

Review of the Agency for Science and Higher Education

August 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the compliance of the Agency for science and higher education (ASHE) with the European Standards and Guidelines for external quality assurance agencies and thus with the membership criteria of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). It was conducted at the request of ASHE itself by an expert panel appointed by the coordinating body, Agencia Andaluza de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación Universitaria (AGAE), and approved by the ENQA Board.

The assessment procedure involved a self-evaluation by ASHE and a two-day visit by the panel, during which it pursued questions raised by the self-evaluation report.

ASHE, which succeeded the external quality assurance competences of the National Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Croatia and the National Council for Science of the Republic of Croatia, was established in 2005 with the task of external quality assurance in higher education and science and several other tasks connected to higher education system. This kind of arrangement came in place through an Act of Parliament in 2009. ASHE successfully built on previous experiences and knowledge and included new procedures and organisational possibilities.

Using the well-prepared self-evaluation report, the legislation and other essential documents as its starting point, the panel interviewed all of the ASHEs bodies (representatives of the Management Board, the Director, representatives of the Accreditation Council) and staff, ministry representatives and members of the national councils responsible for higher education and science, representatives of institutions, students, employers, civil society and other stakeholders.

In the light of the evidence provided by the documentation and the interviews the panel considered that ASHEs overall performance against the standards of the ESG is very high. ASHE is well-led and well-managed at both Board and Executive levels and has great capacity for change and development. The panel found that all ESG-standards are met by ASHE.

GLOSSARY

AGAE

Agencia Andaluza de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación Universitaria

ASHE

Agency for Science and Higher Education

ECTS

European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

EHEA

European Higher Education Area

ENQA

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ESG

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

EQAR

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

HEI

Higher Education Institution

INQAAHE

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

ISO standards

Standards developed by Standards International Organization for Standardization

QA

Quality Assurance

QMS

Quality Management System

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

The review of the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) undertaken in June 2011 was initiated by ASHE itself for multiple purposes one of which is to fulfil the external review requirement of ENQA membership / EQAR listing (a review of type B according to ENQA's guidelines for external review).

The review panel for the external review of ASHE was composed of the following members:

- Séamus Puirseil, former Chief Executive of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, Ireland; president of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation; president of Association of Vocational Education College, Ireland (Chair)
- Janja Komljenovič, former advisor for higher education to the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Slovenia; researcher at the Centre for educational policy studies, University of Ljubljana (Secretary)
- Kurt Sohm, managing director, Fachhochschulrat, Austria
- Domingo Docampo, professor at Department of Signal Theory and Communications, University of Vigo; formerly Rector of the University of Vigo, Spain
- María Cristina Pastor Valcárcel, student of Degree in Law and Actuarial and Financial Sciences, Miguel Hernandez University; chairperson of the Miguel Hernandez University Students' Union; member of the ESU Quality Assurance Experts' Pool.

ASHE applied for ENQA membership in 2007 resulting in ENQAs rejection of the application based on the arguments of lack of formal evidence of ASHEs independence and insufficient human resources. ASHE then successfully applied for associate status which enabled it to further its cooperation with ENQA and its members. ASHE staff was thus able to participate in more than 20 workshops and more than 20 international conferences on quality assurance in higher education and a number of ENQA working meetings on the development and promotion of quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

In addition ASHE joined INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) in 2006 and in 2008 it became a full member of CEEN (Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education). In the same year ASHE joined the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Institutional Management in Higher Education Forum – OECD IMHE.

ASHE substantially changed its competence, status, operation and processes since its establishment focusing also on the ENQA argumentation of 2007. It gained greater independence which is explained in more detail later in this report and it was successful in gaining additional human, financial and professional resources.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

ENQA's regulations require all full member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they fulfil the membership provisions.

In November 2004, the General Assembly of ENQA agreed that the third part of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) should be incorporated into the membership provisions of its regulations. Substantial compliance with the ESG thus became the principal criterion for Full membership of ENQA. The ESG were subsequently adopted at the Bergen ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in 2005.

The third part of the ESG covers the cyclical external review of quality assurance and accreditation agencies. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, external cyclical reviews for ENQA membership purposes are normally conducted on a national level and initiated by national authorities in an EHEA State, but carried out independently from them. However, external reviews can also be coordinated by ENQA or other authority if they cannot be nationally organised. This is the case for this ASHE external review as the coordinator is the Spanish Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education and Scientific Research of Andalusia (Agencia Andaluza de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación Universitaria – AGAE). ENQA was kept informed of progress throughout the whole process.

The external review of ASHE was conducted in line with the process described in *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference.

ASHE produced a self-evaluation report which provided a substantial portion of evidence that the panel used to form its conclusions. The panel conducted a site-visit to validate fully the self-evaluation and clarify any points at issue. Finally, the review panel produced the present final report on the basis of the self-evaluation report, site-visit and its findings. In doing so it provided an opportunity for ASHE to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report. The review panel confirms that it was given access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review.

Self-evaluation Report

ASHE produced a self-evaluation report (91 pages), which was sent to the

review panel prior to the site visit. The self-evaluation report was prepared by a work group with numerous ASHE staff in wide consultation with higher education stakeholders in the country.

The review panel found the self-evaluation report informative, well organised and laid out. It analysed advantages and disadvantages of the system and offered explanation with evidence of changes and state of the play in Croatian quality assurance.

ASHE submitted 20 annexes to the self-evaluation report including legislation and other type of regulation, analyses, reports, consultation material and other documents, translated into English and prepared to translate any further documents upon the panel request. The panel found annexes sufficiently informative and was able to benefit from the additional information that was provided.

Site Visit

The review panel visited the offices of ASHE in Zagreb on 7 – 8 June 2011. The panel held a telephone briefing with AGAE vice-president, Nieves Pascual on the 27th of May 2011 and a preparatory meeting the day before the review to further discuss the self-evaluation report and other available information. The experts also further discussed the initial lines of questioning and distributed tasks among themselves.

During the two-day visit the panel met with many different higher education stakeholders, actors and groups of ASHE representatives. Programme of the visit is included in the Appendix 2 of this report. The panel felt convinced that the scope and level of the programme provided relevant information for the review.

The site visit was well prepared and organised. The panel met with many stakeholders and actors which resulted in additional information and clarification successfully gained. ASHE offered strong organisational support prior and during the visit. Its staff was available at all times and provided the panel with all necessary information and access to additional documents. Furthermore, ASHEs support regarding the logistical organisation, transport and accommodation was of a very high order.

Concluding the Report

During the visit and after the programme finished the panel members thoroughly discussed compliance of ASHE with all of the ESG and ENQA membership criteria. They reached high consensus on each criterion separately.

After the visit the review secretary prepared the initial draft report in cooperation with the chair and panel members. It was submitted to ASHE for comment on its factual accuracy.

After receiving ASHE's comments further revisions to the report were agreed between the Review Chair and Review Secretary, in consultation with the panel. The final text was then submitted by the review secretary to the AGAE for further proceeding, and to ASHE.

CONTEXT OF THE REVIEW¹

Higher Education in Croatia

The Croatian higher education system has a long educational tradition preserved primarily through the work of its public universities. The University of Zagreb, founded in 1669, is the oldest continuously operating university in South Eastern Europe.

Croatia has a binary higher education system:

- university studies consisting of academic programmes that are conducted solely at universities;
- professional studies consisting of professional programmes conducted at polytechnics or colleges of applied sciences (exceptionally, professional programmes can also be implemented at universities).

Thus there are three types of higher education institutions in Croatia: universities, polytechnics, and colleges. Currently there are 122 institutions in Croatia, respectively: 7 public universities, 3 private universities, 67 faculties and academies (as part of universities and acting as legal persons), 2 private polytechnics, 13 public polytechnics, 27 private colleges and 3 public colleges. The large number of higher education institutions is mostly due to the fact that four largest universities (Zagreb, Rijeka, Osijek and Split) are not integrated, and their constituent units (faculties, centres etc.) are legal persons.

