



# ANNUAL REPORT 2020

ACTIVITY PLAN  
2021



agency for science and higher education



AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION  
2020 ANNUAL REPORT  
AND 2021 ACTIVITY PLAN

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*For the publisher*

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# INTRODUCTION



## Dear readers and colleagues,

By all accounts, 2020 was supposed to be a good and peaceful year and I venture to say, even a year of prosperity. However, due to a series of events none of us expected, we found ourselves involved in an astonishing global battle against a pandemic viral disease, of which we knew very little at its beginnings. For many, last year was challenging and even hard, both professionally and privately, and they celebrated its end with hopes for a brighter future.

My associates know that I am an incurable optimist who seeks to find the good in each situation, however arduous this sometimes may seem. Difficult private and professional circumstances are also an opportunity to grow as a person if we choose to do so. This is why I can say that last year was a challenging one for our Agency, but we left it with new knowledge and experiences.

Facing obstacles and perceiving them as opportunities made us realise the importance of flexibility, and so we adapted to the given circumstances and we did the very best we could.

In the following lines I will shortly present the activities that marked the year we left behind us.

In line with the European practice in the area of quality assurance under new conditions and as a result of careful preparations and planning, we adapted the external evaluation procedures that couldn't be carried out in person by following a hybrid model, which proved to be a successful response to the circumstances caused by the pandemic. The hybrid model consists of a preliminary, 1 or 2-day visit to an institution, carried out by expert panel members from Croatia, and a main evaluation visit conducted via videoconferencing. ASHE provided expert panel members, higher education institutions, and all participants of the re-accreditation procedure and the procedure's coordinators with detailed instructions, in order to ensure the same reliability and relevance of the procedure's results and outcomes as in the traditional re-accreditation.

Last year we completed the re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes. The aim of the procedure was to ensure that higher education qualifications, such as the Ph.D. title, reflect high quality study programmes that are comparable and valuable at an international level. During the past three years, we evaluated 114 study programmes, among which some received a high-quality label. We added the finishing touch to the entire process by publishing the *Overview of re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes in the Republic of Croatia*, which reflects on the advantages and challenges faced during doctoral studies, in order to enhance their quality and extend their influence in the national and international context.

During the last few years, ASHE acquired a certain visibility in the academic community through its workshops, i.e. by carrying out educational activities. This year, we had to conduct them in a virtual format and - judging by the participants' comments - we did so with great success. Apart from the already well-known Careering workshops, we covered some current topics, such as the experience of studying and working in higher education during the pandemic and social isolation, the accreditation of online study programmes, etc.



International cooperation and projects also took a virtual form with the aim of ensuring the continuity of activities. In the last quarter of 2020, we began preparing for the upcoming international evaluation that will allow us to renew our membership in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The evaluation is scheduled for 2021, and the preparation process is demanding, but we believe that the result will once again be successful, and that we will renew our membership in these important European associations.

A new strategic period (2021-2025) is also ahead of us, and it will certainly be characterised by changes brought about by the development of technology. These changes will surely have an impact on higher education and science, making the quality assurance an even more important issue. This assumption was our guideline in the process of developing the new ASHE Strategy and the goals we set focus on the quality and international visibility of the entire higher education and scientific system in Croatia. Some of our activities are linked to the provision of support to the work of various bodies in the higher education system, such as the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, and the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges. I am very pleased to say that members of these bodies are also our interlocutors and reliable partners in discussions on important topics like the enhancement of the quality of higher education and science. I would like to express my gratitude to all for supporting our work and efforts to build together Croatia as a country in which education is the driver of economic and social development.

I am especially grateful to the members of our Management Board and the Accreditation Council for their involvement and contribution during last year.

I would also like to thank all members of scientific field committees, field committees, scientific area councils, as well as all panel members that participated in our procedures, higher education institutions that participated in our activities and associates cooperating on our many projects.

Finally, I am grateful to all ASHE's employees and interns for their sense of community and hard work during the last year, through which they kept a serene and positive outlook on the future.

We believe that 2021 will bring us new successes and push forward certain new limits. We also hope that by saying goodbye to 2020, we also closed a period in history marked by *physical distance* and that 2021 will bring about the return to the eagerly awaited *old normal* where a handshake with a colleague, associate or friend will no longer be forbidden.

**Prof. Jasmina Havranek, Ph.D.**

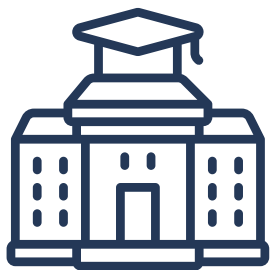
*Acting Director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education*

*Croatia is leading the pack of new countries in the EU, and an indispensable constructive partner in the EHEA!*

**Karl Dittrich,**

President of EQAR

# 2020 IN REVIEW



Re-accreditation of

# 12

higher education  
institutions



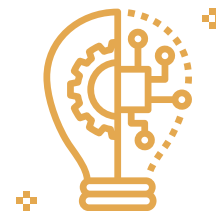
# 6

procedures of  
initial accreditation  
of new study programmes



# 3

procedures of  
initial accreditation  
of HEIs



# 11

procedures of initial  
accreditation for  
scientific activity



Audit of

# 2

higher education  
institutions



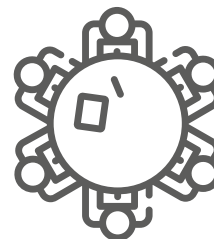
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Accreditation Council  
sessions



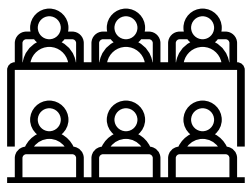
# 104

sessions of scientific  
field committees



# 7

sessions of the  
Council of Polytechnics  
and Colleges



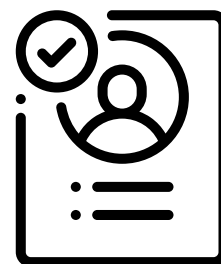
# 37

sessions of  
field committees



# 12

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



# 82,19%

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



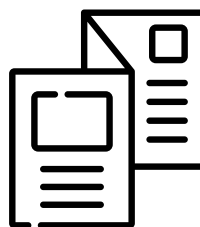
# 1497

foreign higher education  
qualifications  
for the purpose of  
employment recognized



# 9

international projects  
financed  
from the EU programmes  
and other sources



# 3

publications:  
*Overview of re-accreditation  
of doctoral studies in the  
Republic of Croatia and  
Quality assurance  
of scientific activity in Croatia –  
analysis of evaluation methodologies,  
and ASHE promotional leaflet published*



# 1

meeting of  
the CroQAnet



**QUALITY ASSURANCE  
IN SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION**



# RE-ACCREDITATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

In 2019, the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) published the Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2020<sup>1</sup> which includes the following institutions:

1. Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb,
2. Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Zagreb,
3. Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb,
4. Faculty of Education, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
5. Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Zagreb,
6. Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Split,
7. Faculty of Law, University of Rijeka,
8. Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb,
9. Faculty of Law, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
10. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb,
11. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
12. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka,
13. Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb,
14. Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Split,
15. Catholic Faculty of Theology in Djakovo, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
16. University of Split - University Department of Professional study programmes,
17. Faculty of Dental Medicine and Health, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
18. Faculty of Health Studies, University of Rijeka,
19. Academy of Arts and Culture, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
20. University of Zagreb - Matija Vlačić Ilirik University Centre for Protestant Theology,
21. Polytechnic of Karlovac,
22. Polytechnic of Rijeka,
23. Edward Bernays College of Communication Management,
24. European Business School Zagreb.

The Decision on the amendment to the Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2020<sup>2</sup> was adopted in April 2020, in which Item 24 of Paragraph 1 is deleted which reads:

24. European Business School Zagreb.

The re-accreditation of the following HEIs was carried out according to the Plan adopted by ASHE's Accreditation Council:

1. Polytechnic of Rijeka, and
2. Edward Bernays College of Communication Management.

<sup>1</sup> Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2020. The Decision is available at: [https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/novosti/Plan\\_reakreditacije\\_za\\_2020\\_godinu\\_-\\_AZVO.pdf](https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/novosti/Plan_reakreditacije_za_2020_godinu_-_AZVO.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The Decision on the amendment to the Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2020. The Decision is available at: [https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/visoko/Odluka\\_o\\_izmjeni\\_Plana\\_reakreditacije\\_visokih\\_u%C4%8Dili%C5%A1ta\\_u\\_2020.g.pdf](https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/visoko/Odluka_o_izmjeni_Plana_reakreditacije_visokih_u%C4%8Dili%C5%A1ta_u_2020.g.pdf)

The procedure was conducted at the beginning of March 2020. Along with Croatian experts, international experts from the following higher education institutions took part in the re-accreditation:

- School of Media, Film and Music, University of Sussex, United Kingdom.
- Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica, Portorož University, Slovenia.

In accordance with the circumstances and recommendations for fighting and preventing further spread of COVID-19 disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus, during the quarantine which was in force in the Republic of Croatia from mid-March to mid-May, and after the end of the quarantine, ASHE postponed other planned site visits planned in accordance with the Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2020 for autumn this year, and was continually working on the adjustment of implementation of the re-accreditation procedure in the said period.

In September 2020, ASHE's Accreditation Council, in accordance with the ASHE Accreditation Council's Decision on the method of implementing external evaluation procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>3</sup>, taking into account ENQA's statement on quality assurance during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>4</sup> and good practices of other quality assurance agencies, adopted the Decision on higher education institutions to which a combined model of re-accreditation procedure is applied, and which are included in the Re-accreditation Plan for 2020.

By the end of 2020 the following higher education institutions were accredited:

1. Faculty of Law, University of Rijeka,
2. Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Split,
3. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka,
4. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
5. Faculty of Education, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
6. Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb,
7. Faculty of Health Studies, University of Rijeka,
8. Academy of Arts and Culture, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek,
9. Polytechnic of Zagreb,
10. Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Zagreb,
11. Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb,
12. Catholic Faculty of Theology in Đakovo, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek.

Before the beginning of the implementation of the hybrid model of re-accreditation, ASHE had to undertake thorough preparation and planning. It adjusted its evaluation procedures and produced Technical Instructions for Online Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions.

<sup>3</sup> The Agency's Accreditation Council adopted the Decision on the method of implementing external evaluation procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic, which entered into force on 5 September 2020, and will apply until revoked. The Decision is available on the link [https://www.azgo.hr/images/stories/novosti/Odluku\\_o\\_na%C4%8Dinu\\_prov%C4%91enja\\_postupaka\\_vanjskog\\_vrednovanja\\_za\\_vrijeme\\_trajanja\\_epidemije\\_bolesti\\_COVID-19\\_uzrokovane\\_virusom\\_SARS-CoV-2.pdf](https://www.azgo.hr/images/stories/novosti/Odluku_o_na%C4%8Dinu_prov%C4%91enja_postupaka_vanjskog_vrednovanja_za_vrijeme_trajanja_epidemije_bolesti_COVID-19_uzrokovane_virusom_SARS-CoV-2.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Europska udruga za osiguravanje kvalitete u visokom obrazovanju (ENQA) objavila je 5. svibnja 2020. Izjavu o pandemiji COVID-19 (ENQA statement on COVID-19 pandemic) u kojoj je istaknuto da ni jedna agencija neće ugroziti svoju usklađenost sa Standardima i smjernicama za osiguravanje kvalitete na Europskom prostoru visokog obrazovanja (ESG-jima) ako prilagodi svoje procedure novonastalim okolnostima; odgoda postupaka vrednovanja ili prelazak na mrežne procese u ovoj situaciji u potpunosti je dopuštena ESG-jima, a ENQA potiče svoje članove da u tom pogledu zajamče fleksibilnost visokim učilištima. Izjava ENQA-e dostupna je na poveznici <https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/enqa-statement-on-Covid-19-pandemic/>.

By having drafted the Technical Instructions for Online Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions, ASHE has taken all the necessary measures to ensure the reliability and relevance of results and outcomes in the same way as by applying the standard model of re-accreditation by temporarily applying such an adapted re-accreditation model in accordance with the epidemiological situation. The Procedure of Re-accreditation of Higher Education Institutions as of 17 July 2019 also remained in force.

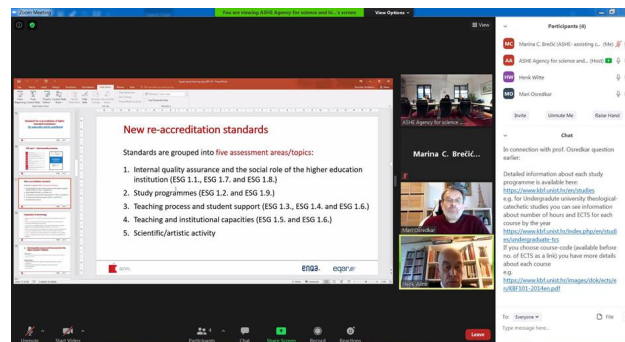
The document comprises the following:

- General instructions for all participants in online re-accreditation;
- Instructions for all participants in the re-accreditation procedure according to the site-visit protocol;
- Instructions for higher education institutions;
- Instructions for members of expert panels;
- Instructions for presidents of expert panels

and instructions for other stakeholders in the re-accreditation procedure regarding online re-accreditation.

