FROM OUTSIDE THE REGULAR EDUCATION SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA FOR ENROLMENT IN THE FIRST GRADES OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The CAO participates in the process of application to the first grades of secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia, which includes candidate registration, verifying the accuracy of personal data and grades of the candidates from outside the regular education system through the National Information System of Applications and Enrolment in Secondary Schools and providing information about the entire procedure. The CAO registered 421 candidates in the summer enrolment term, 220 candidates in the autumn enrolment term and 13 candidates in the subsequent enrolment term. Documents of 255 candidates who were required to submit the documents were processed during the three enrolment terms (summer, autumn, subsequent enrolment term). Out of the total number of candidates registered by the CAO, i.e. 654 candidates, 443 i.e. 68% of them submitted their application forms for both enrolment terms within the given deadline (applications are not submitted during the subsequent enrolment term).

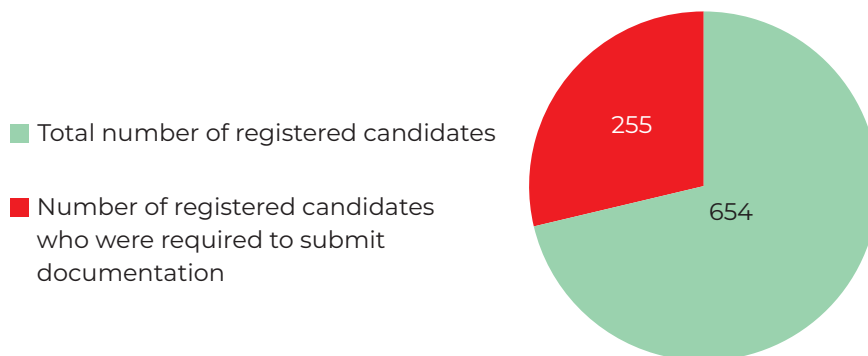


Chart 12: Number of candidate applications outside the regular education system of the Republic of Croatia for enrolment in the first grades of secondary schools in 2021.

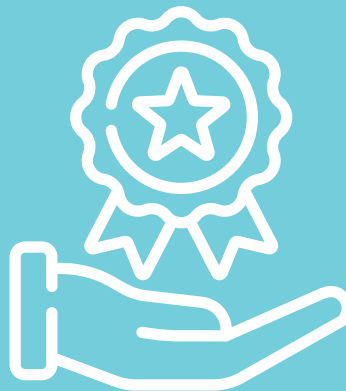
MONITORING GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

In 2021, ASHE continued to conduct surveys on graduate employment. The aim of this project is to gather information from graduates on their experience in higher education and entering the world of employment.

The results of the survey on the employment of students who graduated in the academic year 2017/2018, which was conducted from November until the end of 2019, will be published in 2022.

The survey on the employment of students who graduated in the academic year 2018/2019 was conducted and the analysis of the gathered information was conducted. Drafting of individual reports for HEIs is in progress and they will be published in 2022.

The next survey involving students who graduated in 2019/2020 will be conducted in October 2022.



RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS

NATIONAL ENIC/NARIC OFFICE

ASHE's National ENIC/NARIC Office is an information centre for academic mobility and recognition of foreign higher education qualifications. It is a member of the European Network of National Information Centres on recognition and mobility (ENIC/NARIC).

ENIC network (European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility) was founded by the Council of Europe and UNESCO in order to ensure academic mobility and high-quality application of principles of the Convention on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in Europe (the so-called Lisbon Convention). The network consists of information centres of the member states of the European Cultural Convention or UNESCO Europe Region, with government bodies as their founders.

NARIC network (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) was founded on the initiative of the European Commission with the purpose of improving academic recognition of qualifications in member states of the European Union, European Economic Area (EEA) and joint members of Central and Eastern Europe and Cyprus. The aim of the Network is to encourage academic mobility.

RECOGNITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS

The recognition of foreign higher education qualifications in Europe is done in accordance with the guidelines of The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the so-called Lisbon Convention).

The Lisbon Convention stipulates that the signatory states should establish information centres (ENIC and NARIC network) whose primary function is to enable all interested parties access to information on foreign and national system of (higher) education and qualifications, to provide advice on the recognition and evaluation of foreign higher education qualifications and, in accordance with the relevant legislation, make decisions on the recognition, or rather evaluation of foreign educational qualification.

Implementation of the Lisbon Convention in the national context is the fundamental task of ENIC and NARIC networks. Therefore, in 2021, special attention was devoted to the changes in the national education systems which occurred due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and digital changes that followed these events, as well as their impact on the recognition of foreign qualifications and the scope of work of ENIC and NARIC offices:

- Digitalization of the procedure of recognition of foreign educational qualifications

From the beginning, ENIC and NARIC Office's activities are by their very nature, and for the purpose of faster and easier recognition of foreign qualifications, focused on digital modes of communication (web pages of the ENIC and NARIC networks, etc.), and, therefore, this current situation has only further stimulated the continuous enhancement process of recognition procedures through the accelerated implementation of digital tools - reliance on digital resources, the employment of online assessments and databases when applicable, the recognition of digital qualifications, etc.

- Diploma Supplement

A transparent provision of information remains the key task of the ENIC and NARIC Office, despite all changes in the educational systems. Diploma Supplement - the tool adopted within the Lisbon Convention – is one of the instruments for transparent provision of information. This document was recently updated on the European level, so it could contribute to the automatic recognition of foreign qualifications through more emphasis on learning outcomes and the digital format of the document was improved, which additionally encouraged offices to continually use this document in their work and to encourage additional improvement of this document at the national level.

- Non-traditional forms of learning

Most countries made the transition to online teaching at all levels of education, which stimulated the development of criteria and tools for the recognition of “non-traditional” forms of learning, such as open learning platforms (for example, Massive Open Online Course - MOOC) the so-called microcredentials, etc.

In 2021, the process of recognizing foreign qualifications of refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable groups of migrants at the global level continued to improve. European Qualification Passport for Refugees, originally developed in the European region, became global this year as part of the UNESCO qualifications passport for refugees and vulnerable migrants.

On 15 October 2021 the Croatian Parliament confirmed UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education by the Act on Ascertaining of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (OG-MU 7/21).

In order to respond to the need for a global convention on the recognition of qualifications in higher education that would complement the UNESCO regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications in higher education and improve their cohesion, UNESCO adopted the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education on 25 November 2019 in Paris.

This convention offers the first single global legal framework for the recognition of foreign qualifications in higher education and was adopted relying on UNESCO's regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications in higher education to promote international mobility, as well as communication and cooperation on fair and transparent recognition procedures and ensuring quality and academic integrity in higher education globally.

Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications in Croatia

Since 1 July 2004, Croatia has been conducting the procedure of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications on the basis of the Lisbon Convention principles, or rather the Act on Approving the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, and in accordance with the Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications, which superseded the Act on the Recognition of Foreign School Certificates and University Diplomas that prescribed the procedure of nostrification.

The recognition of foreign higher education qualifications implies a formal acknowledgement of the value of a foreign higher education qualification and does not confer any status rights, academic degrees or titles nor any other titles in accordance with Croatian regulations. The procedure of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications focuses only on the level of acquired knowledge, skills and competencies, without a comparison of study programmes.

In accordance with the regulations in effect, ASHE performs the procedure of professional recognition of foreign higher education qualifications (for the purpose of enabling access to employment in the Republic of Croatia for unregulated professions) and the criteria that have to be met in order to recognize a foreign higher education qualification are as follows:

- A higher education institution which awarded a qualification had been accredited by a competent accreditation body in the state in which it is located;
- That a foreign higher education programme had been accredited by a competent accreditation body of the respective state;
- When a joint degree is concerned, all institutions participating in the delivery of the study programme, as well as the study programme itself, must be accredited by a competent accreditation body of the respective state in which the institution participating in the joint degree is located.

The recognition procedure also includes the following criteria:

- Minimal level and type of qualification that is necessary to access the study programme which leads to the qualification being recognised;
- Access to further education and/or employment that the qualification gives.

The Agency will not recognize a foreign higher education qualification if all the recognition criteria have not been met, in compliance with the international practise.

In 2021, the National ENIC/NARIC Office:

- Received 1540 requests for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for the purpose of employment and processed and solved 1510 requests - out of a total number of processed and solved requests, the decision on the recognition of FHEQ was issued for 1500 requests, while the decision on denial of recognition was issued for 10 requests;
- Received and processed 11 appeals to issued decisions - out of the total number of appeals, nine appeals were resolved in the second instance procedure in favour of the Agency, and two appeal procedures are still pending in the second instance body;
- Responded to 201 requests for the verification of an accreditation institution and the study programme in the procedure of academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications;
- Issued 96 clarifications of Croatian and foreign higher education qualifications;
- Replied to 89 requests for the verification of qualification authenticity;
- Replied to more than 2830 e-mail queries on professional recognition of foreign higher education qualifications in Croatia and abroad, as well as on foreign and Croatian higher education systems and foreign and Croatian higher education study programmes and qualifications.

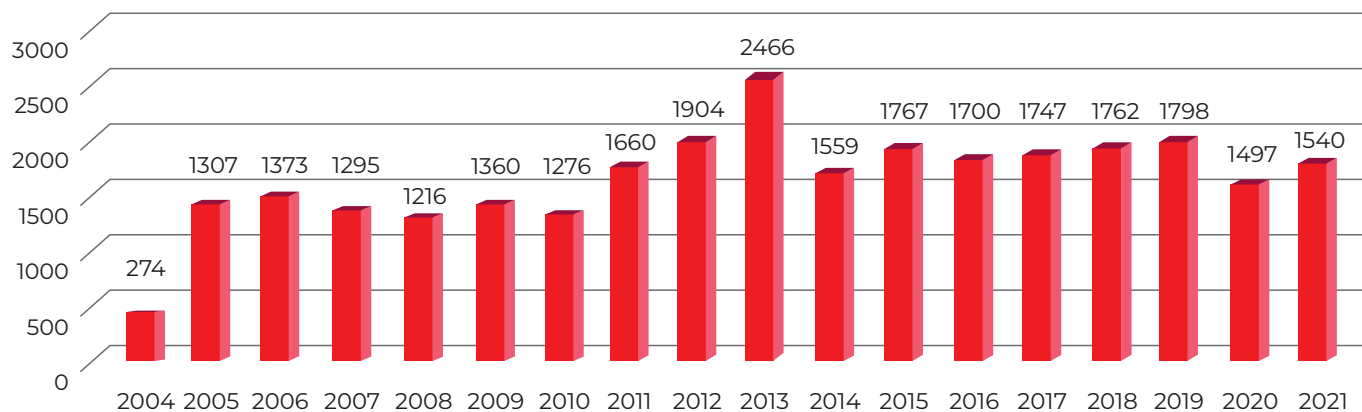


Chart 13: The number of requests for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications (2004 - 2021)

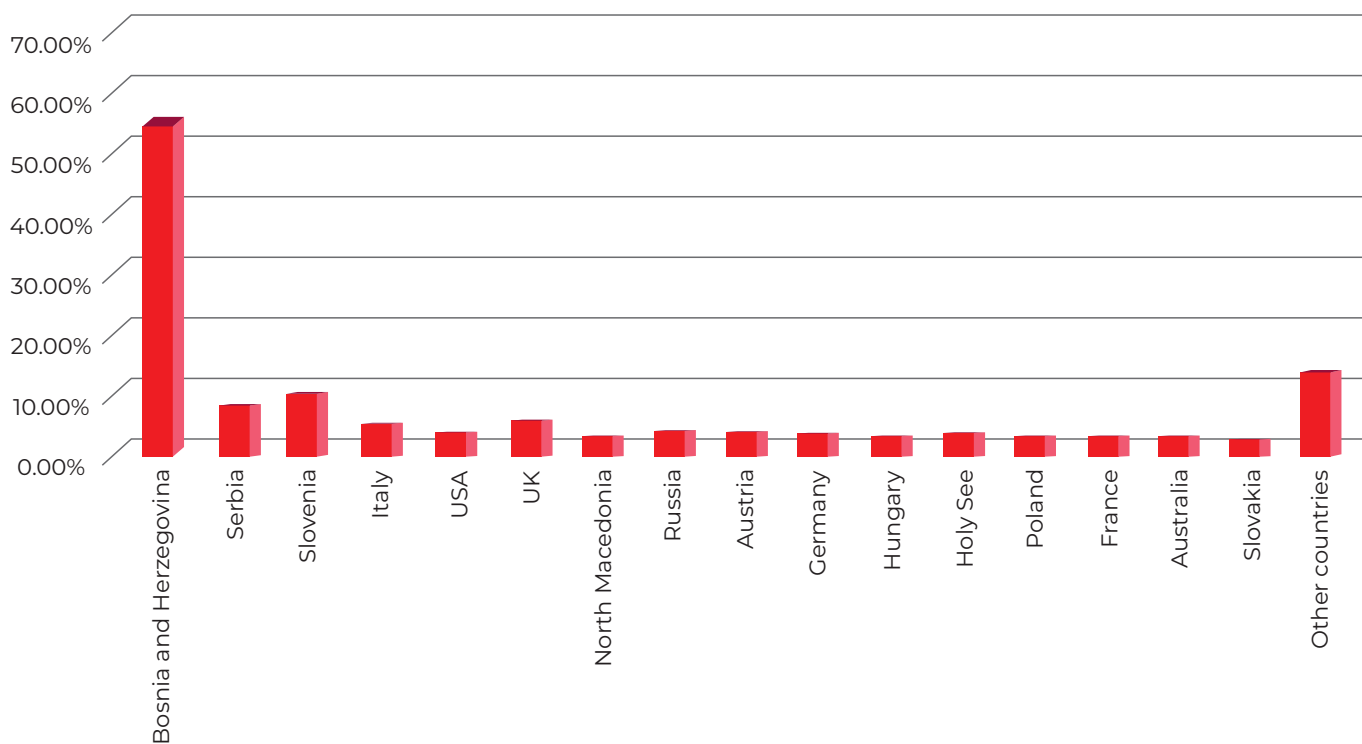


Chart 14: Percentage of higher education qualifications Office received in 2021 (according to the country of issuance of FHEQ)