Croatia has both public and private higher education institutions. Most Croatian universities are public institutions. However, private university education has recently started to develop in Croatia and three private universities have been established (Dubrovnik International University, Media University in Split and Catholic University of Croatia). Regarding higher education institutions providing professional studies, the picture is more varied. Almost all polytechnics are public institutions, while most colleges of applied sciences are private institutions. Both polytechnics and colleges of applied sciences provide first and second cycle professional study programmes – these institutions differ only in the number of study programmes they provide, not in the type of programmes.

The higher education system in Croatia has undergone a comprehensive reform within the framework of the Bologna Process. The Croatian higher education system is now structured according to three cycles (undergraduate, graduate and

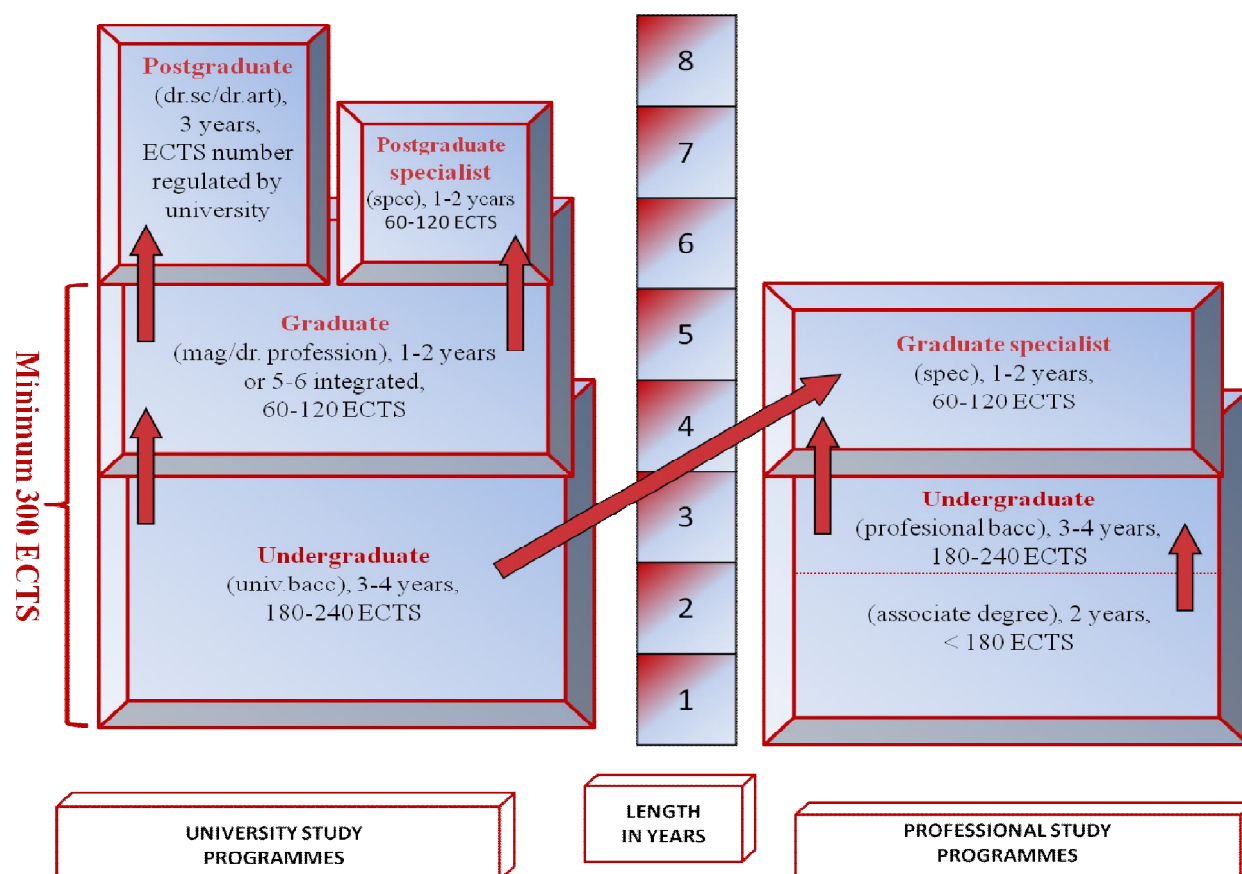
¹ Parts of this chapter are taken directly from the following sources:

- Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia – web page (<http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx>);
- ASHEs self evaluation report;
- ASHEs web page (<http://www.azvo.hr>);
- »Study in Croatia« Information System - web page (<http://www.studyincroatia.hr/>).

postgraduate) and higher education studies in Croatia are organised according to the system of transferable credits (ECTS).

University study programmes fall into three levels: undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate university programmes. Professional study programmes include two levels: professional (undergraduate) and specialist graduate professional studies.

Chart 1 Types of study programmes at HEIs in the Republic of Croatia



A significant step in the reform of higher education in the Republic of Croatia was done in 2005 by restructuring programmes at undergraduate and graduate levels in line with the Bologna principles. 828 first and second cycle study programmes had been accredited by the beginning of the academic year 2005/2006 (991 have been accredited so far), and first Bologna students were enrolled in the programmes that year. Between 2005 and 2009 postgraduate study programmes underwent accreditation process, and so far 103 postgraduate university (doctoral) study programmes and 178 postgraduate specialist study programmes have been accredited.

Table 1 Number and type of study programmes by HEI type

Study programme type	Public university	Public polytechnic	Public college	Private university	Private polytechnic	Private college	Private university - international	TOTAL
Undergraduate university study programmes	343			8				351
Integrated undergraduate and graduate university study programmes	45							45
Graduate university study programmes	364			3			2	370
Postgraduate specialist study programmes	178							178
Postgraduate university (doctoral) study programmes	103							103
Professional study programmes	65	68	3	1	7	34		178
Specialist graduate study programmes	2	20	3		6	16		47
TOTAL	1100	88	6	12	13	50	2	1272

Science in Croatia

Science in Croatia is defined as a common good and a base of both economic growth and social development. Development of science is therefore a focal point of the overall future development of Croatia which is aimed at being focused on achieving excellence, above all by defining and supporting the existing centres of excellence, and creating new ones.

Scientific research in Croatia is monitored and conducted in six fields of science: natural sciences, technical, biomedical, biotechnical and social sciences, and humanities.

The system is currently financed as follows:

- through direct project financing with a mechanism of annual monitoring of results;
- through financing of junior researchers on concrete projects, with multi-year monitoring of their progress (acquiring a master's and a doctoral degree, and publishing scientific papers);
- equipment.

Science is regulated by the 2003 Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education, amended in 2004 and 2007. Along with the *Ministry of Science, Education and Sports*, and the *National Foundation for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development of the Republic of Croatia*, the strategic body responsible for the development of science is *the National Council for Science*. It consists of a chairman and 12 members appointed by the Croatian Parliament upon the proposal of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, and with ensuring a proper representation from the fields of science and arts, from the economy, and the regions.

In accordance with the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education, scientific activity is carried out by universities and their units, public scientific institutes, scientific institutes, the Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences, as well as other legal entities listed in the Register of Scientific Organizations.

Currently there are 190 scientific organisations in Croatia enlisted in the Register of Scientific Organisations. The Register of Scientific Organisations is kept by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports (MSES).

ASHE and Quality Assurance in Croatia

Because of the size of the Republic of Croatia and the important and numerous links between science and higher education, greater efficiency was achieved by unifying evaluation of both systems.

The development of quality assurance of higher education and science in Croatia can be described by three stages. First stage began in 1993 with the first higher education and science legislation and lasted until 2003, second stage can be defined between the period of 2003 and 2009 and the third stage from 2009 onwards.

First Stage: the Beginning of the Quality Assurance in Croatia

The beginnings of quality assurance in science and higher education in Croatia date back to 1993 when the National Council for Science and the National Council for Higher Education was established after the adoption of new legislation.