Details of the procedure were agreed between the ASHE coordinator, the evaluated higher education institution and the members of the expert panels. Training of expert panels is organized a few weeks before the preliminary site visit. During and after the training, questions were prepared for various stakeholder groups included in the site visit protocol. After the training, members of expert panels exchanged open questions with each other via e-mail.

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



Online ZOOM training for the re-accreditation of the Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Split

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

The main site visit was conducted via video link (online; lasting 1 to 3 days). The Zoom Meetings application was used for all meetings, which enables interpretation from Croatian into English.

Foreign expert panel members who participated in the re-accreditation procedures come from the following HEIs:

- Department of European, International and Comparative Law, University of Vienna, Austria,
- Department of Special Pedagogy, Stockholm University, Sweden,
- Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia,
- Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, the Netherlands,
- University of Ljubljana, Slovenia,
- UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), University College London, United Kingdom,
- School of European Cultures and Languages, University of Kent, United Kingdom,
- Department of Philosophy, University of Liverpool, United Kingdom,
- Department of Psychology, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom,
- Faculty of Environmental, Regional and Educational Sciences, Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Austria,
- Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland,
- Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia,
- Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dublin, Ireland,
- Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, The Czech Republic,
- School of Science and Engineering, University of Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom,
- Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff School of Sport and Health Sciences, United Kingdom,
- Lithuanian Sports University, Lithuania,
- Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Primorska, Slovenia.

Other HEIs included in the Decision on higher education institutions to which a combined model of re-accreditation procedure is applied, and which were included in the Re-accreditation Plan for 2020, will be re-accredited at the beginning of 2021.

#### ***Comments of expert panel members regarding their experience in the re-accreditation procedures:***

- I want to thank everyone for participating and for giving me the opportunity to participate in such an important project.
- I would especially like to thank Prof. Ljubica for chairing the Panel and for contributing to the quality of the final report. I would also like to thank colleagues from ASHE for their highly professional approach.
- It was an invaluable experience and I am glad to have met you all.

#### ***Comments of expert panel members mentioned in the anonymous surveys:***

In order to improve its work, ASHE collected feedback on the satisfaction of users with the Agency's services. We received the following comments from various stakeholders regarding implementation of the re-accreditation process in an online environment:

- *Very professional, helpful and diligent.*
- *It is a great pleasure to work with people who are experts in their field and who acknowledge the expertise of each panel member.*

- We received answers to each question promptly and all materials with all necessary information were made available to us on time.
- I have no objections and coordinators were extremely active and a great support to the whole team throughout the re-accreditation procedure.
- Everyone included in the re-accreditation procedure was very polite and ready to help and to ensure the re-accreditation is carried out in the best possible way.
- Extremely professional and pleasant communication in all segments and with all employees of ASHE with whom we communicated.
- The employees of the department were always available, cooperative and professional during the entire preparation process.
- In a word - EXCELLENT!
- Procedures and goals were very clear.
- Excellent, especially under the given circumstances and the combined re-accreditation model.
- The instructions were very well prepared, presented and explained.

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

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

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

In 2020, the Follow-up Committee held three sessions and six follow-up procedures were completed according to action plans in the process of re-accreditation of higher education institutions. For all six cases, the Follow-up Committee issued a positive opinion.



Online meeting of the Follow-up Committee

Given the epidemiological situation and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Follow-up Committee held its sessions online.

## Training activities for higher education institutions

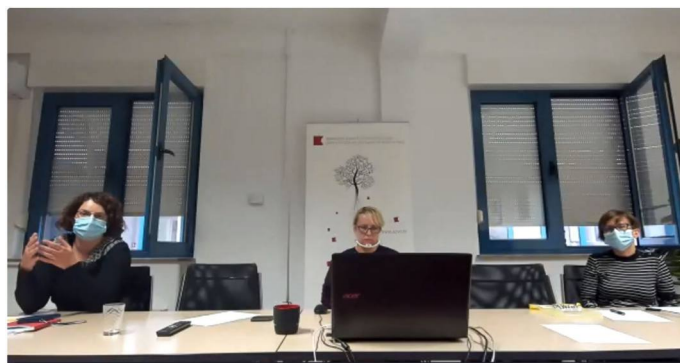
### **An online training event for drafting the self-evaluation report was held for representatives of higher education institutions participating in the procedures of re-accreditation according to the Higher Education Institutions Re - accreditation Plan for 2021.**

ASHE organized training events for drafting self-evaluation reports for representatives of higher education institutions participating in the re-accreditation in 2021, which was held on 27 October 2020. Due to the epidemiological situation and in accordance with recommendations of the competent bodies the training was held online.

The participants in the training event became acquainted with the process of re-accreditation of higher education institutions and the system of assessment and grading of quality, as well as the Standards for the evaluation of universities and university constituents, as well as the MOZVAG information system.

The procedure of re-accreditation was presented from three different perspectives: the perspective of the Accreditation Council was presented by Prof. Sonja Vila, PhD, president of the Accreditation Council, while Prof. Sunčica Oberman Peterka, PhD, from the Faculty of Economics, J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, presented the perspective of the expert panel members. Prof. Anita Domitrović, PhD, from the Faculty of Transport and Traffic Sciences, University of Zagreb, talked about the experience of re-accreditation from the perspective of a higher education institution.

Around 70 representatives of higher education institutions which will undergo re-accreditation next year took part in this online event.



Online workshop for drafting the Self-Evaluation Report

The participants commended the organization and usefulness of the workshop:

- Training available to a wider audience.
- Excellent.
- I commend ASHE for the effort put in the preparation of the training and thank them for all the information provided

### **ASHE presented the Croatian quality assurance system to Indonesian higher education institutions**

The Agency for Science and Higher Education presented their activities and the Croatian quality assurance system to higher education institutions from Indonesia at the online workshop titled "Acquiring International Accreditation from EQAR-Registered Agencies" held on 9 and 10 December 2020.



The aim of the workshop was to encourage European agencies for quality assurance in higher education to promote their activities in Indonesia and to share relevant information regarding standards and procedures they are carrying out. Likewise, one of the goals of the workshop was to encourage cooperation between Europe and Indonesia in the field of higher education.

As part of the programme of Indonesian education system reform, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia drafted the Plan of international accreditation of study programmes at Indonesian higher education institutions, the purpose of which is to promote international accreditation of study programmes. In order to achieve that goal, the German Academic Exchange Service, DAAD, in cooperation with Indonesian ministry in charge of education, organized the mentioned two-day online workshop. Ten more quality assurance agencies entered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) took part in the workshop, including those from Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Kazakhstan, Russia, Lithuania and Croatia.

On the second day of the workshop, representatives of ASHE, Mrs. Ivana Borošić, head of Department for Accreditation in Higher Education and Mr. Sc. Mina Đorđević, head of the Department for International Cooperation, presented the Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatian higher education system, evaluation procedures carried out by ASHE and shared their experience from previous accreditation procedures abroad.

### Training events in which ASHE staff took part

- Using *Microsoft Teams*, VERN University,
- Quality audit network meeting, The Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO),
- ENQA webinar: online site visits and external quality assurance in times of Covid-19,
- EQAF 2020 - Opening Session I: Flexible higher education is here,
- EQAF 2020 - Session III: External quality assurance in emergency situations,
- Virtual Times Higher Education Student Success Forum. Times Higher Education,
- CHEA Webinar: Institutional Liability, Clinical Programs and Quality Confirmation.



ASHE presentation at the online workshop titled  
Acquiring International Accreditation from EQAR-Registered Agencies



CHEA Webinar: Institutional Liability, Clinical Programs and Quality Confirmation.

**Overview of assessment of implementation of quality standards and recommendations issued in the procedures of re-accreditation of higher education institutions in the field of economics**

Based on the implemented procedures of re-accreditation of higher education institutions in the field of economics and final reports produced, below is a short overview of implementation of quality standards and expert panel recommendations resulting from the implemented procedures.

In the procedures of evaluating higher education institutions in the field of economics, a total average grade expert panels gave the higher education institutions is a satisfactory level of quality. On average, each higher education institution was also graded as having a satisfactory level of quality. Differences among higher education institutions in the implementation of quality standards also move within the same degree. It is important to emphasize that no institution was graded as having a minimum or unsatisfactory level of quality.

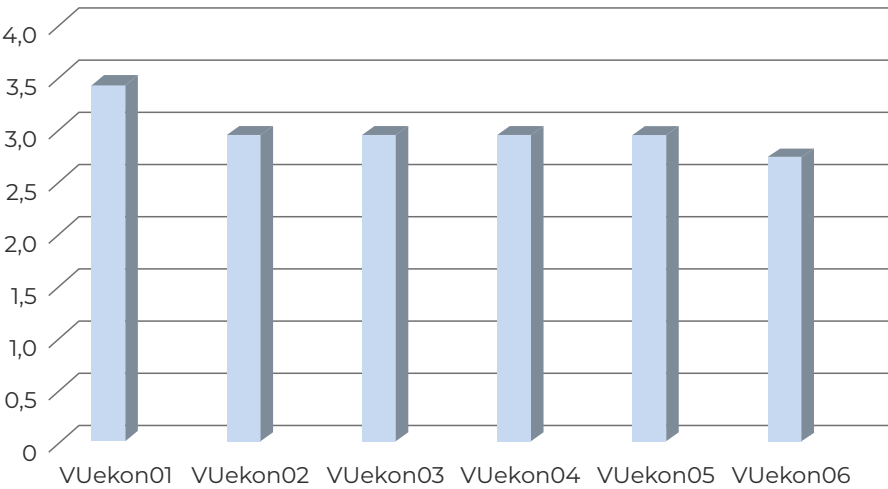


Chart 1: Overview of the degree of implementation of quality standards from unsatisfactory level of quality to high level of quality



If we take into consideration all six higher education institutions in the field of economics, the expert panels assessed that they had reached a satisfactory level of quality in the assessment area *Internal Quality Assurance and the Social Role of the Higher Education Institution*. Thus, all higher education institutions individually reached a satisfactory level of quality. Within this assessment area, the highest graded standards are those related to *supporting academic integrity and freedom, preventing all forms of unethical behaviour, intolerance and discrimination, and understanding and encouraging the development of the social role*, while the lowest graded standard is the *Degree of functionality of the internal quality assurance system*.

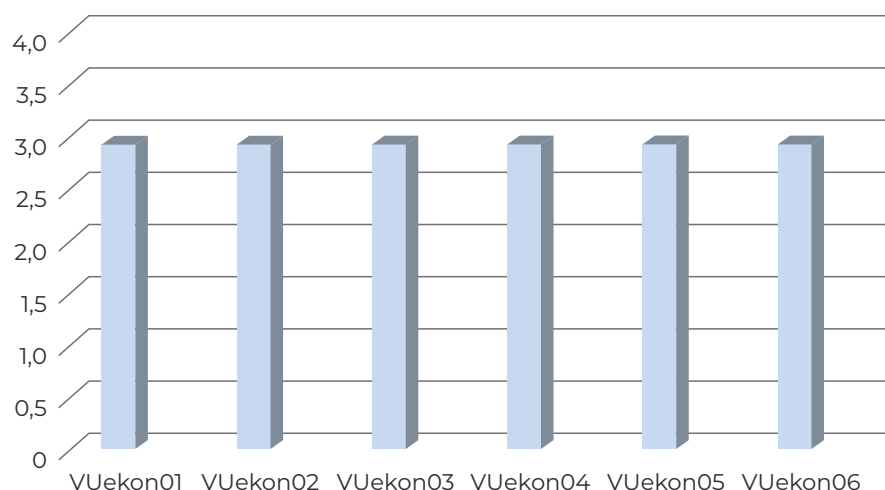


Chart 2: The degree of implementation of quality standards within the assessment area Internal Quality Assurance and Social Role of the Higher Education Institution by higher education institutions

Members of expert panels who participated in the re-accreditation of higher education institutions in the field of economics assessed that on average the assessment area Quality of Study Programmes was graded as having a satisfactory level of quality. This area was graded as having a high level of implementation at one higher education institution, a minimum level at another, and a satisfactory level at the remaining four HEIs. No higher education institution received a grade of unsatisfactory level of quality. If we take a closer look at the quality standards, on average, the lowest graded standard in the field of economics is the standard related to the degree of implementation of the harmonization of the general goals of all study programmes with the mission and strategic goals of the higher education institution and social needs. Two highest graded standards are the standard involving planning procedures which include stakeholder feedback, and the standard student internship is an integral part of study programmes. studijskih programa.