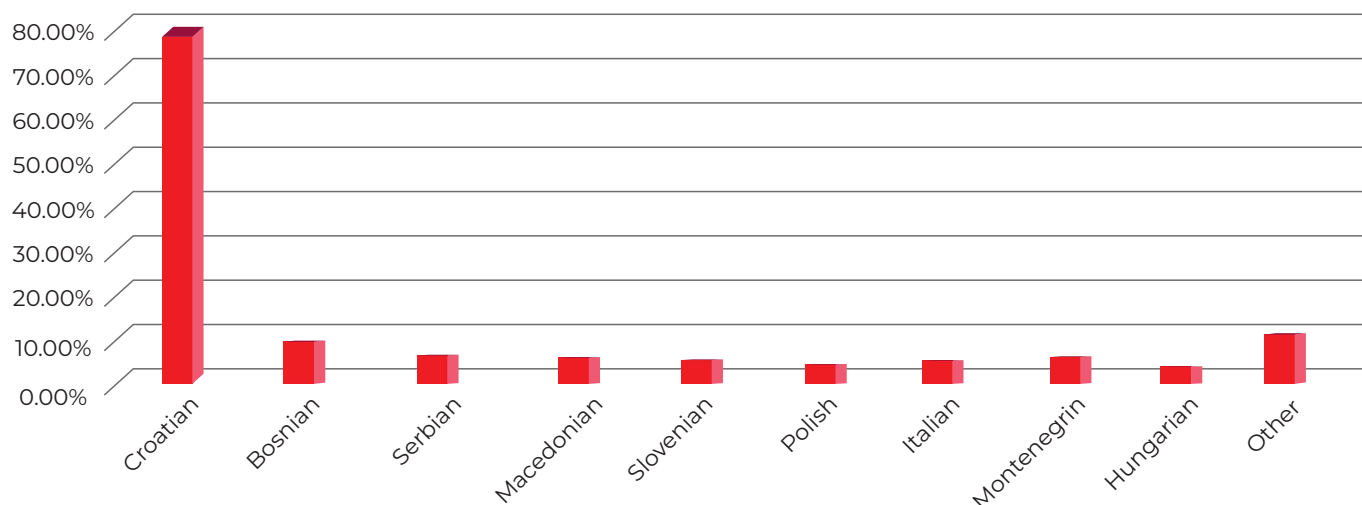


Chart 15: Percentage of higher education qualifications Office received in 2021 (according to the receiver's citizenship)

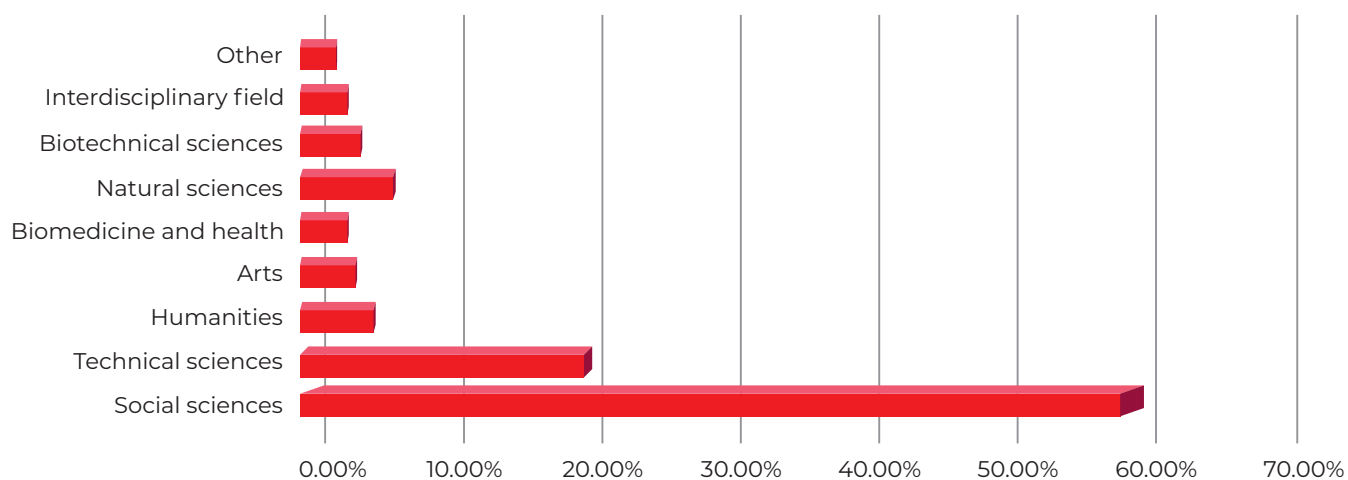


Chart 16: Percentage of higher education qualifications Office received in 2021 (according to the scientific field)

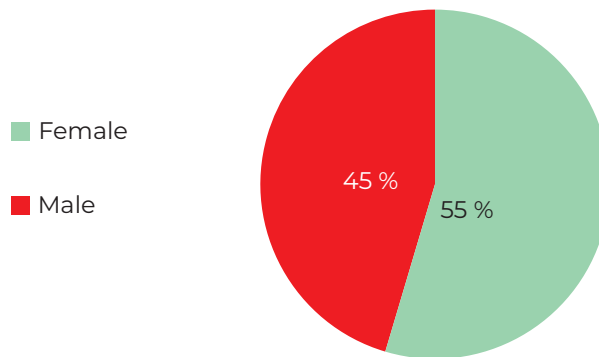


Chart 17: Percentage of higher education qualifications Office received in 2021 (according to the receiver's gender)

ASSISTANCE CENTRE FOR PROVIDING INFORMATION ON THE RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Based on the Act on Regulated Professions and the Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications, the National ENIC/NARIC Office has the role of an assistance centre for providing information on the recognition of professional qualifications.

The role of the Assistance centre is purely informational, while the procedure of recognition of foreign professional qualifications (for the purpose of accessing the regulated labour market) is under the jurisdiction of competent authorities for specific regulated professions.

In accordance with the Act on Regulated Professions and the Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications i.e. provisions of the Directive 2005/36/EC, the assistance centre for providing information on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications provides citizens and assistance centres of other European Economic Area (EEA) Contracting States with:

1. The necessary information on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications in the Republic of Croatia (information about national legislation which governs the access to and pursuit of regulated professions, including social legislation and, if necessary, ethical rules);
2. Assistance in achieving rights that arise from the Act on Regulated Professions and Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications;
3. Information on regulated professions and how to access them in other EEA Contracting States;
4. The necessary information on the Database of Regulated Professions and the recognition of foreign professional qualifications in the Republic of Croatia.

In 2021, the National ENIC/NARIC Office:

- Replied to 155 requests for the verification of the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes in the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.

Table 4: Number of requests for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications (2021)⁴

Competent authority in Croatia	The number of requests for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications (2021)
Croatian Medical Chamber	81
Ministry of Tourism and Sport	39
Croatian Chamber of Pharmacists	35
Croatian Chamber of Psychology	34
Croatian Chamber of Midwives	10
Croatian Chamber of Civil Engineers	9
Croatian Chamber of Medical Biochemists	3
Croatian Chamber of Mechanical Engineers	3
Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development	2
Total	216

⁴ Data from the Database of Regulated Professions and Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications.



**ANALYTICS AND STATISTICS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

The Agency for Science and Higher Education actively participates in the development and management of information and communication tools used in external evaluation procedures, in particular the MOZVAG2 system and the internal information system *Central Procedures Database (CPD)*. In cooperation with the University Computing Centre (Srce), ASHE has been developing and maintaining MOZVAG2 information system since 2017 (it replaced the MOZVAG system) into which all higher education institutions undergoing external evaluation submit information about their activities and resources. It includes information about study programmes, courses, teaching staff, projects and scientific production and other information in accordance with the requirements of a specific evaluation procedure. ASHE also maintains and updates the *Directory of study programmes* available on the Agency's website in both Croatian and English. The Directory provides Croatian and international public (prospective students, foreign ENIC and NARIC offices, etc.) with an insight into the basic information about accredited study programmes in Croatian higher education institutions.

Central Procedures Database information system

Data on all external evaluation procedures carried out by ASHE are recorded in the Central Procedures Database information system, including the information on experts participating in the procedures, documents, procedure outcomes and deadlines for specific phases of a procedure. In addition, ASHE's operational plans, risks and their assessment in relation to business activities and records on staff training are also held in the Central Procedures Database.

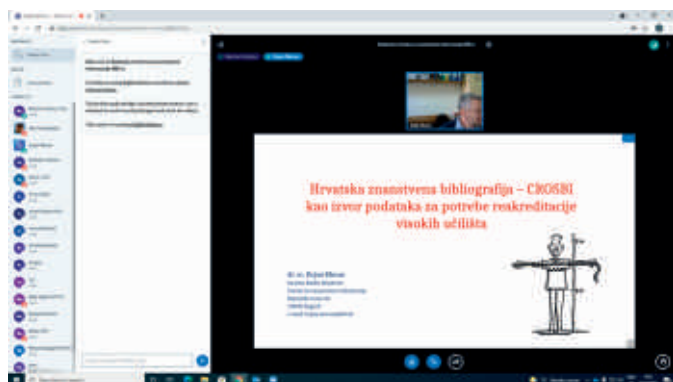
MOZVAG2 information system

MOZVAG2, developed by ASHE in cooperation with the University Computing Centre in 2018, was upgraded several times with the aim of optimizing the delivery of requested information from higher education institutions. More specifically, the option of transferring data was enabled from the information systems *Croatian Scientific Bibliography* CROSBİ and the *Database of Project Activities in Science and Higher Education in Croatia* (Project Database), which are developed and maintained for the purposes of external evaluation by the Centre for Scientific Information of the Ruđer Bošković Institute and ASHE. If the information that the higher education institutions have to deliver within the evaluation procedure is available in the said systems, and if a higher education institution decides to transfer it to MOZVAG2, it is now technically feasible. The information that can be transferred refer to scientific and professional activities at the level of a higher education institution and to each teacher.

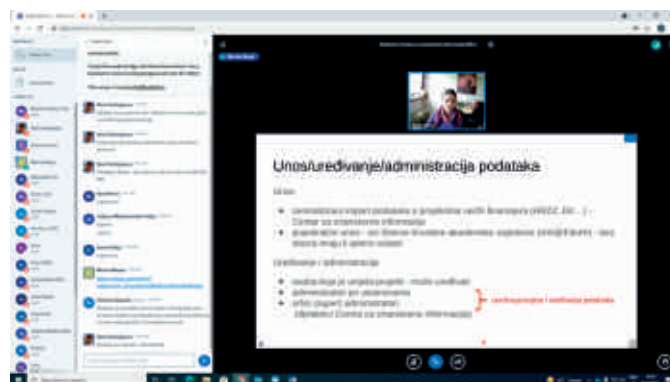
Workshops for administrators of the upgraded CROSBİ and POIROT systems held

ASHE keeps records of authorised MOZVAG2 system administrators, while the Centre for Scientific Information of the Ruđer Bošković Institute keeps records of CROSBİ (Croatian Scientific Bibliography) and POIROT (Database of Project Activities in Science and Higher Education in Croatia) system administrators. ASHE organizes regular workshops for system administrators with the University Computing Centre (Srce) and the Centre for Scientific Information of the Ruđer Bošković Institute. Based on the interest from users, it is evident that most higher education institutions are interested in using the new options.

We held 5 online workshops for CROSBİ system administrators and 3 online workshops for POİROT system administrators in 2021. The workshops were designed for representatives of higher education institutions scheduled to undergo re-accreditation in the coming period. During the workshops, the newly appointed system administrators are assigned privileges and they are trained on how to enter and modify data and prepare reports for the purposes of the re-accreditation procedure. The workshop for CROSBİ administrators held on 5 March 2021 was designed for the formerly appointed administrators, so they could be introduced to the changes and upgrades to CROSBİ. The workshop brought together 74 participants from 55 institutions. Around 150 participants took part in all workshops for CROSBİ system administrators held in 2021. Around 50 participants took part in all workshops for POİROT system administrators held in 2021.



CROSBİ workshop, 27 October 2021



POİROT workshop, 28 October 2022

Support to MOZVAG2 system administrators

E-mail mozvag@azvo.hr and the Quality Forum on ASHE's website serve as a communication channel for the exchange of experience with working in the MOZVAG2 system between ASHE, Srce and HEI system administrators, and for solving their inquiries and problems. Throughout 2021, more than 2000 inquiries were submitted regarding work in MOZVAG2 and for the purpose of a more efficient solving of user enquiries the *Manual for working in MOZVAG2 system* was amended. It is also available online. The Manual will be upgraded in the future based on frequently asked questions from users. The evaluation of 25 higher education institutions was conducted through MOZVAG2 system in 2021. Therefore, in the second re-accreditation cycle which started in 2018, re-accreditation of 103 higher education institutions has been conducted using the MOZVAG2 system.