Pursuant to the Act on Scientific Research Activity the National Council for Science was founded. In addition to its strategic role, it was tasked with evaluating the state of the scientific research and its position and development from the perspective of international comparability, as well as its quality and social necessity, according to the assessments of the Scientific Field Committees (bodies of the National Council for Science in charge of different artistic and scientific fields) and international experts. The Council also had the task of estimating the need for founding public scientific legal entities.

Pursuant to the Act on Institutions of Higher Education the National Council for Higher Education was founded as the strategic body which covered quality assurance and a successful functioning of the higher education system. The Council's task was to estimate the state of higher education and to propose the bases for higher education policies. In addition to that, the task of the National Council for Higher Education was to provide opinions on the necessity of introducing new study programmes and establishing new higher education institutions, as well as providing opinions on meeting the quality standards for the establishment and delivery of study programmes.

Second Stage: ASHE Establishment

Second stage of the quality assurance system development began with new legislation on higher education and science. ASHE was established in 2005 based on this law. The agency, however, performed technical and administrative tasks for the quality assurance procedures which were developed by both newly defined national councils for higher education and science. These two bodies were also decision making bodies regarding evaluation and accreditation in higher education and science.

In this period the National Council for Science launched the procedures of the external evaluation of quality and efficiency of the scientific organisations for the first time, namely in 2007. The second round of scientific organisations was evaluated in 2008. The most obvious consequences can be seen in the whole variety of negative recommendations which resulted in the removal of over ten scientific organisations from the Registry of Scientific Institutions and several letters of expectation issued to the scientific organisations with the purpose of improving their work within the set deadline.

The Act also defined the new composition and the role of the National Council for Higher Education. ASHE performed the procedures of external evaluation of quality of higher education institutions and study programmes. The final opinion on the evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes, as well as on establishing new higher education institutions and study programmes, was issued by the National Council for Higher Education. The opinion of the National Council for Higher Education was forwarded to the Minister of Science, Education and Sports.

During that period it was noticed that the existing legal framework was a restrictive factor in conducting all planned activities since it did not guarantee sufficient ASHE independence in implementing procedures of external evaluation of quality in science and higher education.

ASHE was actively pointing at consequences that might arise, which prompted response and understanding of the strategic bodies of the Republic of Croatia, and in 2009 the new Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education was set into force, which laid a good foundation for future activities.

Third Stage: ASHE Today

The enactment of previously mentioned Act in 2009 started the third period of developing the system of quality assurance in science and higher education of the Republic of Croatia.

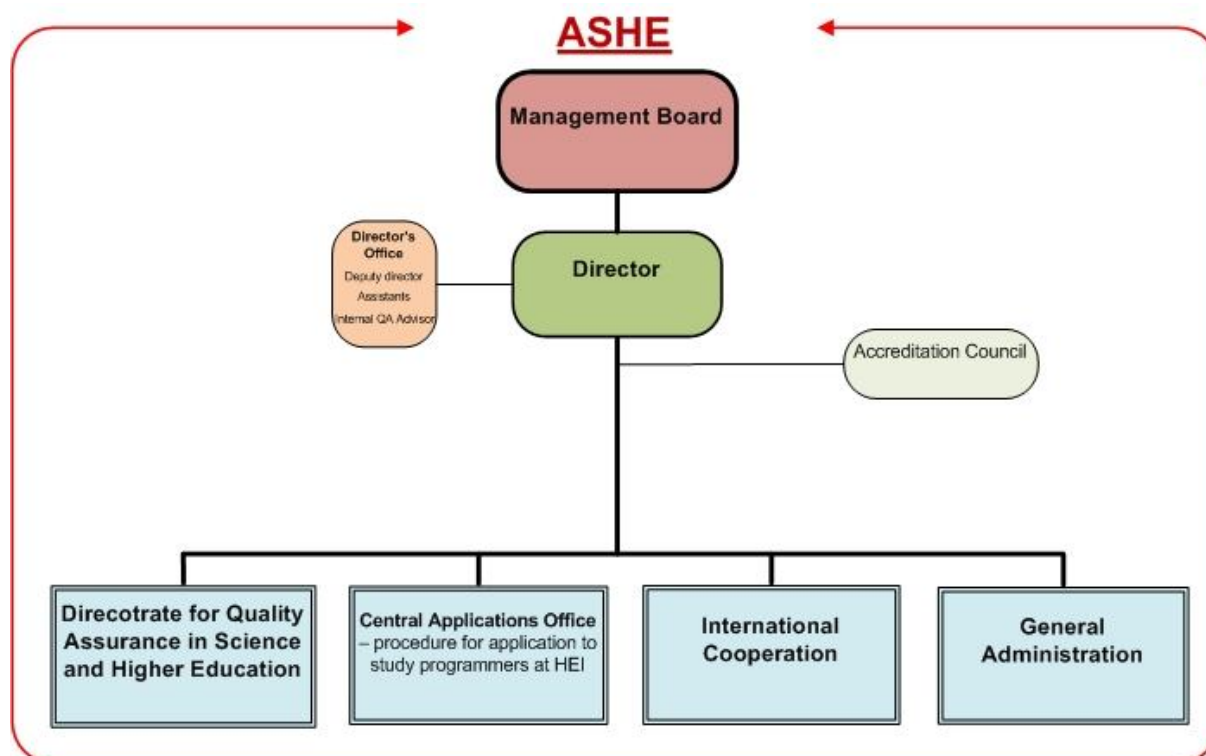
The Act reinforced the ASHE role, making it the institution competent for the procedures of the external evaluation of quality in science and higher education of the Republic of Croatia. This strengthened its independence, and its role within the national context as the unique national body that encompasses numerous activities related to the quality in science and higher education and contributes to connecting these two related systems. ASHE has intensively developed its expertise, learning from European and international best practice, as well as from its own experience in the quality assurance procedures, in spite of the inadequate pre-2009 legal framework and insufficient recognisability in the society.

ASHE is today the only national body responsible for external evaluation of higher education institutions, study programmes and scientific organisations. The legislation in 2009 redefined the scope of ASHE work and ascertained its independence. Within its jurisdiction ASHE carries out the following evaluation procedures:

- initial accreditation;
- re-accreditation;
- thematic evaluation;
- audit.

ASHE bodies are: the Management Board, Director and the Accreditation Council. The bodies are composed of the representatives of all stakeholders from the system of science and higher education, including students. For the purpose of achieving higher degree of transparency and public trust, the representative of non-governmental organisation from the higher education area participates in the work of the Accreditation Council.

ASHE structure is thus the following:



The Management Board supervises the work of ASHE and reaches decisions pertaining to its activities. The ASHE Management Board consists of a President and eight members appointed for a four year term. President and 7 members of the Management Board are appointed by the Croatian Parliament based on the proposals of stakeholders. ASHE appoints one member of the Management Board from the ranks of its employees in accordance with the provisions of the Labour Act.

ASHE Director is professor Jasmina Havranek, PhD, and is appointed by the Management Board.

Accreditation Council is the professional council of ASHE which adopts documents related to external evaluation procedures and the final opinion on the quality of higher education institutions and scientific organisations. It is composed of 11 permanent members appointed for a four-year term by the ASHE Management Board. Stakeholders propose individuals to be appointed into the Accreditation Council. On the basis of these proposals, the Director proposes candidates which are appointed by the Management Board to a term of four years. The Accreditation Council may have associate members coming from non-governmental and non-profit organizations recognized as stakeholders in the area of science and higher education. Associate members are appointed by the Accreditation Council Decision upon the proposal of the Director and have no voting rights. The Director of the Agency participates in the activities of the Accreditation Council without voting rights. Public officials cannot become members of the Accreditation Council.