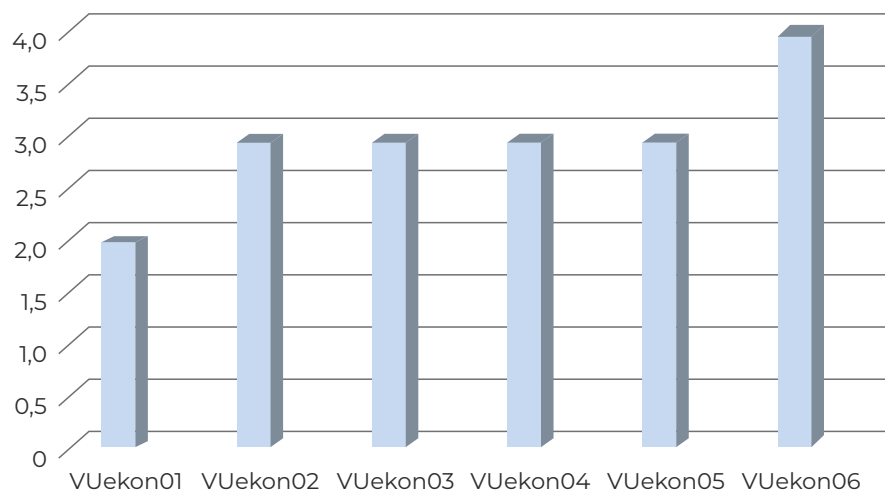


Chart 3: The degree of implementation of quality standards within the assessment area *Quality of Study Programmes* by higher education institutions

The assessment area *Teaching process and student support* has, on average, reached a satisfactory level of implementation in HEIs in the field of economics. Four higher education institutions reached a satisfactory level of quality, while two HEIs reached a high level of quality. On average, the lowest graded standards at six higher education institutions in the field of economics were *Collecting and analysing data on student progress and ensuring continuity of study and completion of students*, while the highest graded standards were *Providing support to students from vulnerable and underrepresented groups* and *Guarantee of issuing of Diploma Supplements and relevant qualification information*.

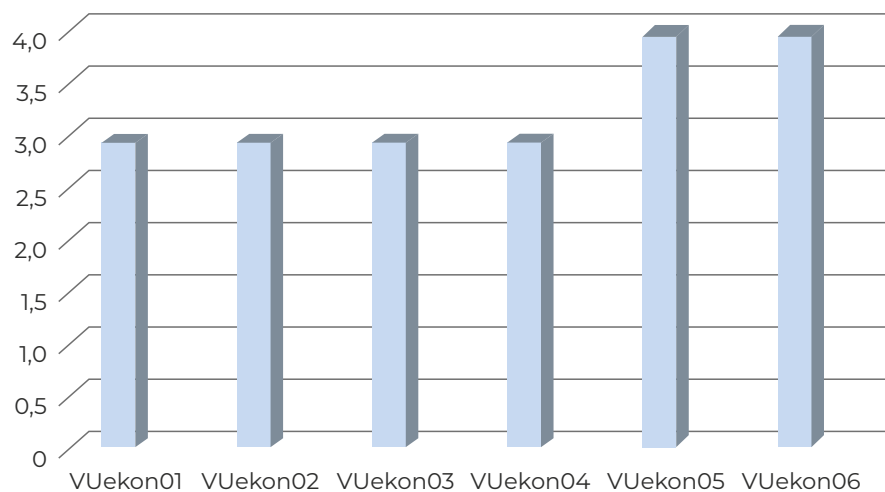


Chart 4: The degree of implementation of quality standards within the assessment area *Teaching process and student support* by higher education institutions

On average, the assessment area *Teaching and institutional capacities* at HEIs in the field of economics was assessed as satisfactory by members of the expert panels. All HEIs were assessed as having a satisfactory level of quality. Within the assessment area *Teaching and institutional capacities* the lowest level of implementation was reached in the standard *Ensuring adequate teaching capacities*, while the highest graded standard was *Objective and transparent process of teacher recruitment based on excellence*.

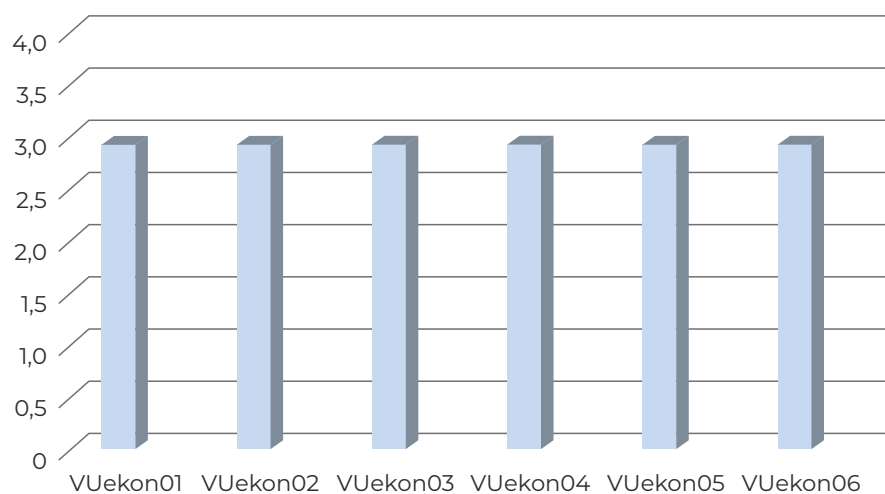


Chart 5: The degree of implementation of quality standards within the assessment area *Teaching and institutional capacities* by higher education institutions

On average, the lowest graded assessment area in six HEIs in the field of economics was the area *Scientific activity*. However, like other assessment areas, it has reached a satisfactory level of implementation according to members of expert panels. No HEI was assessed with unsatisfactory or high level of quality, while two were assessed as having a minimum level of quality, and four a satisfactory level of quality. If we take a look at the quality standards, the standard *Teachers' commitment to achieving high quality and quantity of scientific research* was assessed as having the lowest level of implementation. The highest graded standard is the standard *Proving the social relevance of scientific, professional and artistic research and knowledge transfer*.

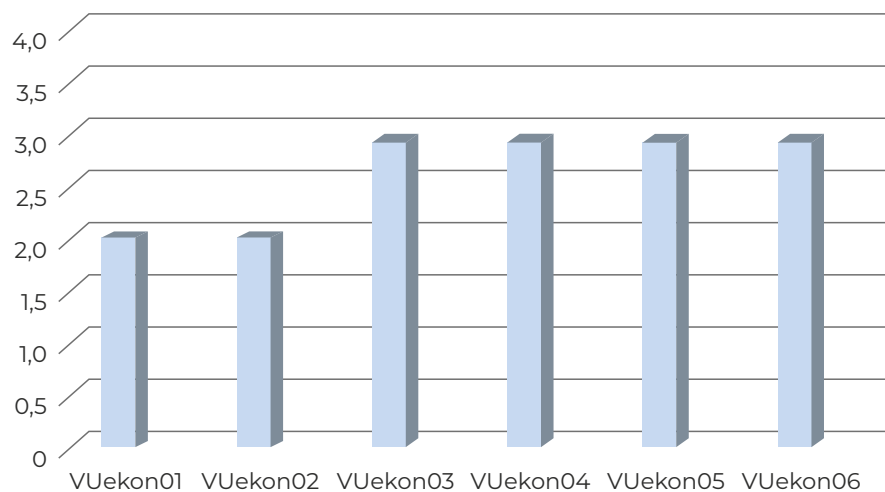


Chart 6: The degree of implementation of quality standards within the assessment area *Scientific activity* by higher education institutions

#### 1.1.5. Overview of assessment of implementation of quality standards and recommendations issued in the procedures of re-accreditation of higher education institutions in the biotechnical field

Based on the implemented procedures of re-accreditation of higher education institutions in the biotechnical field and final reports produced, below is a short overview of the implementation of quality standards and expert panel recommendations following the implemented procedures.

In the procedures of evaluation of higher education institutions in the biotechnical field, on average, expert panels graded the higher education institutions with a satisfactory level of quality. One higher education institution obtained a high level of quality and one a minimal level of quality. The remaining four HEIs were assessed as having a satisfactory level of quality. It is important to emphasize that no institution was graded as having an unsatisfactory level of quality.

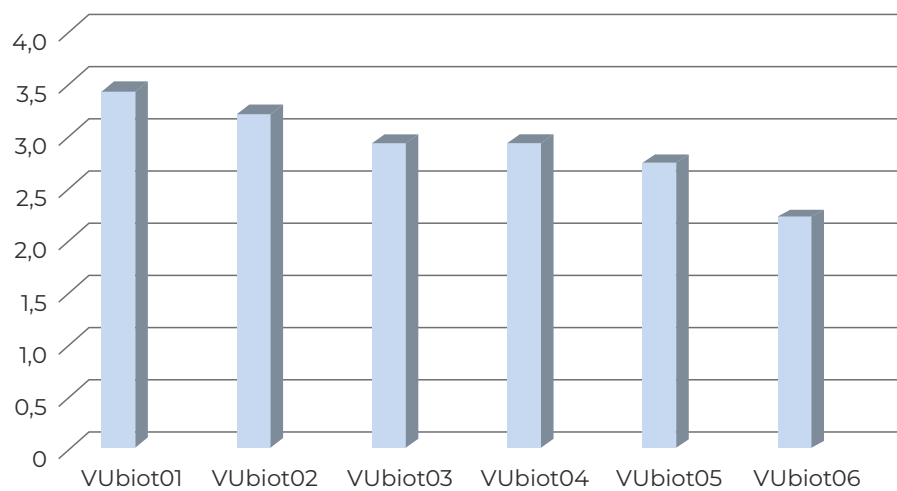


Chart 7: Overview of the degree of implementation of quality standards from unsatisfactory level of quality to high level of quality by higher education institutions

The expert panels, looking collectively for all six higher education institutions in the biotechnical field, assessed that they had reached a satisfactory level of implementation in the assessment area *Internal Quality Assurance and the Social Role*. Within the standard itself, the highest graded indicator is *Understanding and encouraging the development of the social role*, while the lowest graded indicator is the *Degree of compliance of life-long learning programmes with strategic goals and the mission*.

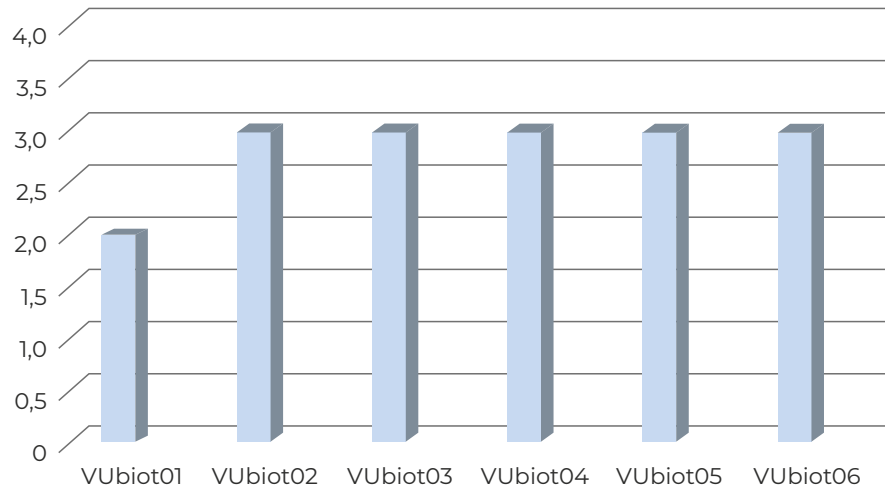


Chart 8: The degree of implementation of quality standards by standard *Internal Quality Assurance and Social Role of the Higher Education Institution* by higher education institutions

Members of expert panels who participated in the evaluation of higher education institutions in the biotechnical field assessed that on average the standard *Quality of Study Programmes* has reached a satisfactory level of implementation. This standard as assessed as high level of quality in one higher education institution, and minimum level of quality at another, while it was assessed as satisfactory level of quality at the remaining four HEIs. No higher education institution was graded as unsatisfactory level of quality. If we take a closer look at the indicators of the standard, on average the highest graded indicator in the biotechnical field was the indicator of harmonization of the general goals of all study programmes with the mission and strategic goals of the higher education institution and social needs. The lowest graded was the indicator that student internship is an integral part of study programmes. None of the mentioned indicators received an unsatisfactory level of quality in any of the evaluated HEIs.