ASHE INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

In 2021, ASHE successfully underwent its third international review conducted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), for the purpose of confirmation that its work is in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), i.e. for the purpose of renewal of its full membership in ENQA and EQAR. All European quality assurance agencies are required to undergo such an evaluation once every five years to prove the quality of their work. The Agency has thus confirmed the credibility and quality of its work, not only at the national, but also at the international level. As part of the evaluation, online meetings of the international expert commission appointed by ENQA were held with representatives of ASHE and various stakeholder groups, such as representatives of higher education institutions, reviewers, students, ministries and entrepreneurs.

The Agency is receiving more and more expressions of interest, both from European countries and Central and Southeast Asian countries, for accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes of these countries, as well as for the training of their accreditation bodies. In light of this, this year, ASHE also coordinated the external review process of the German accreditation agency The Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics (ASIIN) with the aim of renewing their membership in EQAR, accredited seven study programmes delivered by a Ukrainian higher education institution and the procedure of accreditation of a joint graduate study of Croatian and French higher education institutions, in accordance with the standards of The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

ASHE continued to carry out all activities planned within the project Improvement of quality assurance and Project enhancement systems in higher education (SKAZVO), which started in June 2016 and was financed from the Operational Programme "Efficient Human Resources" 2014–2020 of the European Social Fund (ESF). The implementation of activities within the SKAZVO project was extended until the end of 2021 due to the circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The value of the project was HRK 20,391,217.54, of which 85 % is a direct allocation to ASHE from the European Social Fund (Operational Programme "Efficient Human Resources"). The purpose of the project was to develop new and improve existing procedures of external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes and to strengthen the competencies of higher education institutions' staff. The project also launched new activities such as collecting information and informing the general public about higher education, and developed the counselling services for present and future students.

Most project activities aimed at providing support to higher education institutions through training sessions for teaching and non-teaching staff.

The final project conference was held on 14 December 2021 in Zagreb.

The SKAZVO project successfully passed the final external evaluation. Of the seven evaluation criteria, six (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and added value at EU level) were rated excellent, while one criterion, the one related to effectiveness, was rated very good.

Along with the implementation of the SKAZVO project and activities within other international projects in which ASHE participates as a project leader or partner, ASHE employees gave a number of presentations at international conferences, workshops and seminars in 2021, which were mostly held online.

As part of the DEQAR CONNECT project, in which ASHE participates as one of the partners, an analysis of the quality assurance system in the countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and their compliance with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA was published.

ASHE'S MEMBERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

ASHE is dedicated to participating in the international quality assurance system in higher education and science as established and active member.

ASHE is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA), international association of institutions interested in the topic of academic ranking and excellence in higher education and science – IREG Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence, and is included on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). ASHE is also a member of the International Quality Group of the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), and an observer member of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). ASHE is a long-standing member of European networks of national information centres on academic mobility and recognition – ENIC (European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres). ASHE is also a member of IAAO (International Association of Admissions Organisations), EUPRIO network (European Association of Communication Professionals in Higher Education) and the international association GUIDE Association – Global Universities in Distance Education.

INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

ASHE leads or participates as partner in a number of international projects funded by the European Union or from other sources.

Table 5: European Union and other projects

Project name	Partners	Coordinating institution	Duration	EU programme/ source of funding
Improvement of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Systems at Higher Education Institutions (SKAZVO)	-	ASHE	June 2016 - December 2021	European Social Fund

Project name	Partners	Coordinating institution	Duration	EU programme/ source of funding
<i>Keep innovation in Multi Partnership Cooperation in Lifelong Guidance Services (KEEP IN PACT)</i>	Universcience-Cité des métiers de Paris (Francuska), Learning digital (Italy), Municipio do Porto-Cidade das Profissoes (Portugal), LifeLong Learning Platform (Belgium)	French network Réseau international des Cités des métiers	September 2019 – April 2022	Erasmus +
<i>Enhancing the Coverage and Connectivity of QA in the EHEA through DEQAR (DEQAR CONNECT)</i>	ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE and representatives of stakeholders from the European higher education system (Education International - global union of teachers), and representatives of Bologna thematic groups	EQAR, CIMEA ITA	March, 2020 – February 2022	Erasmus +
<i>Effective partnership for enhanced recognition (EPER)</i>	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia	MSE, Republic of Croatia	May 2019 – December 2021	Erasmus +
<i>Stacking credits & the future of the qualification (STACQ)</i>	UHR (Sweden), QQI (Ireland), Art of e-learning, (Great Britain), ECA (Netherlands), NARIC centre (Ectis Ltd., Great Britain), EADTU (Netherlands), NCFHE (Malta), SKVC (Lithuania)	NUFFIC, NL	June 2020 – May 2022	Erasmus +
<i>Automatic Recognition in the Adriatic Region (AdReN)</i>	NARIC centres of Croatia, Greece and Slovenia and IUAV (University of Venice)	CIMEA, ITA	June 2020 – May 2022	Erasmus +

Project name	Partners	Coordinating institution	Duration	EU programme/ source of funding
<i>Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition (OCTRA)</i>	NARIC centres of Latvia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia and Poland, ENIC centres of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Russia, higher education institutions from Latvia, Rectors' Conference and Student Union of Latvia, as well as the associated relevant stakeholders.	NARIC, LV	June 2020 – May 2022	Erasmus +
<i>CroEduPass</i>	EU Member States, Norway, Liechtenstein (The European Blockchain Partnership - EBP)	EC	July 2021 – April 2022	ASHE

OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME EFFICIENT HUMAN RESOURCES 2014 – 2020 OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND (ESF)

Improvement of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Systems at Higher Education Institutions (SKAZVO)

The Agency carried out the SKAZVO project from 2016 and all project activities were finished on 31 December 2021.

Summary of the activities performed within SKAZVO project:

- 54 higher education institution re-accreditation procedures;
- 114 undergraduate university study programme re-accreditation procedures in Croatia;
- 2 international seminars for representatives of foreign QA agencies organized;
- 6 surveys conducted on graduate employment, student experience, aspirations of high school students for the continuation of education and the need for information on higher education and the impact of the pandemic on higher education, students and HEI teaching staff;
- Information system for support to external evaluation (MOZVAG) upgraded;
- 13 publications issued;
- Pilot human resources management system introduced in two HEIs;
- ASHE international review conducted with the aim of renewal of the status in umbrella European associations for quality assurance in higher education, ENQA and EQAR;
- Professional development of ASHE staff in the field of quality assurance;

- More than 100 workshops, seminars and conferences organized for representatives of HEIs and students, which brought together more than 2000 employees of higher education institutions.

SKAZVO seminars and workshops held in 2021:

- Online symposium *Što stoji iza diplome: planiranje i upravljanje karijerom temeljenom na kompetencijama*, 28 January 2021
- Webinar *Predstavljanje okvira za razvoj i procjenu kvalitete e-kolegija Sveučilišta u Rijeci i iskustva učenja na daljinu*, 17 February 2021
- Webinar *Uloga primijenjenih istraživanja u razvoju stručnog visokog obrazovanja*, 26 February 2021
- Webinar on the accreditation of the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME), 2 March 2021
- Online workshop (webinar) for CROSB system administrators, 4 March 2021
- Online workshop (webinar) for CROSB system administrators, 5 March 2021
- Online workshop *Online provjere znanja u sustavu Moodle 1. dio*, 23 March 2021
- Online workshop *Online provjere znanja u sustavu Moodle 2. dio*, 26 March 2021
- Online workshop *Programirano učenje u hibridnom ili online predmetu*, 14 April 2021
- Online workshop *Razvoj i aktivnosti karijernog centra u online okruženju*, 20 April 2021
- Webinar *Online provjere znanja u sustavu Moodle*, 21 April 2021
- Online workshop (webinar) for CROSB system administrators, 13 May 2021
- Online workshop (webinar) for CROSB system administrators, 20 May 2021
- Online workshop *Europski pristup osiguravanju kvalitete združenih studija*, 16 June 2021
- Online workshop *Koliko sam uspješan/na u provođenju online nastave?*, 18 June 2021
- Online workshop *Koliko sam uspješan/na u provođenju online nastave?*, 15 September 2021
- Webinar *Kako prepoznati i pristupiti studentima s psihološkim problemima?*, 22 September 2021
- Workshop *Upravljanje i vođenje nastavne grupe (Class Management) – Kako poticati angažiranost studenata za vrijeme nastave?*, 6 October 2021
- Online workshop *Internacionalizacija visokog obrazovanja u jeku i nakon pandemije COVID-19*, 7 October 2021
- Presenting results of the survey *Studenti i pandemija: Kako smo (pre)živjeli?*, 13 October 2021
- Online workshop (webinar) for CROSB system administrators, 27 October 2021
- Online workshop (webinar) for CROSB system administrators, 28 October 2021
- Seminar *Unutarnje osiguravanje kvalitete: od promatrača do pokretača promjene*, 10 November 2021
- Seminar *Unutarnje osiguravanje kvalitete: od promatrača do pokretača promjene*, 11 November 2021
- Seminar *Unutarnje osiguravanje kvalitete: od promatrača do pokretača promjene*, 12 November 2021
- Final conference of SKAZVO project – Improvement of quality assurance and enhancement systems in higher education, 14 December 2021
- Online workshop (webinar) for CROSB system administrators, 14 December 2021
- Online workshop (webinar) for CROSB system administrators, 15 December 2021
- Online workshop *Osnutak i djelovanje Centra za mentalno zdravlje Visoke policijske škole*, 15 December 2021

Final SKAZVO project conference held in Zagreb

The final project conference was held in Zagreb on 14 December 2021. It was organized by ASHE by observing all epidemiological measures, and it brought together almost a hundred representatives of the academic community, public and state institutions and the media.

The final conference was opened by Prof. Jasmina Havranek, PhD, who was the director of the Agency during the entire implementation of the SKAZVO project. She talked about the project results and the improvements and contributions that project activities have brought to the Croatian higher education system. On that occasion, Prof. Havranek, pointed out that one of the important added values of this project is the strong synergy and partnership that have been achieved both between the Agency and higher education institutions and among higher education institutions themselves.

In addition to the presentation of project activities, challenges and ultimately, achieved results, a round table titled "People make a difference - a motivated academic community" was held at the final conference. Prof. Snježana Prijić-Samaržija, PhD, President of the Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Croatia, Ms. Dijana Mandić, Head of the Sector for the Development of Higher Education of the Ministry of Science and Education, Dr. sc. Vesna Dodiković-Jurković, Deputy Director of ASHE, Assoc. prof. dr. sc. Maja Martinović, vice dean of the Zagreb School of Economics and Management, Asst. prof. dr. sc. Sofia Ana Blažević, Department of Biology, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb and Mario Prišlin, President of the Student Council of the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb participated at the round table. The participants concluded that systematic investment in human resources in higher education is necessary and that the Agency's contribution in the past period is significant, especially when it comes to strengthening teacher competencies and student support services.



Final conference of SKAZVO project

Presenting results of the survey "Students and the pandemic: how we lived (survived)?"

Results of the survey on the scope and impact of the pandemic on the study experience in the ac. year 2020/2021 such as online and/or hybrid teaching, various restrictions in the social life etc., were presented in Zagreb on 13 October 2021.

This survey was carried out by ASHE at the national level in September 2021, in which almost 4300 students of university and professional study programmes, of all levels except postgraduate level, took part.

The purpose of the research was to answer questions about how students assess the quality of teaching at HEIs during the COVID-19 pandemic, how satisfied they are with certain aspects of student life, how they assess their mental health and how the pandemic affected freshmen and their adaptation to higher education.

According to the answers of the participants, online mode of teaching (40%) and hybrid teaching (40%) were predominant in the academic year 2020/2021. One third (35%) of research participants mentioned classroom teaching as the preferred mode of teaching for the academic year 2021/2022 while 29% of them prefers online teaching.

Students expressed their satisfaction with certain segments of organization of online classes and exams, such as the access to teaching materials from home, interaction with teachers in the virtual environment, the criteria and methods of student grading and grading objectivity.

There is a significant level of dissatisfaction with student life among students compared to the pre-pandemic period: 59% students believe that their satisfaction is significantly lower and lower; part-time students are more satisfied than the full-time students. Students largely believe that their mental health deteriorated during the pandemic: 52% of the students sees their mental health as worse and a lot worse than before the pandemic. On the other hand, 25% of students did not experience mental health problems and said in their comments that they felt better in the new, pandemic circumstances than before.

The biggest challenge for first-year students in the transition from secondary to higher education was the lack of live contact with study colleagues, online

teaching instead of live teaching and the lack of motivation to learn caused by the uncertainty of the duration and consequences of the pandemic. Nevertheless, 47% of first-year students are fully and mostly satisfied with the process of transition to higher education, but state that they have a full study experience.



Presenting the results of the survey
"Students and the pandemic: how we lived (survived)?"