In addition to evaluation and accreditation competences, ASHE encompasses also other responsibilities:

- professional recognition of higher education qualifications (National ENIC/NARIC Office);
- integration and cooperation with the international associations and networks dealing with quality assurance in higher education and science (International Cooperation);
- collecting and processing data on the system of science and higher education (Department of Analytics and Statistics);
- integration of data on candidates' fulfilment of the requirements for the enrolment at higher education institutions and providing information on requirements for the enrolment to Croatian higher education institutions, and on the system of higher education and science (Central Applications Office);
- administration and support for the activities of the National Council for Higher Education, National Council for Science, Council for Financing Scientific Activity and Higher Education, Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, Ethics Committee in Science and Higher Education, 7 Scientific Field Committees, 22 Area Councils and expert bodies.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

ESG 2.1 USE OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

STANDARD:

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

GUIDELINES:

The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met. If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

Evidence:

Based on the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (2009) each science and higher education institution should establish its own internal system of quality assurance and development and it should be integrated into the quality assurance system as a whole.

ASHE specifically evaluates internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions in the process of audit and in the process of accreditation it takes internal quality assurance systems into account.

Analysis:

The panel found that the internal systems of quality assurance have still ample room for improvement in the Croatian higher education as such. Higher education stakeholders and later on ASHE recognised the importance of internal quality assurance and developed the concept of external audit model to help the institutions. It was developed within the CARDS 2003 project Furtherance of the Agency for Science and Higher Education in its Quality Assurance Role and the Development of a Supporting Information System. The project enabled ASHE to develop the audit model in cooperation with international experts and implement it in a pilot project at three HEIs in the Republic of Croatia. The preparations for the pilot implementation included drafting the Manual for Audit of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Croatia and Criteria for Audit of Quality Assurance System, organized training seminars for audit experts and developed a database of experts trained and certified by ASHE. The Manual was disseminated to stakeholders; their comments were incorporated into the text, and adopted by the Rectors' Conference in October 2008.

The experiences gained in the pilot implementation and feedback collected from HEIs and experts participating in the audits (who self-evaluated their work and suggested improvements) served to carry out analyses and introduce further

improvements to the audit procedure. These improvements were included in the second edition of the Manual.

The new concept of initial accreditation and re-accreditation was, however, developed after the legislative change in 2009. The panel found some possible repetitions in the external quality assurance system in the future as all institutions have to undergo re-accreditation as well as audits. The system also implies that the result of an audit could launch re-accreditation if relevant difficulties are found. An institution will thus possibly be evaluated several times during the period of five years (for audit purposes and for re-accreditation purposes) and results of these activities might overlap. On the other hand the panel found high satisfaction among stakeholders regarding the audit activity and as the current external quality assurance system is rather young there have not been any repetitions yet. Institutions also reported beneficial outcomes of audit for the internal quality assurance systems and would suggest continuing with this activity.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

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

ESG 2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

STANDARD:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

GUIDELINES:

In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used. As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

Evidence:

The external quality assurance system including procedures is to some extent determined already by the Croatian legislation. ASHE, however, further develops the criteria and procedures for accreditation and audits.

Analysis:

The panel found that higher education stakeholders have been consulted by the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports when the preparation of the previously mentioned legislation took place in 2009. After that Act came to force, ASHE carefully developed the evaluation and accreditation procedures in wide consultation.

The documents pertaining to the procedure of re-accreditation in higher education were drafted and then sent to two international higher education experts, academics active in higher education quality assurance, one specialising in the US, one in European higher education system. After the review, the documents were published on the ASHE website for public discussion. During the public discussion all stakeholders were consulted (HEIs, Student Councils, the business community, civil society organizations, ministries etc.) and the public had the opportunity to submit comments by e-mail. One segment of the public discussion was particularly focused on the criteria for the evaluation of HEIs and in this segment almost all stakeholders' comments and suggestions entered the final version of the text.

As already described before, the audit system was similarly developed in consultation with different experts and stakeholders.

All the criteria and procedures used by ASHE are published and are easily available. The panel also noticed institutions reporting their satisfaction with ASHEs support and improvement in professionalism.

Procedures to be carried out during the year are always preceded by seminars in which HEIs and scientific organisations are informed on the details of the procedures and trained for drafting the necessary documents. Representatives of internal quality assurance units at HEIs are also regularly trained, which fosters the development of quality culture and raises awareness of the ESG. If ASHE identifies the need to further train the stakeholders, or if they request further training, it organises additional workshops and seminars (for example, workshop for creating institutional strategies.) Since ASHE set continuous improvement of the system of higher education and science as one of its goals, it also organises training of stakeholders aimed at presenting the latest trends and best practices (to mention - workshop on the learning outcomes, presentation of German evaluation practices, presentations on institutional rankings, activities in the framework of support to Tempus Higher Education Reform Experts).

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 2.3 CRITERIA FOR DECISIONS

STANDARD:

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

GUIDELINES:

Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be

based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

Evidence:

ASHE publishes all criteria for decisions and in addition it organises seminars or other type of events to introduce them to the stakeholders. The criteria are used and interpreted in a consistent manner.

ASHE has several measures in place to follow the goal of consistency:

- staff training;
- training of experts that participate in accreditation and evaluation;
- staff is present and offers support to experts on site visits;
- internal procedures at ASHE for staff experience sharing and scrutinising the evaluation outcomes.

Analysis:

The consistency of interpretation and usage of the criteria used to be a source of problems in the past; colleges and polytechnics in particular felt that their development was hampered by an unfair evaluation system. The panel found that stakeholders are now satisfied with the work of ASHE and the usage of criteria including the representatives of polytechnics and colleges. Thus the panel understood from the interviews at the site visit that ASHE takes special care in consistent usage and interpretation of the criteria. However, the new system is still rather young and not all institutions have undergone evaluation yet. It also hasn't happened that a higher education institution would lose a licence in this new system.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 2.4 PROCESSES FIT FOR PURPOSE

STANDARD:

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes. Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance. Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
- the exercise of care in the selection of experts;
- the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;
- the use of international experts;
- participation of students;
- ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached;
- the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review;
- recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement
- policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.

Evidence:

Expert teams are always carefully selected by ASHE. For each procedure, ASHE defines a profile of experts who are competent to carry it out. All experts who participate in accreditation procedures receive training material prior to the visits and in addition they are invited for initiative meeting at ASHE before they go on the site visit. All experts who participate in audits attend several days training at ASHE and in addition attend an initial meeting prior to the visit.

ASHE mostly relies upon international experts to organize the expert teams, of which students are members as well. One student is also a full and equal member of the Accreditation council.

Special attention is given to confidentiality and non-conflict of interest. All experts that participate in panels guarantee the fulfilment of these principles by signing Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement.

Processes are based on a model: detailed guidelines are issued and presented to HEIs, self-evaluation reports and documentation from HEIs, initial workshop for expert teams, external review, initial draft expert report, comments by HEIs, expert report, accreditation decision, ministerial decision, published report, and to a varying degree follow-up. A final report provides clear information on fulfilment of each accreditation criteria as well as recommendations for quality improvement. Accreditation criteria are developed for the process and consistently applied.

The procedures of audit and re-accreditation are focused not on compliance with minimal conditions, but on continuous quality improvement and development.

Analysis:

After finishing each activity (training, evaluation etc.), ASHE requires all participants to assess the procedure and suggest improvements. The survey of customer satisfaction is conducted once a year among all recipients of ASHE services. The information collected within the survey is analysed, archived on the Intranet and submitted to the Management with suggestions for improvement.

ASHE publishes an annual report (in print and on line) which is sent to the National Councils, Parliament, Government, Rectors' Conference, Council of Polytechnics and Colleges and all other stakeholders.

The panel found experts who participate in audits very satisfied with the training and support of ASHE. The experts who participate in accreditation attend an initial meeting a day prior to the visit which serves also as training. They suggested that it might be beneficial if trainings were organised before the visits; however, they did not report any lack of information and support for their work.

The panel was impressed with ASHEs efforts to attract foreign, well qualified experts. ASHE used several innovative approaches to successfully invite experts from all over the world. This was especially complimented by institutions.