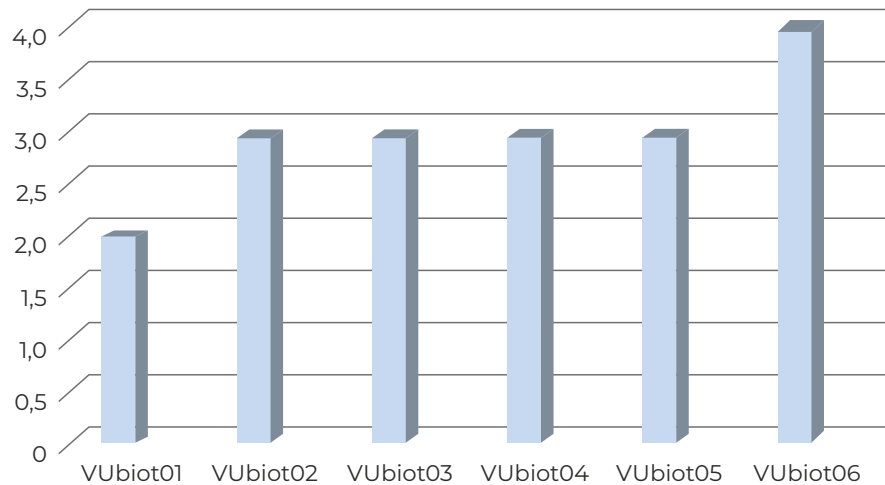


Chart 9: The degree of implementation of quality standard within the assessment area *Quality of Study Programmes* by higher education institutions

Quality standard *Teaching process and student support* has a satisfactory level of implementation in HEIs in the biotechnical field. Five HEIs have reached a satisfactory level of quality, while one HEI has a high level of quality. On average, the highest graded indicator is *Collecting and analysing data on student progress and ensuring continuity of study and completion of students*, while the lowest graded indicator is *Ensuring favourable conditions for foreign students*. According to the best graded indicator, two HEIs were assessed as having a high level of quality, and three as having a satisfactory level of quality. According to the lowest graded indicator, four institutions have reached a minimum level of quality, one satisfactory and one high level of quality.



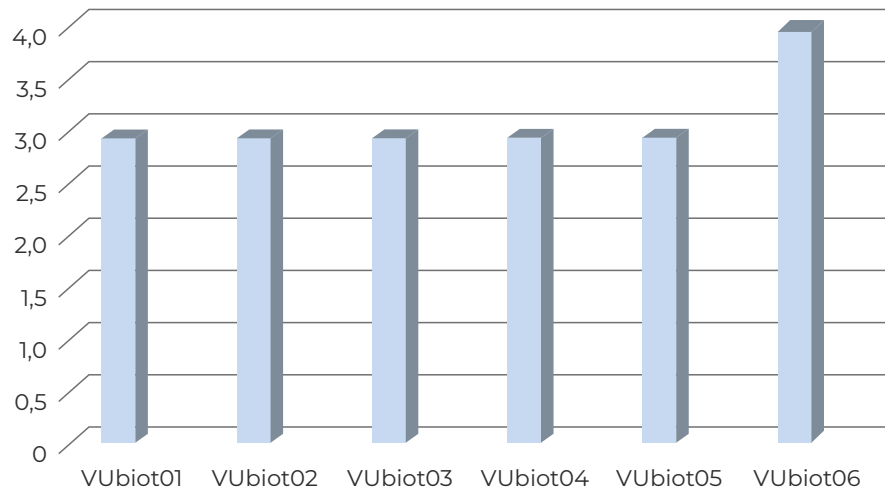


Chart 10: Degree of implementation of the quality standard *Teaching process and student support* by HEIs

Quality standard *Teaching and institutional capacities* was on average at the satisfactory level of implementation according to expert panels evaluating HEIs in the biotechnical field. All faculties have been assessed as having a satisfactory level of quality. The indicator *Library and its equipment and access to additional resources ensure availability of literature and library services for the purposes of high quality of study and scientific and teaching activity* has the lowest level of completion within the quality standard while the best graded criterion was ensuring teaching capacities. In case of the first mentioned indicator, 4 out of 6 HEIs have reached a minimum level, one satisfactory, and the remaining HEIs have reached a high level of quality. Regarding the second mentioned indicator, 4 out of 6 institutions has reached a satisfactory level of quality, one minimum and one high level.

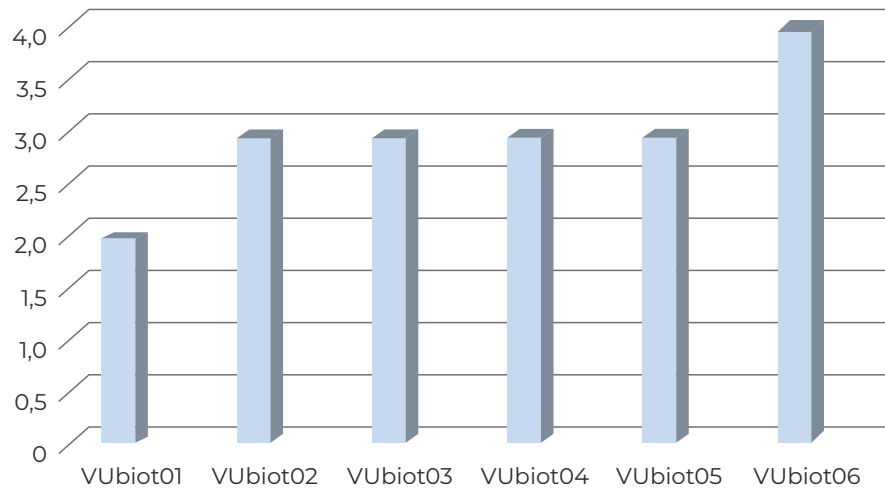


Chart 11: Degree of implementation according to the standard *Teaching and institutional capacities* by HEIs

On average the quality standard *Scientific activity* is the lowest graded standard in six HEIs in the biotechnical field, but like other standards, it was deemed by expert panels to have reached a satisfactory level of implementation. No HEI has been assessed as having unsatisfactory or high level of quality, two HEIs reached the minimum level of quality, and four satisfactory level of quality. If we look at the quality standard indicators, the indicator *Scientific and professional achievements* have been recognized in the national and international context. On average, six HEIs got the lowest degree of implementation, with four HEIs having a satisfactory level of quality, two HEIs having a minimum level of quality, and no HEI having an unsatisfactory or high level of quality. The highest graded indicator *Scientific and professional activity and achievements* improve the teaching process, research and knowledge transfer has the highest level of implementation in the biotechnical field, with two HEIs having a high level of quality, four a satisfactory level of quality, and no HEI having a minimum or unsatisfactory level of quality.

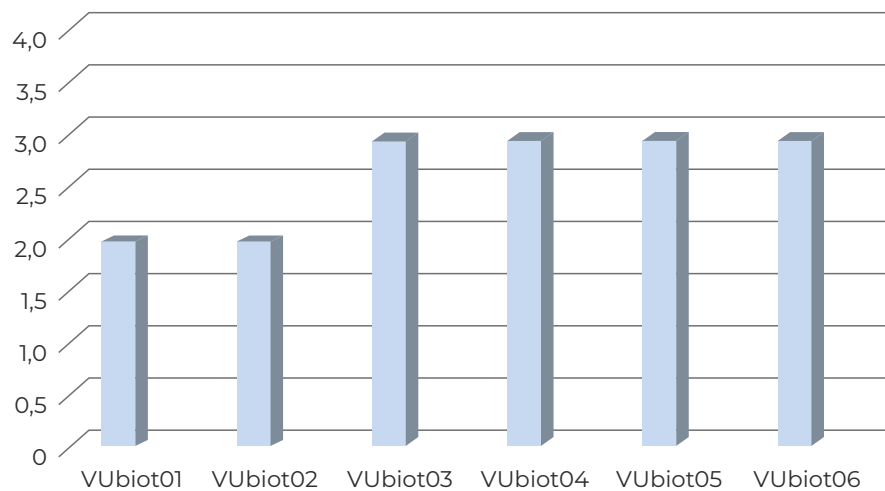


Chart 12: Degree of implementation according to the standard *Scientific activity* by HEIs

## RE-ACCREDITATION OF POSTGRADUATE UNIVERSITY (DOCTORAL) STUDY PROGRAMMES

After it completed the procedure of re-accreditation of postgraduate university (doctoral) study programmes in 2019, after having adopted quality criteria in 2015, the Agency analysed the outcomes of the procedure and published them in the *Overview of re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes in the Republic of Croatia in 2020*. The publication was presented at the conference Evaluation of doctoral study programmes in the Republic of Croatia – overview of *re-accreditation*, held on 23 September 2020 in Zagreb, and it was printed within the SKAZVO project (Improvement of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Systems at Higher Education Institutions).



Prof. Jasmina Havranek, PhD, acting director of ASHE  
at the conference Evaluation of doctoral study programmes  
in the Republic of Croatia



Publication Overview of re-accreditation of  
doctoral study programmes in the Republic of Croatia, 2020

The aim of the Overview was to present the existing postgraduate university (doctoral) study programmes within the context in which they are delivered and to give an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of these programmes in order to enhance their quality and their impact in the national and international context.

The Overview contains a quantitative data analysis, based on descriptive statistical methods showing a comparative overview of data on doctoral study programmes in the whole system and distribution by scientific fields and a qualitative analysis of reports made by expert panels based on the analysis of those parts of final reports that do not follow the given structure, i.e. the parts in which experts were able to present their views on the quality of doctoral education in free form, both for an individual doctoral study programme and for the entire system.

The process of re-accreditation of 114 doctoral programmes involved 225 top experts from abroad and one of the challenges was to answer the question of how they perceive the quality of doctoral study programmes, whether they focus on one doctoral study programme, doctoral education system or the entire national education and science system, and last but not least, how to apply the positive practices from their countries and education systems to the Croatian system of higher education and science.

Quantitative analysis can include data such as the number of doctoral study programmes by scientific fields within the analysed field of science, the number of doctoral study programmes by universities delivering doctoral study programmes in the analysed scientific field, the number of doctoral candidates by scientific fields, the number of doctoral candidates by universities, the number of teachers and their publications, evaluation outcomes by type and scientific field, average scores of four groups of indicators and the share of scores of expert panels for all indicators within the four assessment areas.

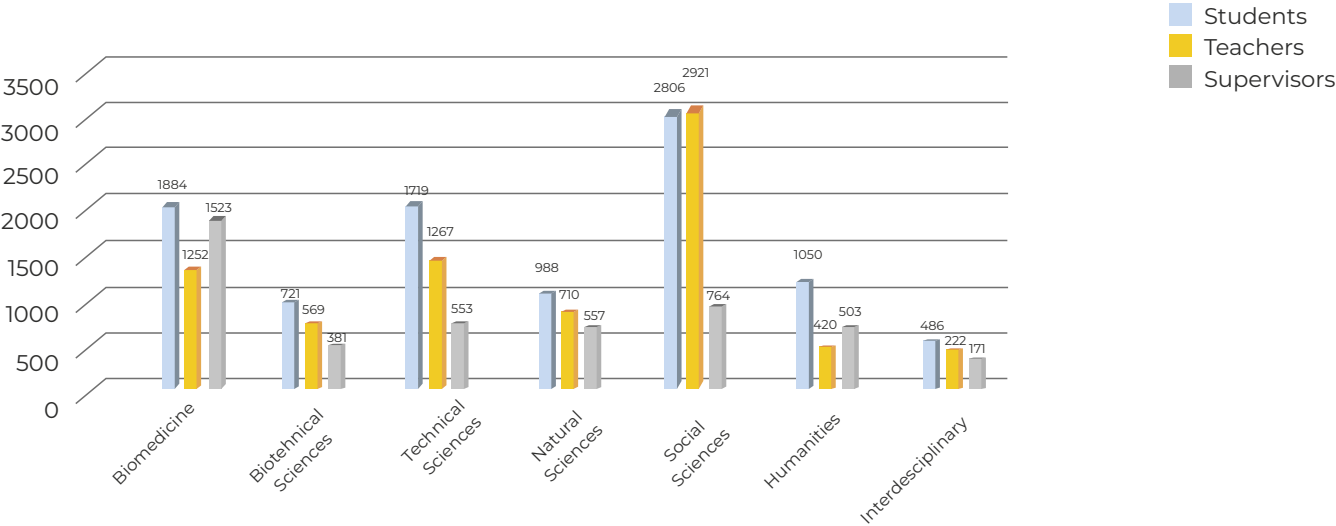


Chart 13: Number of candidates, teachers and supervisors in doctoral study programmes by scientific fields

According to the data submitted for the purpose of evaluation, there are 9645 doctoral candidates studying in doctoral study programmes in seven scientific fields in the Republic of Croatia. The highest number of doctoral candidates study in the field of social sciences (2806), followed by the field of biomedicine and health (1884) and technical sciences (1719). The highest number of doctoral study programmes are delivered in the field of social sciences (36), technical sciences (23) and humanities (20). The largest average number of students per study programme study in the field of biomedicine and health (157), biotechnical sciences (90.13) and social sciences (77.74). The average number of students per doctoral study programme is 77.78.

The quantitative analysis includes grades by which expert panels assessed 34 quality indicators within four assessment areas:

- Resources: teachers, supervisors, research capacities and infrastructure;
- Internal quality assurance of the programme;
- Support to doctoral candidates and their progression;
- Programme and outcomes of the study programmes.