Presenting the results of the survey
"Students and the pandemic: how we lived (survived)?"

of student life. A round table was organized with the following participants: Prof. Jasmina Havranek, Ph.D., Ms. Dijana Mandić, head of the Sector for the Development of Higher Education of the Ministry of Science and Education, Prof. Marina Ajduković, PhD from the Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb, dr. sc. Gabrijela Vidić from the Department of Tourism and Communication Sciences of the University of Zadar and Bruna Bandula, president of the Student Council of the Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. The round table participants agreed that the past academic year was challenging for students as well as HEI teachers and that the majority of students preferred the standard (live) teaching. Also, in crisis conditions, there was a need for stronger support to students in terms of psychological support and strengthening competencies to cope with stressful situations.

Seminar "Internal quality assurance of higher education institutions: from observers to drivers of change" held in Zadar

A seminar titled "Internal quality assurance of higher education institutions: from observers to drivers of change" was held in Zadar on 10-12 November 2021.

The seminar brought together around a hundred representatives of higher education institutions who are responsible for performing activities and procedures of internal quality assurance systems at their higher education institutions.

The aim of the seminar was to exchange experiences and examples of good practice among HEIs, encourage networking of employees of higher education institutions who deal with quality assurance in their work and strengthen their competencies as an incentive to the further development of the quality of higher education and building a culture of quality.



Seminar "Internal quality assurance of higher education institutions: from observers to drivers of change"

The event was opened by deputy Director of ASHE, dr. sc. Vesna Dodiković-Jurković, while Mr. sc. Sandra Bezjak, assistant director of ASHE, Mrs. Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, international expert for higher education and Mr. Goran Đaković from the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) held opening presentations.

During the three-day event, the participants discussed quality assurance from a national and European perspective, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), roles of qualifications frameworks in internal quality assurance, role of students, quality assurance of the teaching process, examples of good practice and other topics.

The participants agreed that there is a lack of training events in Croatia for the so-called "quality managers at higher education institutions", which is why they expressed satisfaction with the organization of a seminar on this topic and with the opportunity to network with colleagues from all over Croatia.

Webinar "European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes" held

A webinar titled "European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes" was held on 16 June 2021 as part of the cycle of workshops Internationalization of higher education.

These are studies that include an integrated curriculum that is jointly managed and delivered by different higher education institutions from the countries of the European Higher Education Area, and lead to a double, i.e. multiple or joint degree.

The webinar was organized with the aim of starting a debate on joint programmes and their quality assurance in line with the guidelines set forth in the document *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*.

Mr. Ronny Heintze from the German Agency AQAS e.V (Agency for Quality Assurance) spoke about the European perspective of development and evaluation of joint programmes and the results of the project.

Mr. sc. Sandra Bezjak, Mr. Tomislav Tomljenović, univ. spec. oec. and Mr. sc. Mina Đorđević from ASHE presented the procedure, standards and the experience of evaluation of joint programmes, while dr. sc. Mislav Balković, dean of Algebra College and Prof. dr.sc. Nedjeljka Balić Nižić and prof. dr.sc. Slaven Zjalić, vice rectors at the University of Zadar talked by the experience of HEIs in the procedures.

Webinar “Internationalization of higher education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic”

As part of the cycle of seminars “Internationalization of higher education” started by the Agency in 2019, ASHE organized a webinar titled “Internationalization of higher education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic”.

This online event was held on 7 October 2021, with participants such as ASHE's representatives, representatives of the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes, the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, University of Zagreb and the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb.

Workshop “Class Management – How to motivate student engagement during class”?

A workshop titled “Class Management – How to motivate student engagement during class”? was held on 6 October 2021. Dr. sc. Dubravka Miljković, prof. emerita from the Faculty of Teacher Education at the University of Zagreb, led the workshop, and the participants discussed the factors that affect the relationship between teachers and students, the leadership styles and models and ways of creating a positive learning atmosphere. The participants also got useful information about the interventions in the prevention and solving of the problems.

Workshop “How to recognize and help students with mental health problems?”

ASHE organized an online workshop titled “How to recognize and help students with mental health problems?” on 22 September 2021.

The online workshop was led by asst. prof. dr. sc. Jasminka Juretić and Ms Ines Jakovčić, univ. spec. psych. from the Psychological Counselling of the University Counseling Center in Rijeka, both with many years of experience in the area of counselling psychology and working with students.

The workshop targeted higher education teachers, employees at career development centres and psychological counselling centres with the aim of further sensitization to the issue of students' mental health and appropriate approach and support.

Two online workshops “How successful am I in online teaching?”

An online workshop “How successful am I in teaching online?” was first organized by ASHE on 18 June 2021. The workshop was led by dr. sc. Sandra Kučina Softić, assistant director of the University Computing Centre in Zagreb and Ms. Tona Radobolja from the E-Learning Centre of the University Computing Centre in Zagreb.

The aim of the workshop was to open a discussion about the quality of teaching at HEIs in exceptional circumstances and how teaching is adjusted to the online surroundings.

The participants had the opportunity to discuss various topics in this field, such as synchronous and asynchronous teaching, communication and interaction, formative assessment, online classes, availability of prepared materials in open access, etc. and they also received information on how to further improve online teaching.

As the online workshop held in June this year attracted a lot of interest, ASHE organized an additional online workshop under the same name for the employees of higher education institutions on 15 September 2021.

Online workshop Computer-Aided Instruction in a hybrid or online course in Moodle learning platform

Online workshop “Computer-Aided Instruction in a hybrid or online course in Moodle learning platform” was held on 14 April 2021. The workshop was led by assoc. prof. dr. sc. Igor Balaban and Ms. Aleksandra Sobodić, M. inf. The participants were introduced to the advantages and disadvantages of a hybrid teaching model, ways of organization of courses for the purpose of encouraging active student engagement, while the practical part of the workshop taught them how to create interactive teaching materials, lessons, short tests etc.

Webinar on the topic of accreditation of the World Federation for Medical Education

ASHE organized a webinar on the topic of accreditation of the World Federation for Medical Education on 2 March 2021. WFME is an international organization in charge of additional accreditation of quality assurance agencies in higher education and the accreditation of HEIs delivering medical study programmes with the aim to secure high standards in the evaluation of study programmes that are based on the recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other relevant organizations.

The need for organizing such an event arose from communication with representatives of Croatian schools of medicine and the interest they have shown in WFME accreditation in order to facilitate graduate mobility in the field of medicine and to enable recognition of Croatian qualifications abroad. ASHE, as a national accreditation agency in the field of higher education, wanted to open a discussion on this topic and to hear experiences from colleagues from the WFME-accredited Dutch agency NVAO (The Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders).

NVAO's experiences were presented by Ms Michele Wera, while prof. Gerda Croiset, dean of Medical Center Goningen presented the experience of a WFME-accredited higher education institution.

Online symposium “What’s behind a diploma: competence-based career management and planning”

Online symposium “What’s behind a diploma: competence-based career management and planning” was held by ASHE and the Student Counselling Centre of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split on 28 January 2021. The symposium was organized as part of the Careering 2021 cycle - a series of workshops conducted by ASHE since 2018, aimed at raising awareness of the importance of career guidance and the role of career centres in higher education institutions.

During this event, educational policies for lifelong professional development of individuals, development of student competencies through socially useful learning, the role of higher education institutions in the development of employability, ways of connecting with employers and other useful topics were discussed.

ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

Keep innovation in multi partnership cooperation in lifelong guidance services (KEEP IN PACT)

ASHE is a partner in an international project KEEP IN PACT (Keep innovation in multipartnership cooperation in lifelong guidance services), aimed at strengthening multi partner cooperation in providing lifelong professional guidance services. The general objective of the project is upgrading the multipartnership management function in the lifelong career guidance centres while specific goals are:

- Strengthen the quality and quantity of services in lifelong career guidance provided to citizens;
- Develop competences in multi-partnership management among professionals working in lifelong career guidance centres;
- Promote multi-disciplinary and integrated services in lifelong career guidance;
- Develop a European network of professionals in multi-partnership management in lifelong career guidance.

KEEP IN PACT project brings together six organisations working in the field of education, training and employment from five countries. The project is led by the French network *Réseau international des Cités des métiers*. In addition to ASHE, project partners include *Universcience-Cité des métiers de Paris* (France), *Learning digital* (Italy), *Município do Porto-Cidade das Profissões* (Portugal) and *LifeLong Learning Platform* (Belgium).

A survey on the needs and practices in the area of multi-partnership cooperation in the field of lifelong professional guidance was conducted, which included career advisers, advisers in career centres in HEIs, HEI teachers and policy makers in the field of professional guidance. The results of the survey will be used for mapping practices in the field of lifelong guidance, development of professional development programmes and guidelines for establishing and maintaining multi-partner cooperation in this area.

Enhancing the Coverage and Connectivity of QA in the EHEA through DEQAR (DEQAR CONNECT)

ASHE is a partner in the project titled Enhancing the Coverage and Connectivity of QA in the EHEA through DEQAR (DEQAR CONNECT) led by EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education), register of Europe quality assurance agencies.

DEQAR CONNECT is a two-year project, which started in March 2020 and which will last until February 2022, which continues on several earlier projects financed by the European Commission, including the project Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR). The aim of the DEQAR project in which ASHE was also partner was developing a European database with information on the results of the evaluation of higher education institutions. DEQAR CONNECT aims to expand this database to include agencies in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that were not previously covered by the DEQAR project, as well as to improve the use of DEQAR data.

As part of the DEQAR CONNECT project, an analysis of the quality assurance system in the countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and their compliance with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA was published. This is the first so-called policy brief, i.e. an overview of policies developed within the project, and in the next period, EQAR will publish several more similar analyses.

Effective partnership for enhanced recognition (EPER)

EPER project (Effective partnership for enhanced recognition) was co-financed by the support of ERASMUS+ programme of the European Union - Key action 3/KA3/ - Support for policy reform. The Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia is a lead partner in the project, while partner countries include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia. The aim of the project was to enhance the recognition procedures and practices in partner countries, strengthen capacities for the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and strengthen regional cooperation in addition to the exchange of experience and good practices among partners from Southeast Europe.

ASHE representatives contribute to the implementation of the project activities by providing expertise in the area of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.

Stacking credits & the future of the qualification (STACQ)

In 2020, calls for funding of NARIC network projects within the ERASMUS+ KA3 programme were thematically focused on improving the automatic recognition of all forms of learning, including digital or virtual learning. This trend poses a challenge in the current practice of foreign qualification recognition in Europe. It was also the reason for launching the Stacking credits & the future of the qualification (STACQ) project by the consortium consisting of ENIC and NARIC centres of the Netherlands, Malta, Lithuania, Sweden and Great Britain, while ASHE participates as a long-time member (and a Steering Group member) of the ECA (European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education).

The project started in June 2020 and will last until the end of May 2022.

The aims of the project are:

1. To develop an online application for easier evaluation of MOOCs.

Independent e-learning outside the traditional education system (such as MOOCs) became increasingly popular in recent years, however, its evaluation proves a difficult task. The STACQ project aims to develop an evaluation tool for a quick and easy assessment of MOOCs.

2. Produce a position paper on the future of the qualification

Without a clear qualification profile, seeking recognition of a stack of credits is at odds with current good practice in recognition, which is based on coherent qualifications and the five elements in it. This project will revisit what a qualification is in the context of a changing education landscape, and what the implications are for a current good practice in recognition.

The focus lies on: 1) mapping developments in higher education, 2) analysing different types of modular education and providing examples, and 3) reflecting on what modular provision means for recognition.

Target groups include ENIC-NARIC centres, LRC Committee Bureau, admissions officers at higher education institutions, students, quality assurance agencies in higher education, online education providers and policy makers. The project goals are to provide ENIC-NARIC centres and admissions officers at European HEIs with a tool for a more efficient assessment of learning outcomes obtained through online learning; to ensure a development of more effective recognition practices for e-learning; to enable ENIC-NARIC networks to prepare for the impact of the new types of learning units on current practices for recognition of foreign qualifications, and finally, to support learning mobility based on new forms of learning in the EU and EHEA.

Automatic Recognition in the Adriatic Region – AdReN

The general objective of the AdReN project is to support and encourage the implementation of the goals of EHEA, particularly the implementation of the Council recommendation on promoting automatic recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and outcomes of learning periods abroad.

The scope of the AdReN project is to foster automatic recognition in the Adriatic region, starting from the project partner countries, by achieving the following results:

- Developed tools for automatic recognition of academic qualifications and qualifications that ensure access to higher education in partner countries,
- Cooperation among ENIC/NARIC centres, competent authorities for the recognition of qualifications, and HEIs in partner countries and other countries of the Adriatic region,
- Set up the Secretariat of the AdReN network.

The project partners include the NARIC centres of Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia and the IUAV University of Venice, and planned activities include drafting of a comprehensive comparative table of Pre-Bologna and Bologna qualifications (academic qualifications and those ensuring access to higher education) in partner countries that are referenced to the

EHEA Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework, together with a comparative study of the different higher education systems. As fostering automatic recognition also implies removing the obstacles towards it, the project is going to focus on substantial differences and transnational education in the region. The project started on 1 June 2020 and will last until 31 May 2022.

Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition (OCTRA)

OCTRA project, funded from the Erasmus+ programme, deals with automatic recognition of foreign qualifications, aiming to encourage its development by providing practical support to the academic recognition process and strengthening cooperation with other stakeholders. Project goal is to strengthen the cooperation between ENIC and NARIC centres, EQF NCPs and National Europass Centres in this regard, as well as to elaborate recommendations for further development of the existing online national qualifications databases and registers (NQD), in order to promote their use in fair recognition. The project provides support to HEIs and national authorities in developing new and improving existing national guidelines for the online course catalogues and NQDs, including a flexible and transparent design of study programmes and qualifications based on learning outcomes and ECTS credits, as well as providing relevant recommendations for the improvement of these online tools, and improving effective use of ECTS for automatic recognition.