One of the ASHE staff working on audits is a full member of audit panels next to other experts and stakeholders. The panel found this practice rather unusual and wondered whether it might be somewhere problematic, although the panel did not find any evidence that this fact would have caused any kind of trouble or conflict in the audit process.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 2.5 REPORTING

STANDARD:

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

GUIDELINES:

In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone. In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers. Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

Evidence:

ASHE publishes several forms of reports on higher education and science: accreditation reports, audit reports, thematic reports and reports on system-wide analyses based on accreditations as well as research-based articles. The reports are available both on ASHEs website and as booklets. There are also brief summaries of system-wide reports and evaluation reports to be found on the website.

The reports are found in Croatian and English language and are available to the public.

Analysis:

All ASHE procedures include drafting of the final report after the site visit. Reports contain descriptions, analyses, recommendations for quality improvement and development, as well as commendations, key findings and conclusions.

After the reports are published they can be commented in a forums section of ASHEs webpage.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 2.6 FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

STANDARD:

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

Evidence:

Some procedures of external evaluation of HEIs carried out by ASHE include follow-up procedures. The follow-up procedures are also included in the legal framework, since both the previous and the current framework law provide for issuing a letter of expectation, which legally binds the HEI to remove the identified deficiencies within a defined period (usually lasting a year.) The current Act also offers a possibility of preventing the HEI from enrolling students in the follow-up period if a letter of expectation was issued to the HEI.

Analysis:

Follow up activities are predicted for most of the external quality assurance procedures:

- in audits the follow up is usual as the expert panel prepares advice for institutions and follows their implementation;
- in re-accreditation follow up is predicted when the letter of expectation is issued and could also be a result of accreditation decision and recommendation to the minister;
- in thematic evaluations follow up is predicted in the sense that they aim to suggest important system changes (e.g. merging of institutions and similar).

Conclusion: fully compliant.

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

ESG 2.7 PERIODIC REVIEWS

STANDARD:

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not "once in a lifetime". It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up

procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

Evidence:

Current legislation predicts periodic reviews in the processes of audit and accreditation every 5 years.

Analysis:

Although the Act which was in force before 2009 did not provide for evaluation cycles, the National Council for Higher Education adopted an evaluation plan which defined a three-year period for carrying out evaluations of all HEIs in the Republic of Croatia. The plan was not completed, because the new Quality Assurance Act was adopted before the end of the cycle. The new Act defined 5 years as the length of the cycle.

The results of the previous evaluation cycle were taken into consideration while planning the current cycle, and the previously evaluated HEIs will undergo evaluation after 5 years, or after the end of the follow-up period if they received a letter of expectation. Before re-accreditation, HEIs have to submit the documentation from the previous evaluations, including the follow-up report.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 2.8 SYSTEM-WIDE ANALYSES

STANDARD:

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

GUIDELINES:

All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

Evidence:

ASHE produced a synthesis of the past evaluations of HEIs, published on the ASHE website and the annual report. The synthesis covers the evaluations of all Croatian law and medical schools, as well as professional courses. The aim of the synthesis is to provide detailed information on the evaluations and provide all stakeholders with guidelines for further development of the higher education and science system.

On the basis of the results of the audit pilot-project, carried out on three HEIs, an analysis was created serving to improve the procedure.

ASHE also created a document titled Starting points for the Network of higher education institutions and study programmes which provides data on the system of higher education and analysis of the current state of play, which should serve as a basis for the Network of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes, to be adopted by the Croatian Parliament upon the proposal of the National Council for Higher Education.

Analysis:

The panel found ASHE to invest much care in the evaluation of the system and the developing of suggestions to change.

Aware of the importance of the detailed, system-wide analyses and further improvement of the external quality assurance system, ASHE recently established a Department for Research and Development aimed at studying European and global best practices and analysing Croatian practices.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 3.1 USE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Standard

The external quality assurance agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance procedures described in Part 2 of the European Standard and Guidelines.

Guidelines

The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990s. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions. The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

ASHEs compliance with ESG Part 2 has been addressed in the text above (ESG 2.1 – 2.8).

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

STANDARD:

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

Evidence:

ASHE was established by a Government Decree in 2005 (OG 101/04, 08/07), and its tasks and competences were re-defined in 2009 by the new Quality Assurance Act. The ASHE scope of work includes various procedures of external evaluation of quality assurance in science and higher education, as well as the establishment of a robust quality assurance system in higher education and research institutions.

Analysis:

ASHE is fully recognised by the Croatian Parliament and Government as is clear from legislation and Ministerial Orders, and thus has a firm legal status. It is also the only such body in the country.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 3.3 ACTIVITIES

STANDARD:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

GUIDELINES:

These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

Evidence:

External quality assurance activities constitute the major part of ASHEs work, though not the only one. ASHE is responsible for initial accreditation of study programmes offered by all private higher education institutions as well as public colleges and polytechnics; accreditation of polytechnics and colleges, re-accreditation of study programmes at those institutions, initial and re-accreditation of all higher education institutions and scientific organisations.

Analysis:

Major part of ASHE operation is external quality assurance of higher education and scientific research. The panel found, however, certain challenges that ASHE is currently facing. The Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education predicts that the Croatian Parliament will adopt the two documents entitled the Network of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Croatia and the Network of Public Scientific Organisations on the proposal of the national councils. According to the Act ASHE can accredit new study programmes and higher education and scientific institutions only based on these documents (and of course in line with other legal documents, its own rules, criteria and procedures). These two documents were not adopted yet. Thus ASHE can currently not accredit new programmes or institutions.

Conclusion: substantially compliant.

Recommendation: the panel strongly suggest to the relevant Croatian bodies to adopt the aforementioned strategic documents as soon as possible allowing ASHE to perform all the tasks it was entrusted with by the legislation. The panel thus recommends an interim report on this matter by 1st of December 2012.

ESG 3.4 RESOURCES

STANDARD:

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

Evidence:

ASHE has 64 employees, while 27 employees are directly involved in the activities of external quality assurance in science and higher education. Most of them hold higher education degrees, including 3 PhDs and 3 MScs, and in line with the constant effort to train staff and involve it in the lifelong learning aimed at improvement of the degree structure, 11 employees are currently enrolled at third cycle programmes (doctoral and postgraduate specialist), and 7 at first and second cycle programmes.

ASHE annual budget is a part of the state budget allocated to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. State budget is adopted by the Parliament upon the Government proposal. ASHE independently proposes its budget – the Budget proposal is based on the budget of the previous year and drafted in line with the Annual Guidelines for Assembling the State Budget, issued by the Ministry of Finance. As of 2011, budget is planned for a three-year period, and the current planning period lasts until the end of 2013. When the budget is approved by the Ministry of Finance, ASHE independently decides on its activities on the basis of the funds available.

The ASHE expenditure in 2010 was cca 2,8 million EUR.

Analysis:

The panel found ASHE to hold appropriate resources. Regarding human resources the panel especially appreciated ASHEs commitment to staff training and professionalism. Thus, all staff participates in trainings, seminars and various events. They also benefit from experiences and knowledge provided by international experts and organisations. Many of the staff members are in addition included in formal types of study and training, including on the doctoral level.

ASHEs policy is to train each employee in a specific field, closely related to the requirements of her or his position. At the same time, they are motivated to stay in touch with developments in other fields covered by the ASHEs activities, and educate themselves in those directions. In line with the priorities, the staff members are involved in the activities outside their direct scope of tasks. Quality development within ASHE and fostering common values enable employees from

different ASHE departments to participate in different tasks thus enabling staff to become knowledgeable in all the activities of the agency.

There are 27 employees who work directly on the activities of external quality assurance in science and higher education. ASHE director appointed 32 trained staff with higher education degrees to act as coordinators of various evaluation procedures.