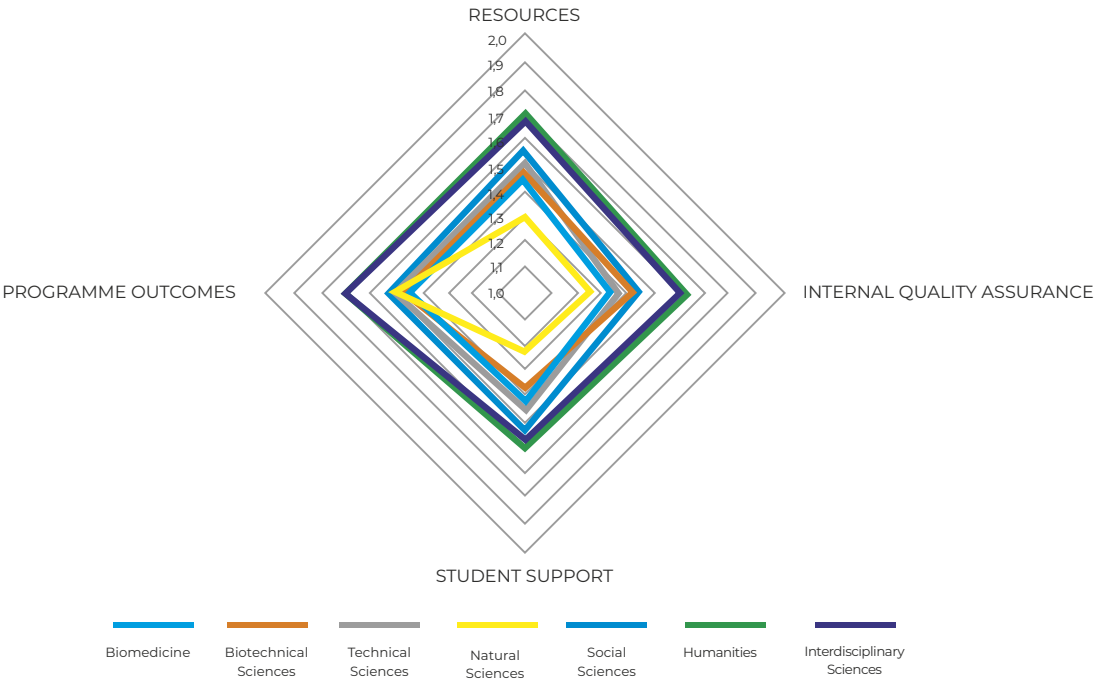


Chart 14: Average grades given by expert panels for four groups of indicators by scientific fields (grades are 1 – high level of quality and 2 – improvements necessary)

In the qualitative analysis of advantages, disadvantages and examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement made by expert panels, several topics emerged: the status of doctoral candidates, the relationship between the national and the international i.e. the need for internationalization and funding of doctoral study programmes.

These are also topics discussed at the conference Evaluation of Doctoral Studies in the Republic of Croatia by a committee composed of renowned national experts involved in this topic in their panel discussion.

The identified advantages of doctoral study programmes include satisfaction, enthusiasm and motivation of doctoral candidates, positive work environment, flexibility of teachers and supervisors, teacher qualifications, favourable ratio of teachers and supervisors. The identified shortcomings of doctoral programmes are a weak enrolment policy, i.e. low (general) enrolment criteria, high enrolment quotas, lack of mechanisms for monitoring the performance of teachers/supervisors, high workload of teachers, high teaching workload of doctoral candidates (insufficient time for research), repetition of undergraduate and graduate content, long study time, large number of inactive students and frequent dropouts, and poor funding sources. Based on the disadvantages, the expert panels issued recommendations for improving doctoral study programmes:

- Improve mechanisms for monitoring the work/progress of doctoral candidates and supervisors (surveys - feedback from doctoral candidates, alumni, evaluation of supervisors' performance, introduction of procedures for solving problems in the work of doctoral candidates and supervisors);
- Tighten enrolment criteria;
- Limit study time;
- Reduce the share of teaching and allow more time for research;
- Strengthen the scientific activity of scientific and teaching staff (e.g. incentive/reward program);
- Introduce a system for checking text authenticity;
- Organize workshops to improve supervisory and teaching skills;
- Develop generic and transferable skills, academic writing;
- Improve the system of financing doctoral candidates;
- Provide better access to bibliographic databases.



Panel discussion „Condition and challenges of PhD study programmes in Croatia “. Left to right: Aleksandar Sušnjar, PhD candidate; Prof. Karmela Barišić, PhD, president of the Working group for drafting criteria for PhD study reaccreditation, Prof. Sonja Vila, PhD, president of the Accreditation Council; Prof. Dijana Vican, PhD, rector of the University of Zadar, Prof. Jasmina Havranek, PhD, acting director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education.

In the context of the relationship between the national and international, numerous advantages of doctoral study programmes have been identified in relation to fulfilling their social mission in the local, regional and national context (national significance and good cooperation with stakeholders in the national context). Deficiencies in this context are mainly related to weak internationalization (non-participation of international experts in the committees for the defence and evaluation of the PhD proposal and dissertation, lack of international projects, poor mobility of doctoral candidates and teachers, small number of papers in high-impact international journals, low participation/presentations at international conferences) and the recommendations of expert panels are made with the aim of solving this problem:

- Better support to publishing papers in high-impact international journals;
- More presentations at international conferences;
- Inviting renowned international experts to participate in the committees for the defence and assessment of the PhD proposal and dissertation;
- Better support for involvement in international projects;
- Attracting funds from international sources;
- Better support to incoming foreign students and experts.

Of the 114 re-accredited doctoral study programmes, the Accreditation Council recommended the issuance of 51 licenses and 63 letters of expectation, seven of which included a ban on student enrolment. The Accreditation Council recommended awarding of a high quality label to 11 doctoral study programmes.

During the re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes, a high level of quality was awarded to four doctoral study programmes delivered at the University of Zagreb, five doctoral study programmes at the University of Split, and two doctoral study programmes at the University of Zadar.



Awarding a high quality label to two doctoral study programmes delivered at the University of Zadar



Table 1: Overview of doctoral study programmes that received the high quality label in the PhD re-accreditation procedure

University of Zagreb	University of Split	University of Zadar
<b>Electrical Engineering and Computing</b> Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing	<b>Mechanical Engineering</b> Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture	<b>Quality in upbringing and education</b>
<b>Pharmacy and Biochemistry</b> Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry	<b>Electrical Engineering and Information Technology</b> Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture	<b>Sociology of regional and local development</b>
<b>Veterinary Sciences</b> Faculty of Veterinary Medicine	<b>Civil Engineering</b> Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Geodesy	
<b>Applied Geoscience, Mining and Petroleum Engineering</b> Faculty of Mining, Geology and Petroleum Engineering	<b>Translation Research in Biomedicine</b> Faculty of Medicine	
	<b>Education Research in Natural and Technical Sciences,</b> Faculty of Science	

After the re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes, the follow-up procedure continued in 2020, in which the Accreditation Council of the Agency monitors the development of re-accredited doctoral study programmes. For the doctoral study programmes which received a license, the HEIs that deliver the study programmes submit to the Agency action plans and annual reports on the basis of which the further development of these doctoral study programmes is monitored. If the HEIs delivering the study programmes want to eliminate deficiencies identified in the letter of expectation and continue to deliver the doctoral study programme, they must submit to the Agency reports on the elimination of deficiencies identified in the letter of expectation showing that the deficiencies have been eliminated and that their recommendations have been implemented, which has to be substantiated by evidence. This way, the Agency is continuously working towards improving doctoral studies in the Republic of Croatia, and consequently, towards improving their international presence.

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

Prior to the expiration of the letter of expectation, the HEIs delivering postgraduate university (doctoral) study programmes submit to the Agency a report on the elimination of deficiencies identified by expert panels in the reaccreditation process. Based on the report and evidence supporting the statements made in the report, the Agency's Accreditation Council considers to what extent and how the higher education institution has implemented the recommendations for improvement. If necessary, the Accreditation Council may send the whole panel or part of the panel to another visit to a higher education institution. After the expiry of the letter of expectation, the Accreditation Council provides opinion on:

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

Based on the opinion of the Accreditation Council, the Agency submits a recommendation to the minister responsible for higher education and science on the issuance or denial of a license for performing higher education and scientific activities, or part of the activities. This recommendation is public and is published on the Agency's website.

In 2020, eight postgraduate (doctoral) study programmes eliminated the shortcomings identified in the letter of expectation and they were issued a certificate of fulfilment of the conditions for performing part of the activity.

In cases when the higher education institution has been issued a certificate of fulfilment of the conditions for performing the activity of higher education or part of the activity and/or scientific activity, with recommendations for quality improvement, follow-up procedure includes the following:

- Within six months after receiving the confirmation, the re-accredited institution adopts an action plan aimed at quality improvement, and submits it to the Agency
- Once a year, the re-accredited institution sends a report to the Agency on the implementation of the action plan, and, accordingly, updates the data on the conditions in the information system used by the Agency.

The issues of follow-up in cases in which a license has been issued to a higher education institution in re-accreditation procedures are dealt with by the Follow-up Committee, an advisory body of the Accreditation Council of the Agency. In 2020, the Committee issued 38 opinions in follow up-procedures for university postgraduate (doctoral) study programmes. Opinions were adopted by the Accreditation Council of the Agency.

## **Publication *Quality Assurance of Scientific Activity in Croatia - Analysis of Evaluation Methodologies* published**

The purpose of the publication *Quality Assurance of Scientific Activity in Croatia - Analysis of Evaluation Methodologies* is to contribute to the discussion on the quality assurance of scientific activity through the analysis of indicators used in the procedures of external evaluation of scientific organizations, with special emphasis on internal quality assurance of the institutions. Since the procedures of evaluation of quality in the area of scientific activity are not related to the evaluation of quality in higher education in most systems, apart from several elements which are necessary for the function of the higher education institutions, such as scientific productivity of teachers, the analysis also deals with specific characteristics of evaluation procedures and monitoring the quality of this activity. Finally, the purpose of the publication is to help scientific organizations build efficient internal quality assurance systems and put in place internal mechanisms for quality assurance which would improve the quality and increase recognizability of scientific organizations.

## **INITIAL ACCREDITATION**

### **Initial accreditation of study programmes**

ASHE carried out the procedures of initial accreditation of study programmes in 2020 according to Article 20 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (OG 45/09) and Articles 15 and 16 of the Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out a Study Programme and Re-Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (OG 24/2010).

The procedure includes checking compliance of a study programme with the strategic document Network of Higher Education Institutions, the examination of received documents, visits of expert panels to a higher education institution, the Agency's administrative and professional support provided during site visits, drafting of the final report and issuing accreditation recommendations.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in March 2020, and due to all prescribed epidemiological protection measures, it was impossible to conduct accreditation procedures in the usual way, so the Agency decided to start implementing online initial accreditation. To that end, it had to adapt the procedure to the new mode of operation. New instructions have been issued to coordinate the procedure. Employees were trained to work online on the ZOOM and MS Teams platforms. The Agency also produced new forms for writing protocols, consulting contracts, statements on non-conflict of interest, training of expert panels, new links to anonymous surveys on user satisfaction with the Agency's services. All of this called for a lot of extra effort and commitment.

The first online initial accreditation of the graduate university study programme History (double-major) and the graduate university study programme Sociology (double-major) of the Croatian Catholic University<sup>5</sup> was conducted by ASHE on 9 July 2020. Accreditation of study programmes was carried out through the Microsoft Teams platform.

<sup>5</sup> Directory of study programmes, ASHE <https://mozvag.srce.hr/preglednik/pregled/hr/nositelj/odabirizvodjac.html?zifranositelj=300017> Downloaded from: [www.azvo.hr](http://www.azvo.hr), (26 August 2020)

The expert panel held a series of online meetings with the management of the higher education institution, study programme coordinators, full-time teachers who will be engaged in the proposed study programmes, and students.

Prior to the very beginning of the implementation of the online initial accreditation procedure of the Croatian Catholic University, thorough preparation and planning was necessary. ASHE drafted detailed documents:

- Instructions and the online site-visit protocol for HEIs and
- Online site-visit protocol for members of expert panels.

In accordance with the instructions for higher education institutions, the day before the evaluation, the person in charge of technical affairs from the Croatian Catholic University participated in the test MS Teams meeting with the ASHE coordinator and an employee from the ASHE's IT Department.

Likewise, in accordance with the instructions, the higher education institution submitted for each of the proposed study programmes two separate videos of premises/equipment mentioned in the feasibility studies (classrooms, laboratories, library, work facilities, IT classroom, student administration office, etc.) and two separate links to the documentation mentioned in the feasibility studies.

Training for members of the expert panels was organized a few days before the online evaluation.

Before the training, members of the expert panels exchanged open questions with each other via e-mail. During and after the training, questions were also prepared for various stakeholder groups provided for in the site visit protocols. Communication between expert panel members was easy to establish given that most members had previously participated in the external evaluation of the Croatian Catholic University.

The ASHE coordinator was responsible for the meeting between the expert panel and the representatives of the higher education institution and (in accordance with the capabilities of the MS Teams platform) admitting to the meetings the groups of stakeholders according to the site visit protocol.

As the accreditation involved double-major graduate study programmes, Sociology and History, the site visit protocol was adjusted so that the panel first interviewed a group of full-time teachers from one study programme and then from another.

The online site visit was very dynamic and we would dare to say very productive because specific questions were asked and concrete answers were given (there were no long introductory talks and preparations for the meetings, which usually take a lot of time).