The aim of the project is to improve a dialogue with HEIs by agreeing upon a template of online course catalogues and improvement of NQDs that would guide to structured and transparent learning outcomes of HE qualifications, facilitating the automatic recognition. Linking course catalogues with the NQDs is important, as both include similar information on qualifications.

OCTRA project partners include NARIC centres of Latvia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia and Poland, ENIC centres of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Russia, higher education institutions from Latvia, Rectors' Conference and Student Union of Latvia, as well as the associated relevant stakeholders.

A progress meeting was held on 13 and 14 September 2021. The methodology, goals and results of the surveys conducted by all project partners for the purpose of gathering information on the use of the so-called course catalogues at HEIs were presented on a two-day meeting held online and live. They talked about further plans and project activities and representatives of HEIs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the host country of part of the meetings held live in Mostar, shortly presented the development and use of their online course catalogues.

The project lasts from June 2020 to May 2022.

Other projects

Pilot-project CroEduPass at EBSI

The Agency for Science and Higher Education, in cooperation with the European Blockchain Partnership implements a pilot-project CroEduPass on the European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI).

The aim of the project is to facilitate applications to study programmes through the National Information System of Application to Graduate Study Programmes and to increase the number of students from the EU who continue their studies at the graduate level in Croatia. The aim of the project is to facilitate applications for enrolment into study programmes for foreign students and to make Croatia an attractive destination for continuation of academic education. The project started in July 2021 and lasts until April 2022.

European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI) is a joint initiative from the European Commission and the European Blockchain Partnership (EBP) to deliver EU-wide cross-border public services using blockchain technology.

COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS IN SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION AND PRESENTATION OF ASHE'S WORK ABROAD

Online meeting with the Georgian agency NAQA

On 17 December 2021, ASHE representatives held an online meeting with the representatives of the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement from Georgia. The meeting was organized at the request of Georgian colleagues to share good practice in external quality assurance in higher education. It was an opportunity for both institutions to get to know each other and to identify areas for joint cooperation and projects.

Annual NARIC Network Meeting

A representative of the national ENIC/NARIC Office of the ASHE participated on the regular annual meeting of NARIC network (National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) which was held online in the organization of the European Commission on 13 December 2021. Topics of this year's meeting were connected to the recognition of foreign educational qualifications, with special emphasis on automated recognition of qualifications, on the need for digitalization of the procedure of recognition of qualifications and the recognition of the so-called micro-qualifications.

International Conference on Recognition

German Rectors' Conference organized an online conference "International Conference on Recognition" held on 25 and 26

November 2021, in which representatives of the National ENIC/NARIC Office of the Agency also participated. The conference focused on the recognition of academic competencies and qualifications as well as the recognition of prior learning. The recognition practice was considered in four different contexts: lifelong learning, quality development, student mobility and networks and alliances.

Round table “Reform of higher education - impact on recognition and mobility”

Representatives of the National ENIC/NARIC Office of the Agency participated in the round table “Reform of higher education – impact on recognition and mobility” held online and live (in Mostar) on 24 November 2021, which was organized by the Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The topic of the round table was the reform of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the impact of the reform on the recognition of qualifications and student mobility.

European Quality Assurance Forum

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF 2021) was organised in the form of online sessions on 18-19 November 2021. The 2021 EQAF online event, titled Building trust and enhancement: from information to evidence, combined online sessions about European policies and trends, research, and practical case examples related to the Forum theme and more generally about current developments in quality assurance in higher education.

In order to promote trust and serve as a basis for informed decision-making and quality improvement, quality assurance must be evidence-based. The amount of data on higher education and the performance of higher education institutions has increased in recent years and its nature is changing partly due to digitalisation. This makes it increasingly important to determine which information is meaningful and relevant for stakeholders in higher education, hence worth serving as evidence for robust quality assurance processes.

The Forum addressed questions such as how to ensure an appropriate balance between qualitative and quantitative data and diverse sources of information. It also focused on how to analyse and interpret the data, as well as how to ensure that it is used to enhance quality and promote trust. Notably, the 2021 EQAF offered an occasion to analyse how to make the best out of the opportunities offered by digitalisation while avoiding pitfalls. The Forum explored the evidence used in external and internal quality assurance and how to improve its use and impact.

True to the EQAF tradition, this year’s Forum was organised using an event platform that provided participants with opportunities for networking, also outside the formal programme, and will facilitate audience interaction.

The Forum is of interest to rectors and vice-rectors responsible for quality assurance, quality assurance officers in higher education institutions, students, quality assurance agency staff and researchers working in higher education or in the quality assurance field.

ENQA General Assembly

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) adopted a decision to hold ENQA's 2021 General Assembly online. Mr. Douglas Blackstock, from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) from Great Britain was elected new ENQA Board President. New ENQA Board members were appointed, annual and financial report for the past year was presented and accepted and other current activities and plans were discussed.

CEENQA General Assembly meeting and workshop

The regular General Assembly of members of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – CEENQA was held online on 13 October 2021.

An online workshop on the topic of implementation of online external evaluation in higher education was held the same day.

Representatives of the Agency, full member of CEENQA since 2008, also participated at the Assembly and the workshop. Moreover, an ASHE representative was also member of CEENQA's Executive Board. The main purpose of the CEENQA network is cooperation between the member organisations in the development and harmonisation of their activities, in the field of quality assurance and quality improvement in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe, thereby making a contribution towards the development of the European Higher Education Area.

Webinars and online meetings of ENIC and NARIC networks

Representatives of the National ENIC/NARIC Office of the Agency participated in the 28th regular annual meeting of ENIC (European Network of Information Centres in the European Region) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) networks. The meeting was held on 9 June 2021 online, and it was hosted by the Portuguese NARIC centre. This year, the topics of the meeting were connected with the challenges caused by the pandemic, the future of higher education and the role of ENIC and NARIC centres in light of the future challenges. This traditional international meeting of ENIC and NARIC networks was organized by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, and was accompanied by several thematic webinars. The webinars included topics of quality assurance in higher education, the Global Convention and regional conventions on recognition, recognition of e-learning, especially learning acquired through open digital platforms, topics related to the recognition of foreign qualifications of refugees and the modular approach to education, especially with regard to progress in digitalization and the circumstances caused by the pandemic.

Cooperation with Ukrainian QA agency (NAQA)

• Online meeting held with the Ukrainian agency NAQA

ASHE representatives held an online meeting with the Ukrainian QA agency National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance – NAQA on 23 March 2021.

The aim of the meeting was to open a discussion on possible areas of cooperation, with emphasis on challenges in quality assurance in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic, international cooperation, exchange of experts and other topics.

• ASHE signed cooperation agreement with Ukrainian QA agency (NAQA)

ASHE signed a cooperation agreement with the Ukrainian agency for quality assurance of higher education on 6 May 2021. The agreement was signed by Prof. Jasmina Havranek, Ph.D. and director of NAQA, Prof. dr. Sergiy Kvit.

The two agencies will cooperate in the field of independent accreditation in higher education, exchange of information, experiences and good practice in the implementation of external evaluation, organization of events such as seminars, conferences, etc. and support to various issues related to the processes of quality assurance in higher education.

An online meeting of heads and representatives of both agencies was held.

• Study visit of representatives of the Ukrainian agency NAQA

As part of a study visit to Croatia, representatives of the Ukrainian National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA) visited the Agency for Science and Higher Education on 5 and 6 July 2021.

NAQA's President Prof. Sergiy Kvit, with his associates Prof. Natalia Stukalo, Mr. Andria Butenko, Mr. Bohdan Morklyanyk and Mr. Ivan Nazarov met with Prof. Jasmina Havranek, Ph.D., the then Acting Director of ASHE, Vesna Dodiković-Jurković, Ph.D., Deputy Director, Mr. Sc. Sandra Bezjak, Assistant Director and other ASHE employees.

Given the interest expressed by NAQA representatives, the participants discussed quality assurance procedures carried out by ASHE, with a focus on the re-accreditation of higher education institutions and doctoral studies, and the evaluation of joint studies in accordance with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

Meeting with Asian quality assurance agencies

ASHE representatives participated in an online meeting with representatives of agencies for quality assurance in higher education from Japan (Japan University Accreditation Association, JUAA), Thailand (Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment, ONESQA) and Taiwan (Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association, TWAEA) held on 9 July 2021 as part of an international staff exchange.

Following cooperation with the TWAEA, ASHE was invited to present their activities at the meeting of the said agencies, with special emphasis on the organization of work during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as plans and expectations in the future period. Dr. sc. Vesna Dodiković-Jurković, Deputy Director of the Agency held a presentation, and representatives of other agencies shared their experiences in quality assurance of higher education during the pandemic.

GUNI network published the results of ASHE survey on study during the COVID-19 pandemic

Care about the mental well-being of students and teachers should be high on the agenda of HEIs under normal circumstances, and even more so in extraordinary circumstances, when this aspect is even more important. This was the conclusion of the article titled *The lesson from the corona crisis: care for students and teachers should be the highest priority* published on the website of the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI).

The paper was co-authored by Professor Jasmina Havranek, PhD, Mr. sc. Mina Đorđević and Željka Plužarić, which is based on the survey Challenges in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation: experiences and needs of HEI staff and students, carried out by ASHE in 2020. The paper explores students' and teachers' assessment of the socio-psychological aspects of online teaching during extraordinary circumstances and their needs, which are recommendations of sort, primarily for higher education institutions, for acting in similar situations, if they occur in the future.

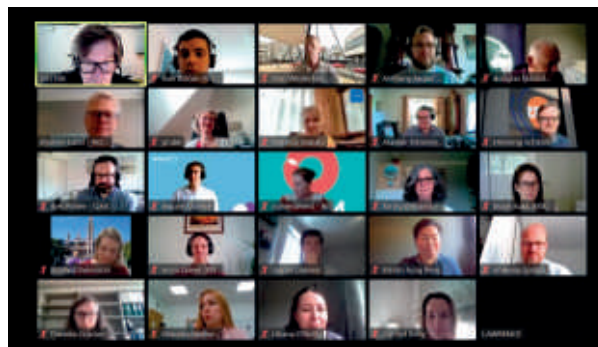
Role of applied research in the development of professional higher education

Webinar titled "Role of applied research in the development of professional higher education" was organized by ASHE and held on 26 February 2021. The event brought together representatives of Croatian polytechnics and colleges with the aim of discussing the importance of applied research at polytechnics and colleges, exchanging experiences at the Croatian level and getting acquainted with good European practices in this area. The webinar was opened by Prof. Jasmina Havranek, PhD (ASHE), Mr. Ivica Šušak (MSE) and Asst. prof. dr. sc. Damir Jugo (CPC). The presentations were held by: Michal Karpíšek, the General Secretary of EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education), prof. Armando Pires, Vice President of EURASHE and president of EURASHE working group on Applied Research and Regional Development, dr. sc. Žarko Nožica, college professor, representative of the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges for international cooperation, doc. dr. sc. Verica Budimir, college professor, Polytechnic of Požega, assoc. prof. dr. sc. Borna Jalšenjak, Zagreb School of Economics and Management. The participants expressed satisfaction with the organization of this online event, as well as the need to intensify the discussion on this topic in the future.

ENQA Leadership Programme

The first of the planned three seminars in the programme of professional development for the employees of quality assurance agencies ENQA Leadership 2021 was held online on 2-4 June 2021. The programme is organized by the umbrella association of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area - ENQA (The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), and an ASHE representative also participates in the programme.

The first seminar was hosted by NOKUT (The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education). The seminar discussed the



2021 ENQA Leadership programme - online seminar

challenges and new trends in quality assurance in higher education and the most frequent problems faced by quality assurance agencies.

ASHE experts in ENQA SEQA-ESG project

The ENQA-led Erasmus+ project Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG (SEQA-ESG) which will last for two years started in May 2020. The project also involves partners from the following six countries: Albania, Montenegro, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Moldova and Malta. The aim of the project is to support quality assurance (QA) agencies and ministries in the six countries in building a system of quality assurance in higher education as one of the key objectives of the Bologna Process. More specifically, the project envisages a number of activities that aim to achieve the following objectives: establishing national legal frameworks in line with the ESG; developing a methodology for the implementation of external evaluations in accordance with the ESG, developing national criteria in line with the ESG; developing appropriate methods and criteria for the involvement of peer reviewers and stakeholder in external QA. As the Agency for Science and Higher Education is recognized among the European agencies for its great experience in the application of the ESG, Mr. Sc. Sandra Bezjak, ASHE's assistant director for higher education, also takes part in the project as one of experts selected by ENQA.

After consultations were held in 2020 to identify the main challenges these countries face in developing quality assurance systems and in particular in coordinating the work of agencies with the ESG, workshops were held in 2021 involving experts participating in the project, who proposed recommendations to address these challenges and encourage further development of quality assurance systems and the agencies in respective countries. The project was very well received and enabled the exchange of information among all project participants, and the plan is to expand the project to some other countries.