During the five years since ASHE establishment, its budget was annually increased by 30% on average. Procedures of external evaluation of higher education institutions and scientific organisations thus received more funds each year, in line with the overall increase of the ASHE budget. Strategic orientation of the Government towards quality improvement of higher education and science was further reinforced by the Plan for Economic Recovery, adopted in June 2010.

ASHE also relies on EU project funding in financing improvement and development of specific activities. ASHE Statute also provides for ASHE own funds, which could be earned in the following period.

In the light of its interviews with staff and management the panel found that the income derived from the state budget and commissioned work is adequate for the accreditation and evaluation tasks.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 3.5 MISSION STATEMENT

STANDARD:

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

GUIDELINES:

These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

Evidence:

ASHE defines its mission, vision and purpose in the following manner:

Mission

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

Vision

The quality of Croatian higher education and science is recognized and acknowledged in the international context.

By continued improvement of quality culture and participation in the development of science and higher education, ASHE contributes to achieving global competitiveness of Croatian higher education and science.

Purpose

In order to achieve its mission, ASHE cooperates closely with higher education institutions, scientific organisations and other stakeholders in higher education and science, on:

- quality improvement of higher education and science, as well as opportunities to acquire specific educational levels;
- dissemination of reliable information on the quality of academic standards to students, higher education institutions' management and the public;
- comparing the achieved standards and quality levels with the quality and standards of similar institutions in the country and EU;
- active trend following;
- developing quality culture in the field of higher education and science.

Analysis:

ASHE has a well-developed mission and vision both for the organisation as a whole and for quality assurance of higher education, which are published on its website. The aims and objectives of accreditation are to be found in the legislation and the visions and missions quoted above refer, in this respect, to the ambitions of ASHE when implementing these tasks.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 3.6 INDEPENDENCE

STANDARD:

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

GUIDELINES:

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments
- is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

Evidence:

ASHE independence is defined by the Act on Quality Assurance in the articles 3 and 4:

Article 3

(1) Agency shall have the status of an independent legal person with public authorities entered to the judicial records.

Article 4

(1) In carrying out the activities determined by this Act and other regulations, the Agency shall be autonomous and independent, respecting European standards and guidelines as well as international practice in the field of quality assurance in science and higher education.

ASHE decides independently on the implementation of the evaluations, methods used, the members of the evaluation panels, timetables and other issues pertaining to evaluations. Other interested parties, such as higher education institutions, ministries or stakeholders have no influence on ASHE's decisions or evaluation results.

Analysis:

Decision making at ASHE and the contents of the evaluations are independent and all decisions regarding evaluations are taken independently in accordance with predetermined evaluation criteria, giving ASHE national and international credibility as an evaluation body.

ASHE independence is primarily reflected in the fact that it adopts accreditation recommendations. The ASHE accreditation recommendation can be positive or negative, depending on the fulfilment of the conditions defined by the Act. On the basis of the ASHE accreditation recommendation, the minister competent for science and higher education issues a licence or adopts a decision denying the licence to the evaluation object. Both the license and a decision by which the license is denied to the applicant are administrative acts. The applicant has no right of appeal against the decision, but may initiate an administrative dispute.

Furthermore, after the audit is carried out, ASHE issues a certificate on the development and the efficiency of the internal quality assurance system, provided that the internal quality assurance system of the evaluation object is efficient.

In line with its competences, the Accreditation Council appoints members of expert panels to carry out evaluation procedures, on the basis of the database of experts developed by ASHE.

The panel thus found that ASHE is independent of institutions, employers and students, although these groups are involved in its work through their activities. There is no doubt that ASHE makes independently the final decisions on, for example, the development of methods of evaluation, the annual action plan, reports and final decisions sent to the ministry.

Due to the historical context of the matter of independence, the current regulation guarantees independence de facto by specifically targeting on independent nomination of members of ASHEs bodies. The members of the Management Board of ASHE are appointed by the Parliament based on the proposals of stakeholders. The Accreditation council is nominated by the

Management Board again based on the proposal of the stakeholders. The panel especially checked this matter at the site visit and as evidenced in the interviews with all stakeholders in the country, ASHE is considered independent.

Based on the legislation, however, it is the Minister who decides about the licence regarding higher education and scientific institutions and study programmes. ASHE sends recommendations and accreditation decisions to the Minister and he or she issues a licence which allows institution to operate in publicly valid manner. The panel found that what has never happened so far is that the Minister would not follow ASHE recommendations and decisions.

According to the legislation it is the relevant Ministry that determines the criteria for accreditation decisions. In this way the Ministry is involved in defining some of the details of quality in higher education. It is true that the development of the criteria for study programmes and institutions involved stakeholders, national councils and other representative bodies, but the formal final decision nevertheless rests with the relevant Ministry. This makes it a time-consuming task to change any of the criteria, should this be considered necessary in the light of experience. As mentioned above, however, ASHE is responsible for the translation of the criteria into guidelines and produces, on its website, independent reports with recommendations and decisions.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 3.7 EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE CRITERIA AND PROCESSES USED BY THE AGENCIES

STANDARD:

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

GUIDELINES:

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

Evidence:

Processes, criteria and procedures used by ASHE are predefined and publicly available, cf. the analysis of ESG 2.3 of this report.

The evaluation processes involves the self-assessment phase and an external assessment by a group of experts including a student member (cf. section

ESG 2.4). ASHE prepares an accreditation report on every assessment process undertaken based on the initial report and comments received by HEIs. The reports are then published on ASHE's website.

Follow-up procedures are in place in case of audits, thematic evaluation and in accreditation if letter of expectation are issued. Comments and conclusions of the review panel on this subject can be found in the analysis of ESG 2.6 of this report.

ASHE has a procedure in place for HEIs to comment on the results of the assessment processes that lead to the final accreditation report and formal decision. Appeals procedures are developed.

Analysis:

ASHE has appeals procedures in place. In line with the ASHE Statute and its competences, the Accreditation Council appoints the members of the Appeal Committee for the re-accreditation procedure. When the re-accreditation procedure is finished, Accreditation Council appoints a three-member Appeal Committee. The three-member committee is appointed for a 2-year period, upon the suggestion by the external stakeholders: National Council for Higher Education, Croatian Student Council and the Ethics Committee in Science and Higher Education. The Appeal Committee, when appointed, elects the president among its members. The HEI undergoing re-accreditation can file an appeal on the ASHE decision (accreditation recommendation) within 15 days after receiving the decision. Upon receiving the appeal or complaint, the Appeals Committee reaches a decision within 1 month, on the basis of the complete documentation used in the re-accreditation procedure. The Accreditation Council discusses the decision of the Appeals Committee, reaches a new opinion and forwards it to the Agency. The Accreditation Council receives both the appeal and the Committee comments, and passes a decision to launch the appeals procedure or reject the appeal.

In the audit procedure, if object of evaluation finds that the Audit Committee did not carry out the audit procedure in accordance with the Manual for Audit of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Croatia, or is not satisfied with audit results, it can file an appeal to the Agency within 15 days after receiving the Audit Report. The appeal is submitted to the Committee for comments. The Audit Committee issues an official response to the appeal within 15 days. Object of evaluation's appeal and Audit Committee's official response are submitted to the Accreditation Council. After reviewing the submitted documents, the Accreditation Council decides on whether the appeal procedure is to be initiated or the appeal rejected. If it decides to initiate the appeal procedure, the Accreditation Council appoints an Appeal Committee from the audit expert database. The Appeal Committee reviews all the documents pertaining to the audit and makes a final assessment within 30 days. The Committee has three members, one of which has to be a student. The Accreditation Council issues a decision on the basis of the final assessment of the Appeal Committee. The decision is final and cannot be appealed to. The decision is submitted to the HEI and the Audit Committee.

In procedures bearing formal consequences (re-accreditation, initial accreditation), in addition to the appeal to the Accreditation Council decision, it is possible to initiate an administrative dispute against the Ministry decision based on the Accreditation Council decision.