In order to improve its work, ASHE collected feedback on user satisfaction with the Agency's services. The comment we received from the higher education institution on the implementation of online initial accreditation of the study programme: *"I believe that the experience from online accreditation can be used to plan future accreditation procedures that can be carried out as a combination of standard and online procedure."*

The expert panel also reacted very positively to this online evaluation and it can be concluded that the online site visit was very successful.

*"Very interesting, pleasant and successful above expectations. However, we have already participated in the evaluation of this faculty, which made it a lot easier for us. If we had not been so familiar with the institution from previous accreditations, it would have been somewhat more difficult. This way it was thorough and completely professional."*

*"The procedure can be performed online while maintaining the required level of quality, but in the end, I do not consider it the right way for future actions due to numerous shortcomings in terms of communication and personal contact with all actors involved, and finally, the experience of the whole situation."*

*"Compared to earlier experiences, online implementation of the accreditation process has shown its advantages and thus greater satisfaction for the participants in the evaluation. As there were no technical obstacles, the procedure ran smoothly."*

*"Human interaction cannot be replaced even by the most sophisticated digital tools."*

In conclusion, we can say that in addition to technical conditions, good preparation and communication among all persons involved in the evaluation process of the higher education institution is necessary. Also, we propose developing a special Code of Ethics, which will be signed by the leader of the higher education institution before the start of the online evaluation. Thus, they undertake the following:

- Not to record interviews during the evaluation procedure,
- Not to admit uninvited persons in the meetings in the room in which the invited participants are physically present.

This accreditation procedure provides a good foundation for future development of other online evaluation procedures, which will be necessary due to the pandemic that is still ongoing and prevents the implementation of accreditation procedures in the usual way.

In the past year ASHE received seven applications for initiating the procedure of initial accreditation of new study programmes from polytechnics, colleges and private universities.

One evaluation procedure was carried out in the standard manner, i.e. a site visit to the HEI was organized. Three evaluation procedures were carried out online as described above.

Based on the initial accreditation procedures carried out in 2020, the minister of Science and Education received a recommendation to issue licences for four study programmes:

- Two undergraduate professional study programmes;
- Two graduate university study programmes.

One application for launching a study programme could not undergo evaluation because the HEI that submitted the application was just undergoing re-accreditation. Two procedures are ongoing.

The reasons why the number of received applications for launching new study programmes was so small was because most polytechnics and colleges in Croatia were undergoing re-accreditation at the time.

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

Below is one of the many positive comments of higher education institutions on the work of the Agency:

*"On behalf of the dean, in my own name and on behalf of all employees of the Polytechnic I thank you for your help in the implementation of the initial accreditation procedure, which is very important to us.*

*I thank the Agency for the support it provides us in the development of our activities and the entire institution and we are looking forward to our future cooperation. "*

### **Initial accreditation for performing higher education activities**

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

In 2020, one application was received for initiating the procedure for performing higher education activities in the first phase of the procedure; obtaining license for the establishment of a higher education institution. The application concerned the founding of a private university. The Agency's recommendation to the Ministry of Science and Education was a positive recommendation for issuing license for the establishment of a higher education institution. The procedure was performed before the onset of the pandemic, and included a site visit to the higher education institution in question.

Two applications for initiating the procedure for performing higher education activities in the second phase of the procedure were also received; obtaining a license to perform higher education activities. The Agency's recommendation to the Ministry of Science and Education in both procedures was to issue a license for performing activities and delivering the proposed study programmes. Evaluation procedures were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic through the ZOOM platform. For this purpose, it was necessary to adapt the procedure and all related documentation to work in an online environment like in the accreditation of study programmes.

## **Initial accreditation for performing scientific activity**

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

Initial accreditation for carrying out scientific activity includes the following stages: examining the submitted documentation, a site visit of the expert panel to a scientific organisation, writing the final report and issuing the accreditation recommendation. In 2020, 11 applications for initial accreditation of scientific activity were received and resolved. Out of 11 applications in total, eight applications were submitted by private higher education institutions, while two applications were submitted by public institutions other than universities, their constituents or public scientific institutes. Four applications were related to the field of social sciences, two to the field of biomedicine and health, two to humanities and one for performing scientific activity in the field of technical sciences and one for performing scientific activity in the field of natural sciences. Out of eleven received applications, ten received a positive accreditation recommendation, while one procedure resulted in termination.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, nine out of eleven initial accreditation procedures were performed online, i.e. via video link via the Microsoft Teams and Zoom platforms, from March to December 2020. The members of the expert panels met with the management and scientists of the institutions that submitted the applications via video link, while the tour of the premises was replaced by photographs and video material.

## **JUSTIFIABILITY OF PUBLIC FUNDING OF NEW STUDY PROGRAMMES**

Public university study programmes are established and implemented by a university senate decision based on a previous assessment of the unit for the internal system of quality assurance and improvement.

In accordance with the provision of Article 20, Paragraph 10 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (OG 45/2009), the Agency gives its opinion on the justification for public financing of study programmes for which public universities require additional funds from the State Budget. Regarding study programmes for which additional funds from the State Budget are not requested, the Ministry of Science and Education decides on entering them into the Register of study programmes and submits the Decision to enter the study programmes in the Register of Study Programmes to the Agency.

The Agency did not receive any application for issuing an opinion on the justification for public financing in 2020.

In 2020, the Ministry of Science and Education submitted to the Agency 26 opinions on registering public university study programmes into the Register of Study Programmes based on their evaluation.

# EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The 2020 Annual plan of audits was adopted by the Agency's Accreditation Council at its 108th session held on 17 September 2019.

The Plan included the following institutions:

1. College of Agriculture in Križevci
2. Zagreb School of Economics and Management,
3. Polytechnic of Bjelovar,
4. College for Management in Tourism and Informatics in Virovitica,

On 12 December 2019, ASHE organised a workshop for the representatives of these institutions; the participants assessed the quality of the workshop with an average grade of 4.7/5.

Site visits have been scheduled for spring and autumn 2020, however, due to unforeseen circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, two HEIs (Polytechnic of Bjelovar and College of Agriculture in Križevci) requested a postponement for spring 2021, which was accepted by the Accreditation Council.

Site visit of the expert panel to the Zagreb School of Economics and Management was carried out on 22-23 September in a hybrid form, partly via video-link and partly in person, in accordance with the Decision on the Manner of Conducting External Evaluation Procedures During Covid-19 Epidemic.

The Expert Panel's Final Report was adopted on 1 December 2020, and the Accreditation Council issued a certificate to the Zagreb School of Economics and Management for an efficient, developed and functional quality assurance system.

As for the satisfaction with the audit procedure, the evaluated HEI assessed the procedure with 5/5, and members of the Expert Panel with an average grade of 4.9/5.



Audit of ZSEM



Due to the epidemiological situation in December of 2020, the audit of College for Management in Tourism and Informatics in Virovitica was fully conducted online, from 16-18 December, in accordance with the decision of the Accreditation Council. The final report of the Expert Panel is due at the beginning of 2021.

On 26 October 2020, ASHE's Accreditation Council adopted, by electronic vote, the 2021 Annual audit plan, which includes the following institutions:

1. Baltazar Polytechnic in Zaprešić,
2. Zagreb School of Business,
3. EFFECTUS University College for Law and Finance – higher education institution.

On 11 December 2020, ASHE organised an online seminar for the representatives of these institutions. Participants assessed the quality of the seminar with an average grade of 4.6/5.

## **CROQANET**

On 2 July 2020, ASHE organised a webinar for the members of the national network of quality assurance units at higher education institutions (CroQAnet); the main topic of the webinar was the social dimension of higher education and the role of quality assurance systems. More than 60 representatives of Croatian HEIs participated in this webinar.

In addition to the main topic, the role of institutional quality assurance systems in the context of the social dimension of higher education, the participants were also presented with ASHE measures for the National Plan for Enhancing the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia for 2019 - 2021, guidelines for the development of a student support system at HEIs, as well as the global goals for sustainable development in the context of higher education.

Participants assessed the quality of the webinar with an average grade of 4.6/5.

### **Database of internal quality assurance systems at HEIs**

Due to the fact that, for the most part of 2020, the Croatian higher education institutions carried out their activities mostly online, and to a lesser extent, because of the pandemic, this year the Agency did not collect data on changes in their internal quality assurance systems, but has used the opportunity to upgrade the platform through which the data is collected and maintained. A new, upgraded solution that will allow for collecting and maintaining comprehensive information on the status and annual activities of higher education institutions' quality assurance systems will be presented to stakeholders in early 2021.



CroQAnet webinar, 2 July 2020.

## ASHE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

During 2020, ASHE Accreditation Council held 11 sessions. At the sessions held, the Accreditation Council issued expert opinions in the following external evaluation procedures:

- Expert opinion in 3 initial accreditations for performing higher education activity;
- Expert opinion in 4 initial accreditations for the implementation of a new study programme;
- Expert opinion in 7 initial accreditations for carrying out scientific activity;
- Expert opinion in 3 re-accreditations of higher education institutions from the first cycle;
- Expert opinion in 17 re-accreditations of higher education institutions from the second cycle;
- Expert opinion in 23 re-accreditations of postgraduate university (doctoral) study programmes;
- Expert opinion in 5 re-accreditations of scientific organisations outside the system of higher education and public research institutes;
- Expert opinion in 9 evaluations of submitted descriptions of changes and/or amendments to study programmes that exceed 20%;
- Expert opinion in 4 audits;
- Expert opinion on the adoption of submitted action plans following the issuance of a letter of expectation.

In addition, the Accreditation Council has in 2020 adopted new documents for the implementation of initial accreditation for delivering study programmes, new documents for evaluating the quality of joint studies, in accordance with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, the 2021 Plan of re-accreditations, the new Conclusion of the Accreditation Council regarding the implementation of the initial accreditation procedure, and - in accordance with the current epidemiological situation - the Decision on the implementation of external evaluation procedures during COVID-19 pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus.

In addition, the Accreditation Council discussed 34 opinions of the Follow-up Committee, the application of the new Collective Agreement for Science and Higher Education in accreditation procedures, the application of CROQF in accreditation procedures, the draft Ordinance Amending the Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out a Study Programme and Re-Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions, the proposal of the Ordinance on Records and Databases in Higher Education, and instructions of the MSE regarding the procedure of changes and/or amendments to the approved study programmes that exceed 20%.

## COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

The Complaints Committee is an expert body of the Agency that decides on the complaints of higher education institutions to the opinion of the Accreditation Council in the procedures of re-accreditation of higher education institutions. Members of the Committee are appointed by the Agency's Management Board following a proposal of the Rectors' Conference and the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, in accordance with the prescribed requirements. The Committee comprises three members, of which at least one is a legal expert. Two substitute members are also appointed. The members are appointed for a term of three years; they are independent in their work and do not represent their respective institutions, and their decisions are guided by the principles of impartiality and objectivity. The first session of the Complaints Committee was held on 11 July 2018.

During 2020, the Committee held four sessions, at which it decided on the merits of higher education institutions' objections to the opinion of the Accreditation Council in a total of 11 cases. In nine cases the objections were found to be unsubstantiated, while in two cases they were found partially justified.



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

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

## NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE, HIGHER EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2020, the Agency continued to ensure the successful work of the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development (NCSHETD), the most prominent professional body concerned with the development and quality of scientific activity and the system of science, higher education and technological development in the Republic of Croatia.

ASHE provided administrative and professional support to the work of the Council by preparing the necessary materials and information for Council sessions, as well as drafting minutes, proposals, comments, decisions and conclusions with regard to the: Active monitoring of the Croatia's Presidency of the Council of the European Union; Financial support for scientific activity: FP9 and Horizon Europe; Scientific centres of excellence; Amendments to the Ordinance on the Conditions of Appointment to Scientific Grades; Decisions of the NCSHETD expert committee for determining the criteria of teaching excellence (65+); Appointments and dismissals of members of scientific field committees and area councils; Presentation of the results of enrolment in higher education institutions in the academic year 2019/2020; Proposals for consent to delivery of professional study programmes at universities; Consent for conducting part of the procedure of appointment to scientific grades; Providing prior consent for delivery of integrated undergraduate and graduate university study programmes; Providing consent for delivery of undergraduate professional studies; Providing consent for delivery of specialist professional graduate study programmes; Presentation on professional studies in the Republic of Croatia today; Providing consent to institutional statutes; Issuing other statements, opinions, recommendations, consents, etc.

During 2020, the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development held 12 sessions, in addition to a number of meetings of working groups and expert committees appointed by the National Council, such as: Expert committee for opinions on meeting criteria for teaching excellence with regard to the extension of the employment contracts (for employees over the age of 65); Working group for prior opinions on statutes; Working group for proposals of minimum work requirements for the re-appointment to scientific, scientific-teaching, artistic-teaching, teaching and professional positions; Working group for proposals of amendments to the Ordinance on Scientific and Artistic Areas, Fields and Branches (part related to arts); Croatian Bologna Follow up Group; and Croatian Strategic Forum for Research Infrastructures.