Online meetings of CEENQA members

Monthly online meetings of members of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – CEENQA continued to be held throughout 2021. Moldavian agency National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC) and the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education presented their work and future plans on the online meeting held on 15 September 2021. An ASHE representative spoke of the challenges of working under the conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the adjustment of the external QA processes in higher education and science to the new circumstances. President of The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) presented the news related to the DEQAR database (The Database of External Quality Assurance Results).



Online meetings of CEENQA members held in September

CEENQA launched monthly online meetings a year ago with the aim of maintaining regular contact among its members and to discuss current issues, especially in view of the business challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and to agree on new thematic platforms for cooperation and projects.

Training sessions held by INQAAHE

INQAAHE held a series of webinars titled *INQAAHE 30 years of spreading the culture of quality around the globe: evolutionary trends, The DNA of QA: the 10 Es and Beyond* in 2021.

As part of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of INQAAHE and the official establishment of its international head office in Barcelona, INQAAHE organized a hybrid event held in Barcelona on 7-8 October 2021. The event was hosted by AQU Catalunya and the University of Barcelona. It marked 30 years of spreading the culture of quality in higher education around the globe. During that period cooperation between the regional networks of quality assurance, higher education institutions, bodies for quality assurance, and INQAAHE's strategic partners, particularly with UNESCO, was strengthened. Possibilities for further development of INQAAHE, contribution to the development of standards in quality assurance in higher education, new trends and training events for INQAAHE members were discussed.

ECA Consortium meetings and webinar

ASHE representatives participated in the regular meeting of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education – ECA), held on 30 June 2021 online and on the winter webinar held on 13 December 2021. The webinar focused on the topic of the European approach in the development of the system of quality assurance of the networks of universities. As a long-standing full ECA member, ASHE actively participates in all ECA activities and in various development projects of the network.

Cooperation with the University of Mostar

Upon the invitation of the Rector of the University of Mostar Prof. Zoran Tomić, PhD, ASHE held a workshop titled "Internal and external quality assurance" for representatives of the University on 19 October 2021. The main topics discussed were internal quality assurance and 2015 ESG, re-accreditation of higher education institutions, re-accreditation of postgraduate university (doctoral) studies and other topics such as online studies, joint studies, the European university alliance.

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLISHED PAPERS

- Bezjak, S.: *Akreditacija združenih studija-Europski pristup*, 5. Sveučilišni dan kvalitete: Relevantnost i kvaliteta visokog obrazovanja, Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Zagreb, Hrvatska, 26. studenoga 2021.
- Bezjak, S.: *Proces pripreme mikrokvalifikacija kao dijela sustava HKO*, 44. Andragoška škola na temu: Mikrokvalifikacije u obrazovanju odraslih, Zagreb, 10. prosinca 2021.

- Bezjak, S. , završna konferencija ESF projekta *Unapređenje sustava osiguravanja i unapređenje kvalitete visokog obrazovanja – SKAZVO*, Zagreb, 14. prosinca 2021. godine
- Bezjak, S.; Đorđević, M.; Gopić, M.; Tomljenović, T.: *Postupak, standardi i iskustvo vrednovanja združenih studija*, AZVO radionica: Europski pristup osiguravanju kvalitete združenih studija, online, 16. lipnja 2021
- Bišćan, I. *Kako pomoću sredstava EU-a mijenjati visoko obrazovanje?*, završna konferencija ESF projekta *Unapređenje sustava osiguravanja i unapređenje kvalitete visokog obrazovanja – SKAZVO*, Zagreb, 14. prosinca 2021. godine
- Blagdan, E. *Akademsko priznavanje inozemnih visokoškolskih kvalifikacija* izlaganje na webinaru *Internacionalizacija visokog obrazovanja u jeku i nakon pandemije COVID-19* – 7. listopada 2021. godine
- Blagdan, E. izlaganje na okruglom stolu konferencije „Visokoškolske ustanove: ključ inkluzivnosti ranog i predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja“, Zagreb, 7. prosinca 2021. godine
- Dodiković Jurković, V. *Interno osiguravanje kvalitete - potpora razvoju i promjenama*, seminar unutarnje osiguravanje kvalitete visokih učilišta: od promatrača do pokretača promjene“, Zadar, od 10. do 12. studenog 2021. godine
- Dodiković-Jurković, V., „QA System in Croatia: The Role of ASHE and Prospect for the Future“, *International Staff Exchange Program (Video Conference)* JUAA/ONESQA/TWAEA/ASHE, 9. srpnja 2021.
- Dodiković-Jurković, V., *Združeni studiji*, međunarodni stručni skup „Unaprjeđenje studijskih programa za potrebe OS RH“, Kovčanje, Mali Lošinj, 19.-23. srpnja 2021.
- Dodiković-Jurković, V., „Unutarnje osiguravanje kvalitete i ESG-ji 2015“, Radionica Unutarnje i vanjsko osiguravanju kvalitete“ za predstavnike Sveučilišta u Mostaru, Mostar, 19. listopada 2021.
- Dodiković-Jurković, V., sudjelovanje na okruglom stolu „Ljudi čine razliku – motivirana akademska zajednica“, završna konferencija projekta SKAZVO Unapređenje sustava osiguravanja i unapređenje kvalitete visokog obrazovanja, Zagreb, 14. prosinca 2021.
- Đorđević, M., Bezjak, S.: *Razvoj združenih studija – od ideje do realizacije*, online radionica o združenim studijima u okviru UNIC projekta, Sveučilište u Zagrebu, 14. prosinca 2021.
- Đorđević, M.; Plužarić, Ž. predstavljanje rezultata istraživanja "Studenti i pandemija: kako smo (pre)živjeli?" u sklopu panela "Studenti i nastava u pandemiji", Sveučilišni računski centar SRCE, Zagreb, 9. prosinca 2021. godine
- Đorđević, M.; Plužarić, Ž.; Bišćan, I. predstavljanje rezultata istraživanja "Studenti i pandemija: kako smo (pre)živjeli?", Zagreb, 13. listopada 2021. godine
- Đorđević, M.; Plužarić, Ž.; Bišćan, I. publikacija Rezultati istraživanja „Studenti i pandemija Kako smo (pre)živjeli“, Zagreb, listopad 2021. godine
- Havranek, J.; *Ljudski potencijali u visokom obrazovanju*, Sveučilište Sjever, Koprivnica, 25. ožujka 2021.
- Havranek, J., Bezjak, S. *Osiguravanje kvalitete iz perspektive Agencije Što smo postigli i možemo li zajedno više?*, seminar: Unutarnje osiguravanje kvalitete visokih učilišta: od promatrača do pokretača promjene“, Zadar, od 10. do 12. studenog 2021. godine
- Petrušić, I.; Đikić, M.; Havranek, J., The change of disciplinary practices as an effect of peer review in re-accreditation: the case of humanities in Croatia // *Quality in Higher Education*, published online (2021), 1-15 doi:10.1080/13538322.2021.1988222



INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Based on the decision adopted by the Management Board of the Agency in 2006, ASHE developed an integrated quality system which includes entire organization and is based on the application of the ESG standards and ISO 9001 standard requirements. The application of these standards includes the application of the PDCA cycle, which has contributed to continuous improvement of business processes and development of a culture of self-evaluation, both at the individual and organizational levels.

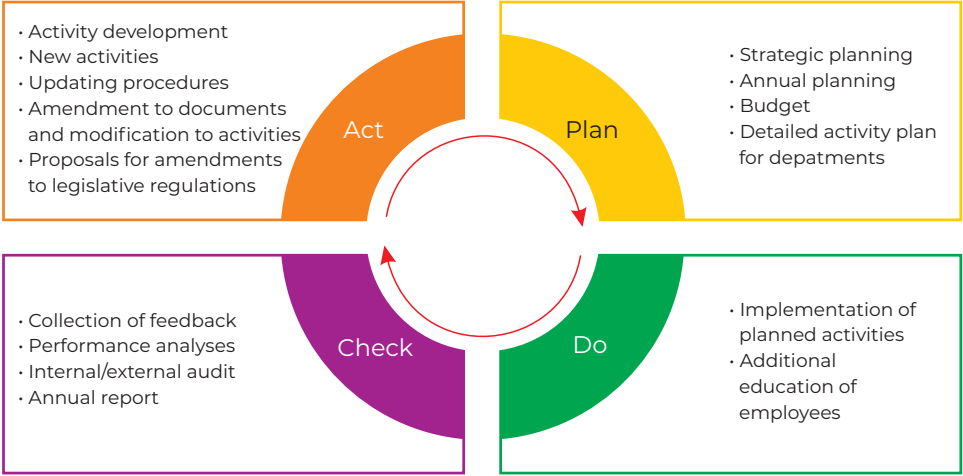


Chart 18: Diagram of PDCA cycle implementation

Regular internal audit of ASHE was carried out from 20 to 30 April 2021. Seven internal audits were carried out at the level of all ASHE's organizational units. The audit teams have recorded the following: 8 observations, 6 commendations, 4 recommendations for development and 5 recommendation for improvement. Internal audit did not show any non-conformities.

QMS was the subject of external evaluation through the process of external audit carried out by Det Norske Veritas (hereinafter: DNV) every year, while it is subject to recertification audit every three years. Since the last re-certification was carried out in 2018 the certification number: 68377-2009-AQ-HRV-HAA was valid for the period from 5 November 2018 to 28 October 2021.

This year's external audit which was also re-certification audit was carried out by DNV on 16 September 2021. The focus of the audit was on the implementation of the risk management process. This year's external audit resulted in a report confirming that the Agency's QMS is in high compliance with the requirements of HRN EN ISO 9001: 2015. Based on the results of external audit and DNV report the Agency was issued a new certificate no.: 68377-2009-AQ-HRV-HAA valid in the period from 29 October 2021 to 28 October 2024.

In line with the Part 2 and 3 of the ESG, European quality assurance agencies operating within EHEA are obligated to undergo international external review procedure (ENQA Agency Reviews) once every five years. The procedure is carried out by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereinafter: *ENQA*) and it is the precondition for applying for and gaining full membership in ENQA and EQAR i.e. for renewing membership after a period of 5 years.

The Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) underwent its third international review for extending membership in ENQA, as well as listing in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

In line with the procedure *The ENQA Agency Reviews* and the *Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies*, ASHE produced a self-evaluation report with annexes covering the period from 2017 to 2021. ASHE's Self-evaluation Report was submitted to ENQA in April 2021, and it was published on the Agency's website in Croatian and English in May.

ASHE underwent its first international review in 2011, and the second one in 2016/17. Based on the report and the decision of the ENQA Board, ASHE gained full membership in ENQA for a five-year period in 2017. Based on the reports considered by EQAR Board ASHE was entered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in 2011, and based on the report from 2017 it renewed its status for a period of five years (until 28 February 2022). ENQA Review Report from 2017 is available on ASHE website.

In addition to the findings that refer to ASHE's compliance with individual standards and guidelines (Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG), the report also contains recommendations for improvement in the following period. ASHE drafted and submitted its action plan for the follow-up stage to ENQA (CLASS: 030-02/16-01/0001, REG. NUMBER: 355-01-18-0001, 20 February 2018) which was fully adopted by the ENQA Board.

Major improvements made during the follow-up stage refer to adopted and implemented new procedure of re-accreditation of higher education institutions and the development of a new model of initial accreditation, which includes application of the CroQF principles, a new model of audit, as well as the development of the Agency's cross-border activities, and ASHE's contribution to the development of the higher education system in Croatia.

In the 2021 Self-evaluation Report, ASHE has shown all the improvements made based on the recommendations from 2017 ENQA report and their impact on the further development of the higher education system in the Republic of Croatia.

A new SWOT analysis was produced to which employees from all ASHE departments contributed.

ASHE greatly values and continually monitors the satisfaction of its users/stakeholders with ASHE services. Questionnaires are sent to the stakeholders, and their answers are processed, analysed and used to identify good practices and opportunities for improvement. Moreover, the stakeholders express the level of satisfaction with ASHE services via mail, telephone conversations, in various events organized by ASHE (conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.).

Throughout the year, feedback is continuously collected, by means of questionnaires, from members of expert panels and evaluated higher education institutions that participated in various types of external evaluations. The collected information is processed, analysed and discussed at department meetings. These discussions lead to improvements and the recognition of good practice, and feedback is further communicated to the management, the Accreditation Council and other bodies.