The panel's interviews with representatives of institutions indicated that both the development of the new accreditation system and its introduction were implemented professionally.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ESG 3.8 ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURES

STANDARD:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

GUIDELINES:

These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;
2. Documentation which demonstrates that:
 - the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
 - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
 - the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;
 - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.
3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.

Evidence:

ASHE publishes policies and regulatory framework on its webpage in a transparent manner. It focuses very much on its internal procedures including constant improvements. They include employees (internal) and stakeholders (external) in the assessment and improvement procedures. Employee and customer satisfaction is tested by surveys. The survey results are presented and analysed in the Management Assessment. The analysis of the results is used by the Management in defining priorities and short-term goals in order to improve the quality of all ASHE activities.

In addition, ASHE established a quality management system in December 2006. in line with the ISO 9001:2002 standard. Det Norske Veritas Adriatica (DNV) certification foundation certified the system in the same year, issuing a certificate which confirmed that all the processes set up were in line with the ISO 9001 norm and that the quality of all activities is constantly improved. Once a year

ASHE carries out the internal QMS audit, the outcome of which are department reports on the corrective activities carried out.

After every seminar organised by ASHE for the stakeholders, a survey is conducted, establishing the participant's satisfaction with the topics selected, experience gained, and the opportunities to use them in their daily work.

ASHE staff and all experts working with ASHE sign a Non-conflict of Interest Statement. A list of the experts appointed for a review is sent beforehand to the institution under review for confirmation. Participation of foreign experts in the review panels, as well as other stakeholders, fosters the objectivity of the external reviews and assessments of the review subjects.

Analysis:

The panel discussed the internal quality assurance with the staff and management of ASHE and reviewed the material presented and is satisfied that there are appropriate processes for internal quality assurance, that they are applied and that measures are taken to improve on the basis of results.

As already mentioned before, there are many openings for staff to participate in appropriate further training.

The Accreditation Council is composed of representatives of all stakeholders - business community, students, universities, polytechnics and colleges, scientific organisations and civil society organisations working in the field of higher education. For the decision to be valid, at least two thirds of members have to be present. A decision is adopted when at least two thirds of the present members vote for it. In reaching decisions on the external evaluation procedures, voting is done in two cycles - in the first, the Council votes for a positive recommendation, and if the majority does not approve it, there is a second cycle in which the Council votes for the letter of expectation. If the majority does not approve, licence denial is issued. Licence denial is never voted for.

Everyone participating in the external quality assurance procedures (AC members, members of expert panels, coordinators) sign the *Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement* which obliges them to respect the data privacy, avoid any conflict of interest and links to evaluation objects, and prevents nepotism. The Statement is based on the *Accreditation Council Ethical Codex*. This Codex forbids the organisation to offer gifts to the expert panel and the members to receive them if offered, before, during and after the site visit; the organisation staff is not allowed to communicate with the experts outside the site visit, and the panel members are obliged to inform the ASHE coordinator on any breach of the Codex. The ASHE coordinator is obliged to present this information to the Accreditation Council, which decides how to tackle the problem.

All ASHE staff, in addition to the Work Contract which obliges them to keep trade secrets, sign the *Confidentiality Statement*. ASHE has fostered transfers of good practice to all employees, in order to introduce them to the latest trends in quality assurance. ASHE staff also participate as observers in study visits and trainings for panel members within various evaluation procedures, to mention Germany (ZeVA), Hungary (HAC), USA (WASC), Netherlands (NVAO, SURF),

United Kingdom (QAA, EQUIS, UCAS), Slovenia (VPIS), Sweden (Ladok), Ireland (CAO), Australia (UAC).

Conclusion: fully compliant.

ENQA MEMBERSHIP CRITERION 8: MISCELLANEOUS

I. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgements and decisions are reached in consistent manner, even if the judgements are formed by different groups;

II. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

III. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

Evidence:

Consistency and objectivity of the opinions is supported by clearly defined and public criteria for various types of reviews. ASHE established a database of experts who apply to international public calls and send their CVs on a standardised form. Its goal is to cooperate with other European quality assurance agencies on creation of a common European database of experts. In addition to carefully selecting the most competent experts for a review, and paying attention to equal representation of all stakeholders, much attention is given to the compulsory training before each review, described before in the report. The institution reviewed assesses the quality of work of the expert panel, as well as the review itself, which is an additional factor adding to the professionalism of ASHE activities. In order to avoid inconsistent application of criteria in the re-accreditation process, which has far-reaching formal outcomes, the final assessment is not suggested by the panel but by the Accreditation Council which is acquainted with the outcomes of all reviews carried out within the system.

The appeals procedures are in place and are described under the ESG 3.7.

ASHE is committed to contribute to aims of ENQA.

Analysis:

The panel found ample evidence of ASHEs professionalism and consistency. Many interviewed stakeholders and representatives declared that important development of ASHE operation can be found. Several of them complimented ASHE for their effort, motivation and kind support it offers to other bodies, individuals or representatives.

The panel also found very high commitment to international quality assurance system and development. Since its establishment, ASHE has fostered the incorporation of the Croatian science and higher education in the international systems and has a very active International Cooperation Department. With the support of CARDS, MATRA and TAIEX programmes, as well as foreign embassies, ASHE regularly organises study visits and good practice exchange with foreign experts, mostly from EU and USA.

ASHE has also participated in a joint accreditation of a joint graduate study programme, with the German agency AQAS, had an observer role in the reviews carried out in Croatia by NVAO within the "Pilot Project of Institutional Audit of Universities of Applied Sciences in Croatia", the IIEP/UNESCO distance course "External Quality Assurance: Options for Higher Education Managers in CSI and South-East European Countries", presented itself at the 2010 European Quality Assurance Forum and participated in a number of other workshops, seminars and conferences abroad. ASHE employees participated in the workshop on quality assurance at the postgraduate (doctoral) level, held in 2009 in Brasov, Romania, and published an article titled „Quality Assurance of Doctoral Study Programmes in Croatia“ in the 2010 ENQA publication „Quality Assurance in Postgraduate Education.“

ASHE is ready to apply its international experience to cooperation with ENQA and has already suggested future common activities, such as the establishment of the experts' database.

Conclusion: fully compliant.

CONCLUSION

The review panel has in ASHEs self-evaluation report, the many supplied documents and in the context of the site visit found much to commend in ASHEs organisation and operations, especially due to its recent establishment. The panel was most impressed with the expeditious transformation ASHE was able to accomplish after the legislative changes that took place in 2009. All of the stakeholders the panel interviewed commended ASHE for the fast growth in professionalism, knowledge base and support services.

The panel thus offered some suggestions for ASHE to consider that are mainly targeted in future after the current system will have been properly established and implemented. As there are many processes currently in place with possible overlapping at least in the formal manner, ASHE might consider evaluating the processes and adjust them accordingly. For ASHE to be able to do this the support of the relevant ministry and the government will be needed as this might require legislative changes in the future.

The panel also learned with interest that ASHE has many other tasks and competences for the higher education system, such as recognition of foreign qualifications, national enrolment procedures for higher education, several databases etc. The panel investigated whether this is burdensome to the agency but found that quite contrary, the system works rather well.

The panel would like to conclude the report with the encouragement of ASHE, the ministry and other stakeholders to follow the work and further develop the system in a consistent manner. The panel would also like to thank AGAE, in particular to Elias Fereres and Nieves Pascual for their excellent work and support of the review.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

Part 2

2.1 - *Use of internal quality assurance procedures*

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

2.2 - *Development of external quality assurance processes*

The aims and objective of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

2.3 - *Criteria for decisions*

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

2.4 - *Process fit for purpose*

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

2.5 - *Reporting*

Reports should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

2.6 - *Follow-up procedures*

Quality Assurance Processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have predetermined follow-up procedure, which is implemented consistently.

2.7 - *Periodic reviews*

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advanced.

2.8 - *System-wide analysis*

Quality Assurance should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

Part 3

3.1 - Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

The external quality assurance agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance procedures described in Part 2 of the European Standard and Guidelines.