Report and the Work Plan of the Director of the Agency have been adopted with a YES vote by all 16 members of the NCSHETD who have participated in the discussion and voted. Several members of the Council commended the work of ASHE in general, but also the cooperation, i.e. the professional support provided by ASHE provides to the National Council. As the President of the National Council (Prof. Mirjana Polić Bobić, Ph.D.), I am happy to join these commendations, and also point out that the part of ASHE's work concerning the support to the National Council, as well as its Area Councils and Scientific Field Committees represents a significant part of the overall operation of the Agency (it is worth noting that each of the 23 scientific field committees holds 6 sessions a year). Additionally, ASHE provides continuous support to current members of the NCSHETD since they were appointed in July 2019 by preparing documentation for Council sessions; this cooperation is always professional, and the relationship cordial. I therefore agree with remarks made by academician Bermanec that the Agency's report could have been even more explicit regarding our excellent cooperation and relationship, and fully list all its aspects.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Conclusion of the 41st session of the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, summary minutes available at <https://www.nvzvotr.hr/images/zapisnici/Skra%C4%87eni%20zapisnik%2041%20elektroni%C4%8Dke%20sjednice.pdf>

## SCIENTIFIC AREA COUNCILS AND COUNCIL FOR ARTS

Scientific area councils are responsible for the matters within the competence of the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, in relation to scientific and artistic areas. In 2020, Scientific Area Council for Humanities held two sessions.

## SCIENTIFIC FIELD COMMITTEES

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

During 2020, a total of 104 sessions were held, with a total of 1202 decisions passed, of which 1171 were positive and 31 were negative.

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

- Scientific Field Committee for Biomedicine and Health - Fundamental Medical Sciences, Clinical Medical Sciences,
- Public Health and Health Protection, Dentistry and Pharmacy, followed by the Scientific Field Committee for Social Sciences- Economics
- Scientific Field Committee for Humanities - History, Art History, Art Science, Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology.

In 2020 there were

- 978 appointments to scientific grades upon individual request or the request of the scientific institution,
- 224 conducted on the basis of a public call.

The data shows that in 2020 the appointments to grades were carried out for:

- 462 research associates,
- 406 senior research associates,
- 159 scientific advisors, and
- 103 scientific advisors with tenure.

The Scientific Field Committee for Arts - field of Dramatic Arts (theatre and media), Film Arts (film, electronic and media art of motion pictures), Music Art, Visual art, Applied arts, Dance Art and Art of Movement confirmed the artistic segment in the appointment to artistic-teaching grade for 27 assistant professors, 4 associate professors, 8 full professors and 2 full professors with tenure.

Within the procedure of determining criteria for scientific/artistic excellence, in the selection procedure for the conclusion of employment contracts for employees over the age of 65, scientific field committees have in 2020 issued 30 positive decisions (of which 10 in the field of arts) and 1 negative decision on meeting the criteria for scientific excellence. Table 2 shows the total number of conducted procedures and results of appointments to scientific grades by scientific field committees in 2020.

Table 2: Number of conducted procedures and results of appointments to scientific grades by scientific field committees in 2020

Scientific Field Committee	No. of sess. held	Excellence criteria	Positive decisions				Negative decisions				Total positive	Total negative	Total
			Research associate	Senior research associate	Research advisor	Research advisor with tenure	Research associate	Senior research associate	Research advisor	Research advisor with tenure			
Biology SFC	4	0	14	16	9	1	0	0	0	0	40	0	40
Physics (+Geophysics) SFC	3	2	7	9	2	0	0	0	0	0	18	0	18
Geology (+ interdisciplinary natural sciences) SFC	4	0	8	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	17	0	17
Chemistry SFC	5	0	10	11	13	1	1	0	0	1	35	2	37
Mathematics SFC	4	1	11	10	3	2	0	0	0	0	26	0	26
Architecture and Urban Planning, Geodesy and Civil Engineering SFC	3	0	9	12	4	6	1	0	0	0	31	1	32
Electrical Engineering and Computing SFC	5	1	32	16	14	5	0	0	0	0	67	0	67
Chemical engineering, Mining, Geology and Petroleum Engineering, Metallurgy, Textile Technology and Printing Technology SFC	5	2	14	14	10	6	0	0	0	0	44	0	44
Mechanical Engineering, Naval Architecture, Traffic and Transportation Engineering, Aviation, Rocket and Space Technology SFC	4	0	21	16	5	10	2	0	0	0	52	2	54
Fundamental Medical Sciences, Clinical Medical Sciences, Public Health and Health Protection, Dentistry and Pharmacy SFC	7	8	144	99	34	22	1	3	0	0	299	4	303
Veterinary Medicine SFC	2	0	6	2	2	9	0	0	0	0	19	0	19

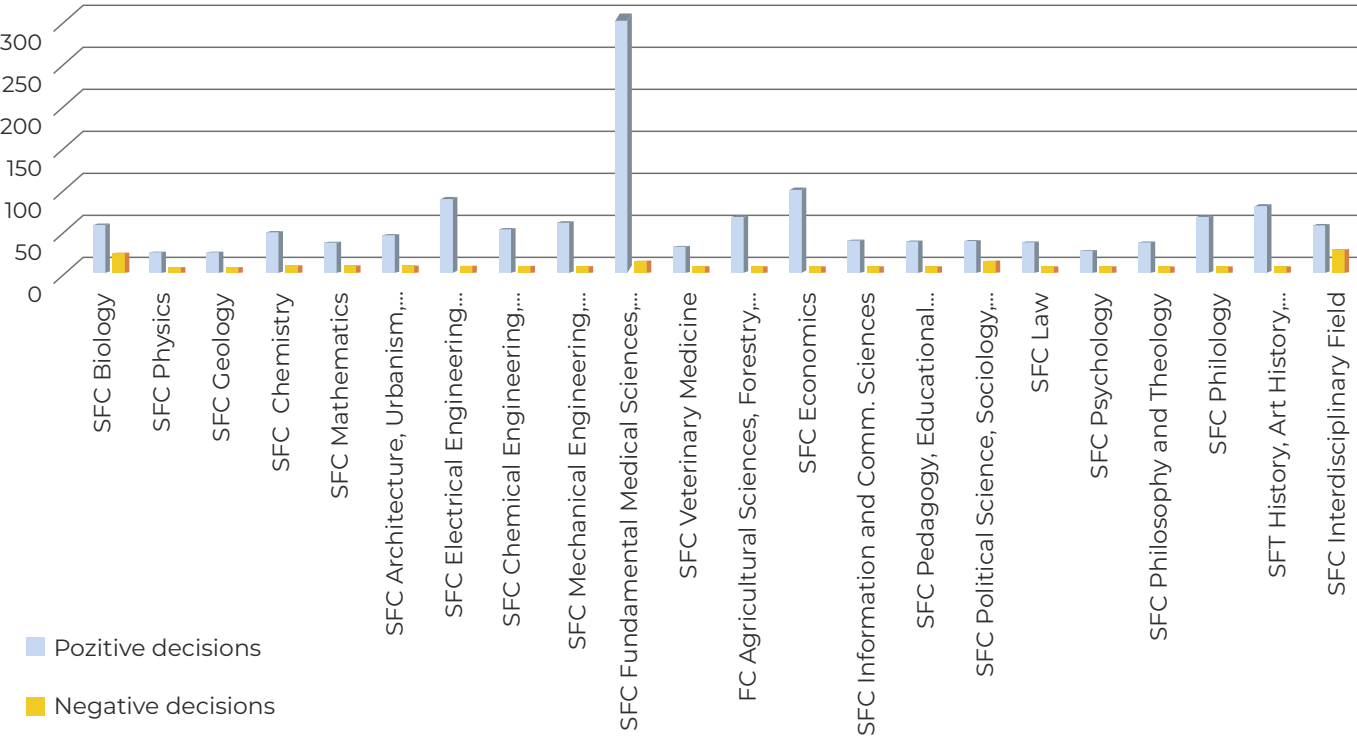
Scientific Field Committee	No. of sess. held	Excellence criteria	Positive decisions				Negative decisions				Total positive	Total negative	Total
			Research associate	Senior research associate	Research advisor	Research advisor with tenure	Research associate	Senior research associate	Research advisor	Research advisor with tenure			
Agricultural Sciences, Forestry, Wood Technology, Biotechnology, Food Technology and Nutrition SFC	3	0	18	34	9	3	0	0	0	0	64	0	64
Economics SFC	6	1	43	33	14	6	0	1	0	0	96	1	97
Information and Communication Sciences SFC	4	0	14	7	2	6	0	0	0	0	29	0	29
Pedagogy, Educational and Rehabilitation Sciences, Logopaedics and Kinesiology SFC	6	0	13	9	2	3	2	0	0	0	27	2	29
Political Science, Sociology, Demography, Social Work and Security and Defence SFC	4	1	9	11	3	5	3	1	0	0	28	4	32
Law SFC	3	0	3	18	3	2	0	0	0	0	26	0	26
Psychology SFC	5	0	3	8	3	1	1	0	0	0	15	1	16
Philosophy and Theology SFC	8	1	10	8	4	2	0	0	0	0	24	0	24
Philology SFC	5	1+1 neg	21	29	9	3	0	0	0	0	62	0	62
History, Art History, Art Science, Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology SFC	1	1	25	26	7	9	0	1	0	0	67	1	68
Interdisciplinary Field SFC	5	0	27	13	3	1	3	3	2	0	44	8	52
<b>TOTAL</b>	100	30+ 1 neg.	462	406	159	103	14	9	2	1	1131	25	1156



Table 3: Number of conducted procedures, and results of determining the art component for the artistic-teaching grades by the Scientific Field Committee for Arts in 2020

Scientific field committee	Pozitive decisions						Negative decisions				Total		
	No. of sessions	Excellence criteria	Assistant professor	Associate professor	Full professor	Full professor with tenure	Assistant professor	Associate professor	Full professor	Full professor with tenure	Total positive	Total negative	Total
SFC Arts	1	10	27	4	8	2	4	0	1	0	41	5	46

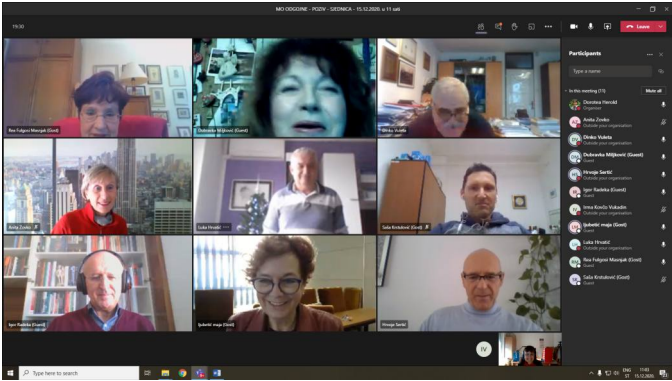
Chart 15: Total number of decisions made by scientific field committees in the appointments to scientific grades in 2020



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the administrative procedures of appointment into scientific grades have in 2020 been carried out under specific epidemiological conditions, with a reduced number of participants at meetings, in order to protect the health of both ASHE employees and members of the scientific field committees. Beginning with 16 March 2020, the scientific field committees have conducted their work online, in accordance with recommendations by the competent Ministry, the National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, and the Agency for Science and Higher Education; initially by electronic vote and e-mail correspondence, and after April 2020 exclusively via MS Teams application. The Agency for Science and Higher Education has provided administrative and technical support to committees in this aspect as well.



Session of the Scientific Field Committee for the area of Biomedicine and Health - Veterinary Medicine - 10 December 2020



Session of the Scientific Field Committee for Social Sciences - Pedagogy, Educational and Rehabilitation Sciences, Logopaedics and Kinesiology- 15 December 2020



Session of the Scientific Field Committee for Technical Sciences - Mechanical Engineering, Shipbuilding, Traffic and Transport Technology, Aviation, Rocket and Space Technology- 9 December 2020

## COUNCIL OF POLYTECHNICS AND COLLEGES

Council of Polytechnics and Colleges (hereinafter: the Council) is a national body that decides on the issues of common interest for the activities and development of polytechnics and colleges. Its members are deans of all polytechnics and colleges in Croatia. A representative of the Rectors' Conference, and a representative of the Council of Students of Polytechnics and Colleges participate in the work of the Council without voting rights. The Council comprises 35 members, of which 17 are polytechnics and 18 are colleges. From the total number of members, 14 institutions are public and 21 are private.

In 2020, the Agency for Science and Higher Education organised seven sessions of the Council, of which four were held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic; three via MS Teams platform and one via e-mail. The main topics discussed at the Council sessions included the Decision of the Constitutional Court on repealing the parts of the Croatian Qualifications Framework Act related to the position of professional studies in the CROQF levels and the proposed draft amendments to the said Act. The Council also discussed the procedure of re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programme delivery during the pandemic, for which it developed its own Recommendations for the Organisation of Teaching at Polytechnics and Colleges in 2020/2021 academic year, which were agreed upon by the Ministry of Science and Education and the Croatian Institute of Public Health.