Table 6: Overview of the client satisfaction with ASHE services expressed by quality index values with data from 2017 to 2021

Department	2017 Quality Index	2018 Quality Index	2019 Quality Index	2020 Quality Index	2021 Quality Index
OVP	4,3	4,72	4,54	4,6	4,87
OVO	4,4	4,65	4,65	4,7	4,7
OAZ	4,75	4,75	4,38	4,4	4,9
OAV	4,5	4,46	4,66	4,52	4,39
UMO	4,5	4,58	4,53	4,49	4,59
OP/OIP	4,87	4,9	4,87	4,85	4,87
SPU	4,47	4,3	4,7	4,75	4,6
MS/UEN	4,72	4,9	4,93	4,84	4,75
URR	4,83	4,64	4,56	4,75	4,84
TOTAL ASHE	4,59	4,66	4,65	4,66	4,72

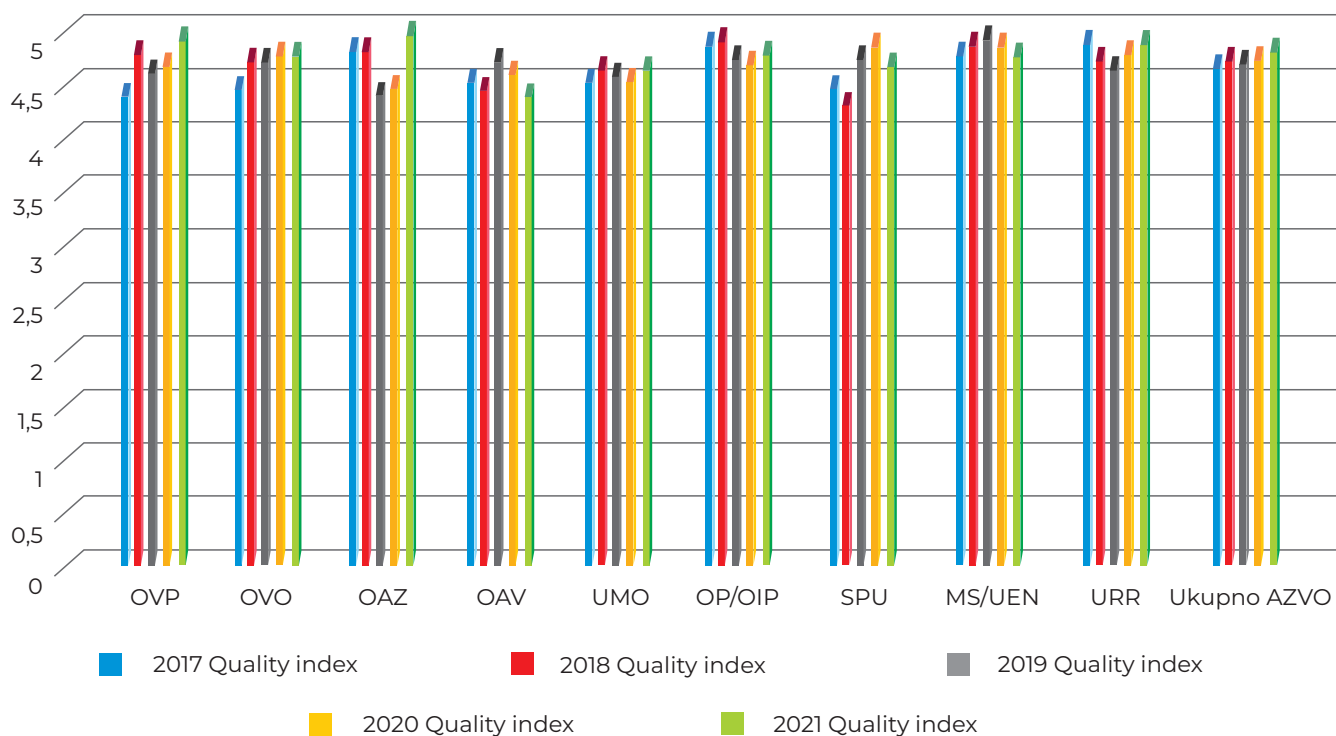


Chart 19: Overview of the client satisfaction with ASHE services expressed by quality index values with data for 2017-2021

OVP – External Audit Department
 OVO – Department of Higher Education
 OAZ – Department of Accreditation in Science
 OAV – Department of Accreditation in Higher Education
 UMO – Office for Scientific Field Committees
 OP/OIP – General Administration/IT Department
 SPU – Central Applications Office
 MS/UEN – International cooperation/ENIC/NARIC Office
 URR – Director's Office

The stakeholder/user feedback indicates the following:

- Regarding the cooperation with ASHE employees, clients/stakeholders commended the expertise, knowledge of quality assurance, professionalism, courtesy, timely response, clear and prompt feedback, focus and excellent presentation skills of ASHE employees.
- Satisfaction with trainings and seminars organised by ASHE, aimed at preparing higher education institutions for various external evaluation procedures, structured lectures, objective and fair approach to higher education institutions. Awareness of the importance of continuous implementation of external evaluation procedures, not only for further development of higher education institutions, but also as a confirmation of the integrity of their work.
- Satisfaction of expert panel members, especially foreign members, with availability of the coordinator and the overall support provided by ASHE coordinators throughout the evaluation process, clarity of instructions, excellent organization of evaluation site visit, and the quality of training sessions.
- Satisfaction with the activities carried out through SKAZVO project, which allow for the development of competencies of different stakeholder groups within the academic community. As some activities were carried out online, while satisfied that the joint implementation of the planned activities was not interrupted, the stakeholders also expressed a wish to meet again in person as soon as the circumstances allow it.
- Part of users are satisfied with ASHE website, its up-to-date information, contacts, materials and visual identity; a smaller number of users, in particular those that use scientific field committees' web pages, pointed out that a more user-friendly access to documents is needed.
- Part of the users stated that MOZVAG is a nice idea, but because of a lack of connection with other databases used in higher education and science they ended up entering part of the data which were already entered in other systems such as ISVU, CROSBİ, project database, etc. manually. The kindness and willingness of the employees to respond to all their inquiries helped them a lot.
- Satisfaction with the fact that ASHE activities contribute to the increased visibility of the Croatian area of higher education.

Collection of feedback from conducted educational activities

Educational activities intended for various stakeholder groups are an important part of ASHE's work. Within the framework of the EU's SKAZVO project, from 2017 the Agency carried out workshops for employees at higher education institutions and students in order to provide support in segments that were assessed as needing support during the first cycle of external evaluations. During the implementation of the SKAZVO project 107 workshops were organised with a total of 5116 participants. The topics were selected in cooperation with stakeholders on the basis of their suggestions and expressed interest. Here are some of the selected topics:

- The cycle of workshops entitled Careering is carried out by the Agency with the aim of providing support to the development of career centres at higher education institutions. Participants (career advisers, teachers at HEIs, students) rated the workshops with high grades – the average grade is 4.84. The usefulness, i.e. the possibility to apply the acquired knowledge at work, was rated by participants with the average grade 4.68. Moreover, they pointed out that, besides theoretical knowledge, the exchange of experience with other colleagues, networking and practical exercises were particularly useful. The majority expressed interest in

more workshops and they suggested concrete topics based on their day-to-day experience. ASHE used the collected suggestions in the planning of further workshops and due to extremely positive feedback, the cycle of workshops *Careering* will be continued in 2021.

- Workshops on learning outcomes in higher education and the competence approach in planning study programmes intended for teachers in higher education proved to be successful and participants rated them with the average grade 4.77, while their usefulness was rated with the grade 4.66. Participants estimated that these workshops were a good basis for creating as successful study programmes as possible; the usefulness of workshops held throughout the year, and in particular in view of the re-accreditation procedure, was emphasized. In accordance with suggestions made by participants and in order to include the largest possible number of teachers, a series of workshops on this topic were organised at higher education institutions throughout Croatia.
- Because it understands the need for a stronger involvement of students in ASHE's quality assurance procedures, but also at their home higher education institutions, the Agency organised a seminar for students that was rated with the grade 4.23, while the relevance of this topic for the higher education sector was rated by participants with the grade 4.79. Participants consider useful the information they received on quality assurance procedures and in which ways students can become drivers of change at higher education institutions. They emphasized the need to organise in future similar workshops on the topic of quality of study programmes, with a focus on practical work.
- ASHE organises workshops on the work with the upgraded MOZVAG2 and CROSBİ systems and the Project Database that are used in the re-accreditation procedure of higher education institutions. The form and the quality of these workshops were rated with the average grade 4.54, while the content of the workshop was graded with the average grade 4.56. We believe that it is very important that participants should have the possibility to take part in the discussion during workshops on the work with the reconstructed information systems, which was also recognised by the participants who rated this aspect with the grade 4.66.

Due to circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, workshops for higher education institutions were held online in the form of a webinar in 2021. Participants rated online workshops with slightly lower grades than workshops held face-to-face. This is particularly evident from the grade on the possibility for participants to take part in the discussion, which was in average rated with the grade 4.85, while for the online workshops this aspect was rated with the grade 4.05. We therefore conclude that participants in the workshops held in a traditional manner are more satisfied with their possibility to participate in the discussion.

We believe that our employees are our most valuable resource and a reason for our success. Keenly aware of the importance of continuous learning and development, we have actively encouraged our employees to expand their knowledge and develop new skills, to think critically, to identify risks, to creatively solve problems and improve ASHE business processes. From the very beginning, we have encouraged the development of a quality culture in which employees are responsible for the quality of their own work, and aware of their contribution to the institutional mission and strategy.

During March and April 2021, we conducted an employee satisfaction survey. Data was collected via e-questionnaire. The questionnaire was voluntary and completely anonymous. Questionnaires were filled out via an electronic form.

A review of the 2015-2021 estimates of the various aspects of organisational climate showed that ASHE employees rated with highest grades (above 4) various professional values and business goals, employee development opportunities, and cooperation with the immediate superior. The aspect of professional values and goals got the highest grade in 2021 (4.44).

With regard to individual aspects of the organisational climate:

- Employees gave on average higher grades to some aspects of work: the connection between the individual work and business goals of the organizational unit and work autonomy got the highest grades;
- In terms of motivation, employees value the most the sufficiency of benefits in relation to other organizations and the joint setting of work goals, and they identified as areas for improvement the adequacy of wages with regard to similar jobs outside ASHE;
- In terms of employee development, the level of qualifications and superiors' support in career development got the highest grades.

As far as the aspect of communication / cooperation / support is concerned, the aspects of respecting colleagues from the department, flexibility of ASHE in meeting the needs of users and respecting colleagues from all over ASHE continuously got the highest grades from employees. The exchange of knowledge and information between departments got the lowest grades.

Considering the work engagement and commitment to the organization, the employees show the most that they are ready for additional work and overtime work, and they grade cooperation with the immediate superior in solving problems at work 4.68. Regarding cooperation with the immediate superior, all grades are higher than 4. Employees most value cooperation in solving problems at work and encouraging open communication in the team.

In terms of cooperation with ASHE management, the opportunity to present ideas and suggestions to the management, and the relationship between the management and the employees got the highest grades.

In the area of professional values and business goals, the employees gave the aspects of familiarity with the mission and vision and the ASHE Strategy as well as clarity of values and business goals the highest grades.

In 2021, satisfaction with work was most related to the aspect of flexibility of working hours, use of vacation and job security, and the least to the location of work and the amount of salary.

Suggestions for improvement include areas related to the location of work, greater overall workspace, further digitization of business processes and a more even distribution of work.



PUBLIC RELATIONS

In its Strategy for 2021-2025, the Agency for Science and Higher Education, within the strategic goal 2 (Strengthening the social role of ASHE as a promoter of the quality of higher education and science), committed itself to strengthening recognition and preserving identity and contributing to the development of society and maintaining public confidence. Planning and implementation of communication activities are important for achieving these goals.

The following activities were carried out in 2021:

- 2020 Annual Report and 2021 Activity Plan were published in Croatian and English in hardcopy and electronic form and submitted to the Croatian Parliament, the Government of the Republic of Croatia, higher education institutions and other stakeholders in the higher education and science system, as well as to ENQA, EQAR and European quality assurance agencies in higher education, and published on the Agency's website www.azvo.hr.
- The Self-evaluation Report of the Agency for Science and Higher Education for 2021, the Analysis of outcomes of re-accreditation of higher education institutions in the field of economics, the Analysis of outcomes of re-accreditation of higher education institutions in the field of biotechnical sciences were published.
- Two ASHE newsletters were published in Croatian and English. The newsletters were published on ASHE website and social networks, and the printed edition was sent to all higher education institutions.
- Higher education institutions were regularly informed about ASHE activities and news in the higher education and science system.
- Press releases regarding the more important ASHE activities and events were published on ASHE website and sent to relevant media and stakeholders. All media inquiries were promptly handled and relevant information sent to the representatives of the media.
- ASHE's website and Facebook and Twitter profiles were updated on a regular basis.
- In order to increase international visibility, news concerning ASHE's activities were published in electronic newsletters issued by ENQA, EQAR, CEENQA and INQAAHE.
- Cooperation with a student association which organizes STEM Games (international student competition in STEM field with the aim of promotion of the event through ASHE's communication channels (publication on the ASHE website, Facebook and Twitter page).
- Almost 30 training activities and conferences attended by representatives of higher education institutions, students and the media were held in 2021.



2021 FINANCIAL REPORT

ASHE is funded by the Ministry of Science and Education. ASHE revenue in 2021 comprised of 20 accounts:

- A621155 – Administration and general transactions
- A621179 – National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development
- A621182 – Council of Polytechnics and Colleges
- A621186 – Evaluation of scientific institutions
- A621187 – Evaluation of higher education institutions
- A621190 – External audit of higher education institutions and scientific organisations
- A621191 – Monitoring graduate employment
- A621192 – Central Applications Office
- A867004 – Committee for Ethics in Science and Higher Education
- K621178 – Equipment and maintenance
- K621194 – National Information System for Applications to Higher Education Institutions
- K867008 – European Social Fund - SKAZVO project (Improvement of quality assurance and enhancement systems in higher education)
- A867009 – HRMinHEI Project - Modernisation of Higher Education Institutions through enhancement of Human Resources Management function
- A867002 – EURASHE – Harmonisation of Approaches for Vocational Education in Europe
- A867010 – MEHR - Modernisation, Education and Human Rights
- A867013 – DEQAR – Database of External Quality Assurance Reports
- A867014 – ERASMUS – Strengthening multi-partnership cooperation in providing lifelong guidance services – KEEP IN PACT
- A867015 – ERASMUS PLUS – Allocating Credit to European Professional Training Programmes (ACEPT)
- A867016 – ERASMUS PLUS – Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition (OCTRA)
- A867017 – ERASMUS PLUS – Automatic Recognition in the Adriatic Region – ADREN

Based on the financial reports, total revenue in 2021 amounted to **HRK 21.830.812**. It consisted of:

- state budget resources for 2021 – HRK 19,257,739
- other revenue - HRK 608.333
- ESF project - *Improvement of Quality Assurance and Project Enhancement Systems in Higher Education* (SKAZVO) – HRK 1.169.929
- Other EC-funded projects: HRK 382.394
- Own revenue - HRK 412.417

Total expenditure in 2021 amounted to **HRK 21.427.094**. These consist of business expenditure in the amount of HRK 20.427.700 and expenditure for acquisition of non-financial assets in the amount of HRK 999.394.