3.2 - Official status

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdiction within they operate.

3.3 - Activities

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

3.4 - Resources

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective manner with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

3.5 - Mission Statement

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, set down in a publicly available statement.

3.6 - Independence

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

3.7 - External quality assurance criteria and processes used by agencies

The process, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance processes;
- an external assessment by group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s) and site visit as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

3.8 - Accountability

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

Appendix 2: Programme of the site visit

DAY ONE, Tuesday, 7th of June 2011

Session	Time	Group
S 1	9.00 – 10.00	Representatives of the ASHE Management team <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Jasmina Havranek, ASHE director 2. Mrs Vesna Dodiković Jurković, deputy director 3. Mrs Nada Matjanovski, assistant director 4. Mrs Emita Blagdan, assistant director 5. Mrs Mirjana Dugandžija, legal expert
S 2	10.00 – 10.30	Representatives of the ASHE Management Board <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Mile Dželalija, Board president (<i>teleconference</i>) 2. Professor Renata Mažuran 3. Professor Davor Pavuna (<i>teleconference</i>)
	10.30 - 10.45	<i>Coffee break</i>
S 3	10.45 - 11.30	Representatives of the ASHE Accreditation Council <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Vlasta Vizek Vidović, Council president 2. Mr Goran Radman 3. Professor Sonja Marić 4. Professor Roko Andričević
S 4	11.40 – 12.10	Representatives of the Ministry for Science, Education and Sports Mr Radovan Fuchs, Minister, and his aides
	12.10 – 12.25	<i>Coffee break</i>
S 5	12.25 – 13.15	Representatives of the Rectors' Conference <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Gordana Kralik, president, rector, University of Osijek 2. Professor Pero Lučin, rector, University of Rijeka 3. Professor Blaženka Divjak, vice-rector, University of Zagreb 4. Professor Ivan Pavić, rector, University of Split
S 6	13.20 – 14.00	Student Union representatives <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Zoran Knežević, University of Rijeka 2. Mrs Maja Škrinjar, University of Pula 3. Mr Šime Višić, University of Zagreb 4. Mr Krešo Jelinčić, University of Zagreb 5. Mrs Sanja Ančić, University of Zagreb

		6. Mrs Ana Šašek, University of Zadar 7. Mr Marko Šimić, University of Osijek 8. Mrs Kristina Milanović, University of Osijek 9. Mrs Ljubica Ukić, University of Applied Sciences „Marko Marulić“ in Knin
	14.00 – 15.15	<i>Panel review and lunch</i>
S 7	15.15 – 16.00	Representatives of the Council of Universities and University Colleges of Applied Sciences <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Marko Jelić, Council president, dean of the University of Applied Sciences „Marko Marulić“ in Knin 2. Professor Antun Pintarić, vice-president of the Council, dean of the University of Applied Sciences „Lavoslav Ružička“ in Vukovar 3. Professor Đuro Njavro, vice-president of the Council, dean of the University College „Zagreb School of Economics and Management“ 4. Professor Žarko Nožica, representative of the Council for International Cooperation, University College for Applied Computer Engineering
S 8	16.10 – 16.55	Members of the panel for reaccreditation and thematic evaluation Members of panel for reaccreditation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr Ivan Damir Anić, Institute of Economics, Zagreb 2. Mrs Sunčica Oberman Peterka, Faculty of Economics, University of Osijek 3. Mr Mato Brautović, University of Dubrovnik 4. Professor Andreas Polk, Berlin School of Economic and Law, Germany 5. Mrs Đeni Paskojević, student, American College of Management and Technology Members of panel for thematic evaluation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Zoran Roca, Lusofona University, Portugal 2. Professor Ilija Zovko Institute Louis Bachelier, France (<i>teleconference</i>) 3. Professor Vince Gaffney, University of Birmingham, UK (<i>teleconference</i>)
S 9	17.00 – 17.45	Members of the panel for audit <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sergij Gabršček, Centre for Knowledge Promotion, Slovenia 2. Professor Ljiljana Pinter, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Zagreb 3. Professor Ivan Slapničar, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, University of Split

		<i>(teleconference)</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Professor Zmago Brezočnik, University of Maribor, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Slovenia Mrs Olga Štajduhar Pađen, Institute for Electrical Industry and Energy, representative of the business community Mrs Sunčica Uhitil, Labosan d.o.o., representative of the business community Mr Petar Razović, student, University of Split, Faculty of Economics Mr Miho Obradović, student, University of Dubrovnik
	17.45 – 18.30	<i>Panel review meeting, end of day one</i>

DAY TWO, Wednesday, 8th of June 2011

Session	Time	Group
S 10	9.00 – 9.30	Representatives of the National Council for Higher Education and National Council for Science <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Professor Vedran Mornar, president of the National Council for Higher Education Professor Krešimir Pavelić, president of the National Council for Science
S 11	9.40 – 10.30	Representatives of HE Institutions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Professor Danica Škara, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Split Professor Ružica Beljo Lučić, Faculty of Forestry, University of Zagreb Professor Tihomir Hunjak, Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb Professor Aleksandra Deluka, University of Rijeka Professor Bruno Zelić, Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology, University of Zagreb Professor Zlatko Česić, University of Applied Sciences „Marko Marulić“ in Knin Professor Dražan Kozak, Mechanical Engineering Faculty, University of Osijek
	10.30 – 10.45	<i>Coffee break</i>
S 12	10.45 – 11.30	Representatives of the labour market <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mrs Vesna Štefica, Croatian Chamber of Economy Mr Ninoslav Šćukanec, Institute for the Development of Education Mrs Mirela Lilek, journalist, “Vjesnik”

		4. Mr Mislav Balković, Croatian Employers' Association 5. Mr Saša Matijašević, Edu centar, Moj-posao.net
S 13	11.35 – 12.20	Specialized ASHE staff for QA activities in Higher Education and Science – ACCREDITATION IN HE EVALUATIONS IN SCIENCE 1. Mrs Sandra Bezjak 2. Mrs Ivana Borošić 3. Mrs Mia Bagarić 4. Mrs Marina Grubišić 5. Mr Filip Jakopović 6. Mrs Marina Matešić 7. Mrs Vlatka Derenčinović 8. Mrs Irena Petrušić 9. Mrs Kristina Ferara Blašković 10. Mrs Ivana Krznar
	12.20 – 13.15	<i>Panel review and lunch</i>
S 14	13.15 – 14.00	Specialized ASHE staff for QA activities in Higher Education – AUDIT IN HE 1. Mrs Vesna Dodiković-Jurković 2. Mrs Davorka Androić 3. Mr Goran Briški
S 15	14.10 – 14.55	Other ASHE staff 1. Mrs Željka Rebić, Department of Finance 2. Mrs Minea Antolić, Central Applications Office 3. Mrs Gordana Cukar, Central Applications Office 4. Mrs Sandra Karoglan, Croatian ENIC office 5. Mr Davor Jurić, Department of Analytics and Statistics 6. Mrs Marina Cvitanušić, Department of Analytics and Statistics 7. Mrs Đurđica Dragojević, International Cooperation 8. Mrs Silvija Vrgoč, Public Relations 9. Mr Tomislav Tomljenović, IT Department 10. Mrs Maja Šegvić, Department of Higher Education, Unit for Professional Studies 11. Mrs Martina Francetić, Department of General, Legal and Personnel Issues 12. Mr Krešimir Hajdarović, Department of Science 13. Mr Zoran Tršinski, Unit for Scientific Field Committees
	14.55 – 15.10	<i>Panel review meeting, coffee break</i>
S 16	15.10 – 15.40	Final meeting with ASHE Management

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professor Jasmina Havranek, ASHE director 2. Mrs Vesna Dodiković Jurković, deputy director 3. Mrs Nada Matjanovski, assistant director 4. Mrs Emita Blagdan, assistant director 6. Mrs Mirjana Dugandžija, legal expert
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