ASHE expenditure from 1 January to 31 December 2021

Accounts in the chart of accounts	Item	Achieved in the previous 2020 reporting period	Achieved in the current 2021 reporting period
1	2	4	5
	TOTAL EXPENDITURE (CLASS 3 + 4)	19.305.835	21.427.094
3	BUSINESS EXPENDITURE	18.486.637	20.427.700
31	Staff expenditure	11.133.222	11.549.742
311	Salaries (gross)	9.294.440	9.588.457
3111	Salaries for employment in normal working hours	9.294.440	9.418.611
3113	Salaries for overtime work		169.846
312	Other staff costs	328.616	403.111
313	Salary contributions	1.510.166	1.558.174
3132	Compulsory social security contributions	1.510.166	1.558.174
3133	Compulsory unemployment insurance contributions	0	0
32	Material costs	7.333.225	8.788.310
321	Staff reimbursement costs	1.034.347	509.023
3211	Travel costs	565.962	180.224
3212	Reimbursement for expenditure on travel, field work and separation	245.319	249.421
3213	Professional training costs	223.066	79.378
322	Material and energy expenditure	274.451	269.991
3221	Office supplies and other material costs	242.585	236.109
3223	Energy	9.200	15.916
3224	Material and equipment for maintenance	9.764	9.639
3225	Small inventory and car tires	12.902	8.327
323	Service costs	5.428.613	7.260.054
3231	Telephone, post and transport costs	284.481	288.278
3232	Current and investment maintenance services	43.435	47.001
3233	Promotion and information services	17.034	204.598
3234	Utilities	32.759	30.473
3235	Rent	787.969	982.797
3236	Healthcare and veterinary services	56.890	71.899
3237	Intellectual and personal services	3.960.147	5.219.201
3238	IT services	59.504	54.432
3239	Other services	186.394	361.375
324	Reimbursement for expenditures incurred by persons outside the employment relationship	3.896	195.994

329	Other expenditure not included above	591.919	553.248
3291	Temporary work contracts with members of representative and executive bodies, committees, etc.	92.588	87.144
3292	Insurance premiums	51.281	19.163
3293	Representation costs	177.676	220.576
3294	Membership fees and standards	136.394	140.399
3295	Fees and charges	21.750	20.825
3299	Other expenditure not included above	112.230	65.141
34	Financial expenditure	11.618	7.288
343	Other financial expenditure	11.618	7.288
3431	Bank costs	11.618	5.541
3432	Negative exchange rate differences and differences due to the application of the currency clause		1.747
35	Subsidies	0	0
352	Subsidies to companies, cooperatives, farmers and artisans outside the public sector	0	0
3522	Subsidies to companies and cooperatives outside the public sector	0	0
36	Grants given abroad and to the users of the public budget	8.572	82.360
361	Aids to foreign governments	0	0
3611	Current aids to foreign governments	0	0
369	Transfer between users of the public budget	8.572	82.360
3691	Transfer between users of the public budget	0	82.360
3693	Current transfers between users of the public budget on the basis of the transfer of EU funds	8.572	0
4	Acquisition of non-financial assets	819.198	999.394
41	Acquisition of non-produced longterm assets	60.417	50.949
412	Intangible assets	60.417	50.949
4123	Licence	60.4177	50.949
42	Acquisition of non-financial assets:	758.781	948.445
422	Space and equipment	177.831	172.495
4221	Office equipment and furniture	117.620	89.958
4222	Communication equipment	20.646	56.885
4223	Maintenance and protection equipment	0	0
4227	Installations, machines and equipment for other purposes	39.565	25.652
426	Intangible produced assets	580.950	775.950
4262	Investment in computer programmes	580.950	775.950

Business expenditure:

1. Staff expenditure includes:

- salaries (gross) and salary contributions
- other staff expenditures (annual leave, Christmas bonus, length of service awards, gifts for children, help after an extended sick leave, retirement severance allowances).

2. Material costs include:

- 2.1. Travel costs and other remunerations
- 2.2. Material and energy expenditure
- 2.3. Service costs
- 2.4. Other costs.

Item 2.1. Travel costs and other remunerations that includes:

- Travel costs for members of expert panels participating in external evaluation procedures (initial accreditation, re accreditation, audits and improvement of quality of higher education institutions), travel costs for members of bodies working with the Agency (members of the Accreditation Council, the Complaints Committee, the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, Management Board, Follow-up Committee, Scientific Field Committees, Field Committees, Scientific Area Councils, Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, and other committees established in accordance with the work plan and as required);
- Reimbursement of staff travel expenses, including all re-accreditation procedures, as well as all workshops of all universities
- Costs of education (employees and other stakeholders involved in quality assurance procedures in science and higher education) through seminars, conferences, professional training in the country and abroad.

Item 2.2. Material and energy expenditure:

- Office material, energy, material for current and investment maintenance, small inventory, car tires and other costs.

Item 2.3. Service costs included:

- Maintenance of information systems (maintaining Centrix system for administration and data management, IP telephone centre and contact centre, software for financial administration, and other programmes)
- Expenditure – rent (offices, space for seminars, workshops, training courses and sessions of committees, working groups and other bodies working with the Agency)
- Intellectual service costs:
 - temporary work contracts with Croatian and foreign members of expert panels working on external quality assurance procedures implemented by the Agency (initial accreditation, re-accreditation, audit and improvement of quality of HEIs)
 - temporary work contracts with members of expert and administrative bodies working with the Agency (members of the Accreditation Council, the Complaints Committee in HEI re-accreditation procedure, the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, the Management Board, the Follow-up Committee, Scientific Field Committees, Scientific Area Councils, the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, field committees, and other committees established in accordance with the work plan and as required)
 - student work for Central Applications Office.
- telephone, postage (Scientific Field Committees, ENIC/NARIC, CAO) and transport costs
- promotion and information services (ASHE's annual report, leaflets and brochures for events at the Agency and various analyses)
- Expenditures for other services (car registration and technical inspection, document archiving services, design and printing services for brochures, leaflets and certificates).

Item 2.4. Other expenditure not included above that includes:

- Costs of the Agency's Management Board
- Insurance premium
- Membership fees - domestic and foreign.

Acquisition of non-financial assets:

- software licences
- IT programmes costs (contracts for the maintenance and upgrading of the National Information System for Applications to Higher Education Institutions in Croatia - NISaHEI and the National Information System for Applications to Graduate Study Programmes -NISaGSP, costs of maintenance and upgrading of the MOZVAG information system and its upgrade)
- office, computer and communication equipment, equipment for the maintenance of heating and ventilation system, etc.

Contracts awarded in public procurement in 2021:

Simple procurement procedures and public procurement procedures carried in 2021

In 2021, there were 21 simple procurement operations carried out pursuant to the Rules for the procurement of goods, works and services of an estimated value up to HRK 200,000.00 and for the procurement of works of an estimated value up to HRK 500,000.00. The total value of the carried out procurement procedures is HRK **1.239.008,64** (VAT excluded). For procurements of an estimated value exceeding HRK 200,000.00 the Public Procurement Act applies.

Based on the carried out public procurement procedures of the Central state office for public procurement one contract for a fixed telephone and six insurance policies was concluded (mandatory, for 2021. The cumulative value of contracts and policies amounts to **162,608.19**, VAT excluded.

For all procurement procedures planned at the beginning of the year, as well as the changes of the procedures over the year, the Agency is under an obligation to monitor expenditure, i.e. realization of the carried out procedures. They are entered in the Electronic Public Procurement Classifieds and after the end of the year a statistical report on public procurement is produced and entered in the Electronic Public Procurement Classifieds.

2022 ACTIVITY PLAN

- Renewal of registration in EQAR and of full membership in ENQA for a period of five years based on the conducted international review of ASHE's work;
- Drafting and adopting ASHE operational plan for 2022 in accordance with ASHE Strategy for 2021-2025;
- Carrying out re-accreditation in accordance with the *Re-accreditation Plan* adopted by ASHE's Accreditation Council (14 higher education institutions and two higher education institutions which requested a postponement in 2021);
- Carrying out initial accreditation for performing higher education activity upon request;
- Carrying out initial accreditation for performing scientific activity upon request;
- Carrying out initial accreditation of study programmes upon request;
- Carrying out initial accreditation of online study programmes upon request;
- Carrying out audit procedure in accordance with the *Audit Plan* adopted by ASHE's Accreditation Council (4 higher education institutions), in addition to the audit of one higher education institution included in the Audit Plan for 2021;
- Carrying out thematic evaluation upon request;
- Carrying out evaluation of joint study programmes upon request;
- Carrying out cross-border evaluation upon request;
- Development and application of CQF (carrying out the procedure of evaluation of requests for entering in the Register, i.e. sub-registers of the standards of qualifications and/or units of learning outcomes (at levels 5 (the part related to higher education); level 6; SC 6; level 7.1; 7.1.SC;7.2;8.1;8.2), activities of establishment and administrative and professional support to the work of 11 sectoral councils and other activities in accordance with the Act on Croatian Qualifications Framework (OG, 22/13, 41/16, 64/18, 47/20, 20/21) and Ordinance on Croatian Qualifications Framework (OG 96/21);
- Re-accreditation of public scientific institutes and part of scientific organisations outside the system of public scientific institutes (other legal entities);
- Gathering and processing data and producing statistics and analytics on the level of the system;
- Support to Croatian HEIs in the implementation of CROQF and the ESG;

- Monitoring graduate satisfaction and employment;
- Providing expert, administrative and IT support to strategic and expert bodies in the system of science and higher education (the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, Field Committees for Appointment to Scientific-Teaching and Teaching Grades at Polytechnics and Colleges, Scientific Field Committees for Appointment to Scientific Grades, Scientific and Artistic Area Councils);
- Participating in ongoing international projects and applying for new ones;
- Developing human potentials – lifelong learning (training of ASHE employees);
- Training activities – the training of expert panels which conduct procedures of external evaluation and thematic education of HEIs and scientific organisations, organising conferences, seminars and workshops;
- Regular activities of the national network of QA units at higher education institutions;
- Improving the internal quality assurance system at ASHE, in accordance with the ESG and the ISO 9001 standard, implementation of the annual internal and external audit;
- Active participation in the development of the national information system for science and higher education;
- Informing the public on the conditions of enrolment, application deadlines and other relevant information on applying for, competing and obtaining the right to enrol in study programmes (through the *Become a student* website, the official website of the Central Applications Office and by direct contact with the candidates submitting inquiries to the Central Applications Office);
- Collecting documentation and entering personal data and grades into the National Information System for Applications to Higher Education Institutions in Croatia for candidates who have completed high school education before 2010, or outside the Republic of Croatia, in order to compete for enrolment in study programmes with other candidates from the system of education of the Republic of Croatia;
- Conducting the procedure of applications to integrated undergraduate and graduate study programmes at Croatian HEIs;
- Introducing a centralised system of application to graduate study programmes;
- Creating ranking lists based on points obtained according to the terms of enrolment in the study programmes for candidates applying for study programmes in higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia;

- Collecting and analysing data of candidates outside of the regular education system in Croatia enrolling in the first grades of secondary schools;
- Providing information about the national education system, foreign education systems and the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications;
- Providing information on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications;
- Recognition of foreign higher education qualifications;
- Active cooperation with external stakeholders (the Ministry of Science and Education, the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Croatian Parliament, the Croatian Rectors' Conference, the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, the State Archives, the Croatian Employment Service, the Ministry of Public Administration, the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, etc.);
- Cooperating with institutions from the public and private sector, non-governmental and non-profit organisations;
- Providing IT support to ASHE business processes and providing information security;
- Exchanging experts in the field of higher education and science;
- Presentations at professional conferences;
- Informing the public about activities carried out by ASHE;
- Promotional activities.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ARFEQ – Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications

ASHE – Agency for Science and Higher Education

CAO – Central Applications Office

CEENQA – Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

CPC – Council of Polytechnics and Colleges

CQF – Croatian Qualifications Framework

ECA – European Consortium for Accreditation

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

ENIC – European Network of National Information Centres on Academic Recognition and Mobility

ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

ESG – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

FC – Field Committee

MSE – Ministry of Science and Education

NARIC – National Academic Recognition Information Centres

NCHE – National Council for Higher Education

NCS – National Council for Science

NCSHETD – National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development

NISaGS – National Information System for Applications to Graduate Studies

NISaHEI – National Information System for Applications to Higher Education Institutions

SFC – Scientific Field Committee

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