New members of field committees and Field Committees Coordination Committee were appointed at the beginning of the year. With the aim of raising the quality, the Council initiated the procedure of major amendments to the Decision on the Conditions for Assessment of Teaching and Professional Activity in the Procedure of Appointment to Teaching Grades, and appointed a Committee for drafting the proposals of new conditions. A Committee for Public Polytechnics and Colleges was also established with the aim of further development of specific issues.

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

Since October 2020, the Council has a website at [www.wivs.hr](http://www.wivs.hr), and the development of a web portal at [www.strucnistudiji.hr](http://www.strucnistudiji.hr) is in the final stage. The web portal will serve as a platform for the promotion of polytechnics and colleges, and professional studies in general.

## FIELD COMMITTEES

Field committees of the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges held 37 sessions in 2020 (9 regular, 28 online), passing a total of 343 positive decisions on the fulfilment of criteria for the appointment to teaching grades.

Table 4: Number of positive opinions adopted at FC sessions in 2020

Field Committee	Social Sciences	Technical Sciences	Humanities	Natural Sciences	Biotechnical sciences	Biomedicine and health	Arts	Total
Number of sessions	7	6	5	5	5	5	4	37
Number of opinions	143	66	16	16	11	83	8	343
Tenured college professors	14	0	1	1	1	6	0	23
College professors	23	9	4	1	5	5	0	47
Senior lecturers	41	18	3	6	2	14	3	87
Lecturers	65	39	8	8	3	58	5	186

The data shows that in this period, the Field Committee for Social Sciences passed the highest number of positive decisions (143). It is followed by the Field Committee for Technical Sciences, which passed 83 positive decisions, and the Field Committee for Biomedicine and Health, which passed 66 positive decisions.

The highest number of positive opinions in the procedures of appointment to teaching grades was passed in the field of Economics (64 positive decisions passed), followed by the field of Clinical Medical Sciences (60 positive decisions) and the field of Information and Communication Sciences and Electrical Engineering (21 positive decisions).

The teaching grade that resulted in the highest number of positive opinions in all scientific fields is the teaching grade of lecturer, which in 2020 resulted in 186 positive opinions, and the lowest number of positive opinions was reached for the teaching grade of tenured college professors - 23 positive opinions.

During 2020, two sessions of the Field Committees Coordination Committee were held (one regular and one online); in addition to decisions regarding the interpretation of the appointments to teaching grades of the members of the Council

of Polytechnics and Colleges, one positive opinion was made in the procedure of appointment to teaching grade in interdisciplinary fields of science, field Project Management. The data does not include the number of amendments and negative opinions passed at the sessions.

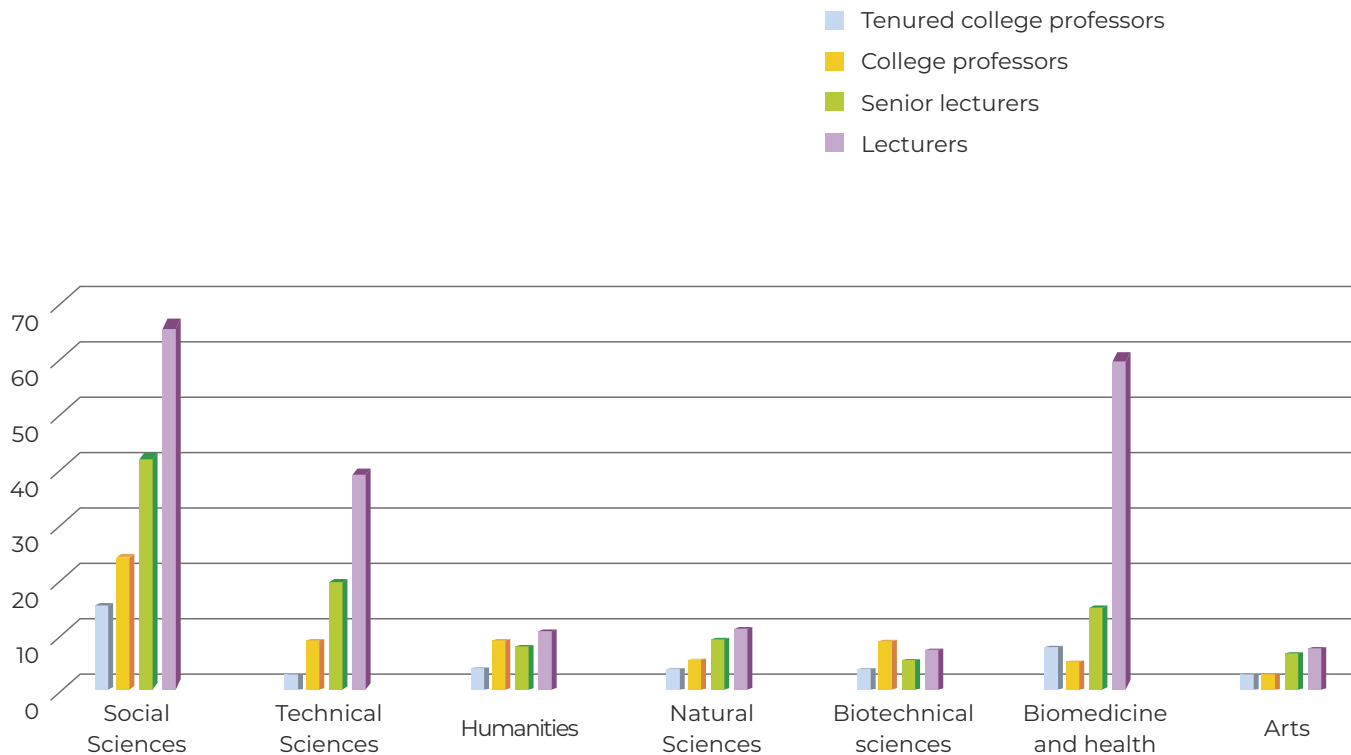


Chart 16: Number of positive opinions by field committees in 2020



**APPLICATIONS TO  
STUDY PROGRAMMES  
AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS  
IN CROATIA**

## APPLICATIONS TO UNDERGRADUATE AND INTEGRATED UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

Application for undergraduate and integrated undergraduate and graduate study programmes in the summer enrolment term began on 1 February and lasted until 20 July 2020, when the final ranking lists for study programmes were published. Out of a total number of 32,894 candidates, at the moment when ranking lists for the summer enrolment term were made public, a total of 28,590 candidates had applied to study programmes, of which 27,036 secured their right to enrol. The Central Applications Office (CAO) received and processed documents from 270 candidates, of whom 114 completed their secondary education outside of Croatia. Processing included filing of documents, making sure that the documentation is valid, and a thorough check and verification of candidates' personal data and grades entered into the system. In the autumn enrolment term, which lasted from 23 July until 17 September 2020, out of a total of 6,053 candidates, 4,886 candidates applied for admission to higher education institutions at the time of the publication of the ranking lists, and 4,170 candidates secured their right to enrol in the autumn term. The CAO received and processed documents from 175 candidates, of whom 41 completed their secondary education outside of Croatia.

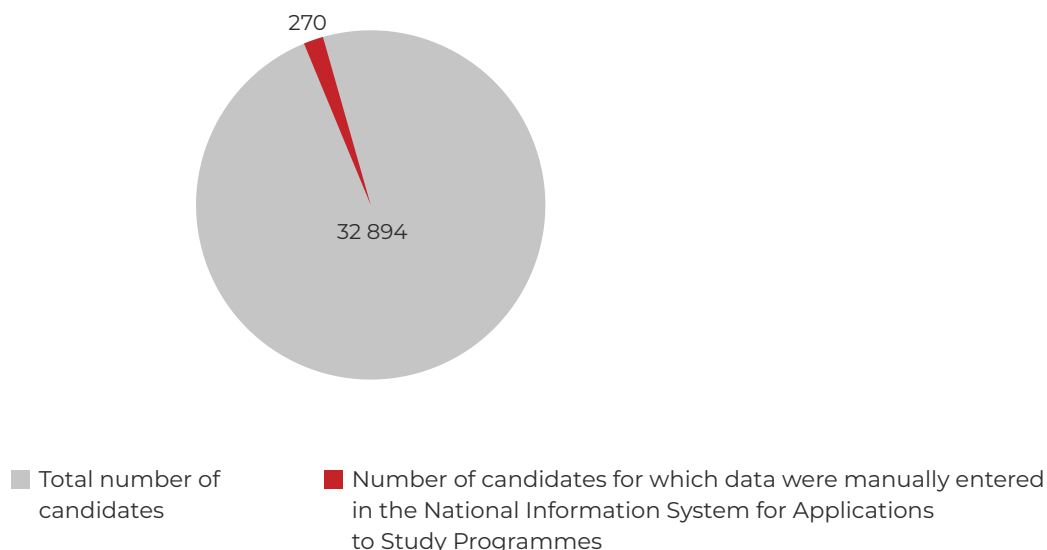


Chart 17: Number of candidates who were required to submit documentation to the CAO in the summer enrolment term.

Chart 18: Number of candidates who were required to submit documentation to the CAO in the autumn enrolment term.

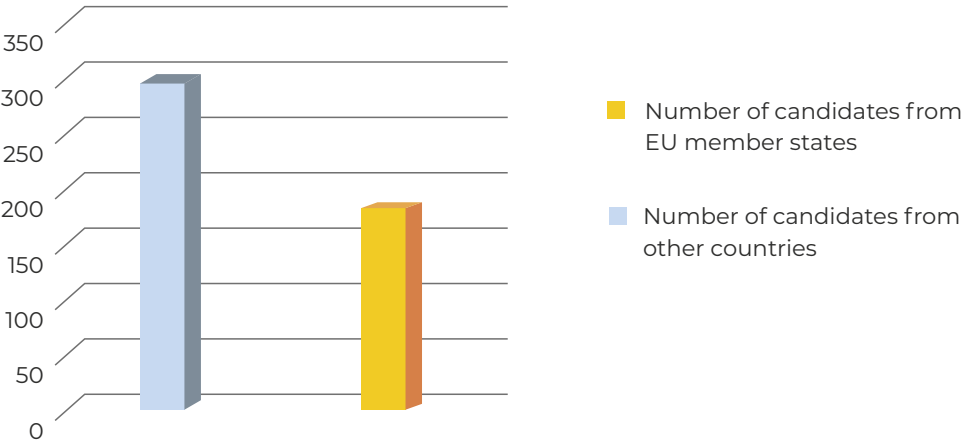
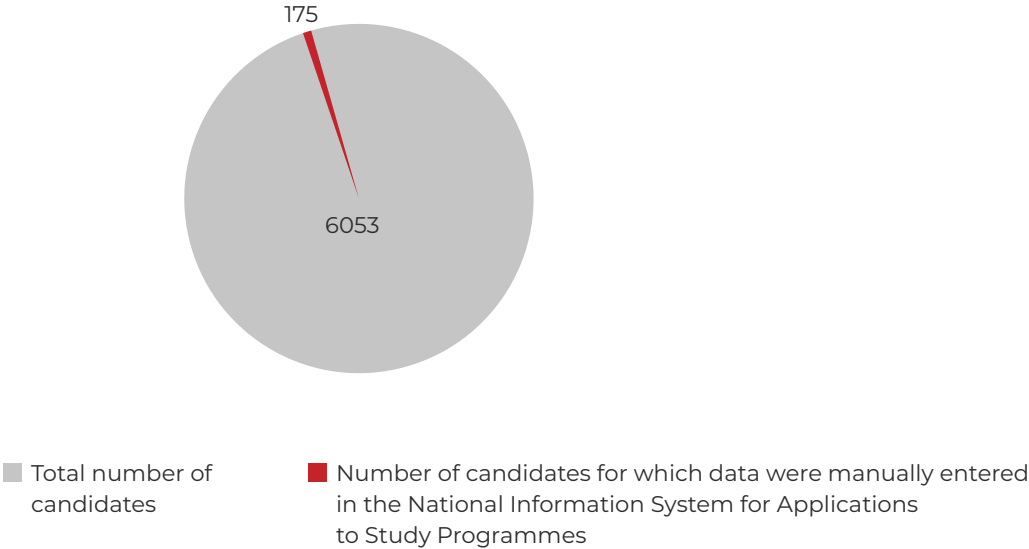


Chart 19: Number of candidates completing high school education, by country of completion



The CAO also received 80 requests for advanced enrolment, out of which 65 were granted and properly entered into the system. In the summer enrolment term, there were 39,993 slots available at all Croatian higher education institutions. Out of a total number of 32,894 candidates, 2,036 or 82.19% secured the right to enrol in a study programme, and 1,554 or 4.72% did not secure the right to enrol in any study programme. A total of 144,076 applications for study programmes were registered (4.38 per candidate). In the autumn enrolment term, there were 12,957 slots left at higher education institutions. Out of a total number of 6,053 candidates, 4,170 or 68.89% secured the right to enrol, and 716 or 8.43% did not secure the right to enrol in any study programme in the autumn enrolment term. A total of 17,694 applications were registered (2.92 per candidate).

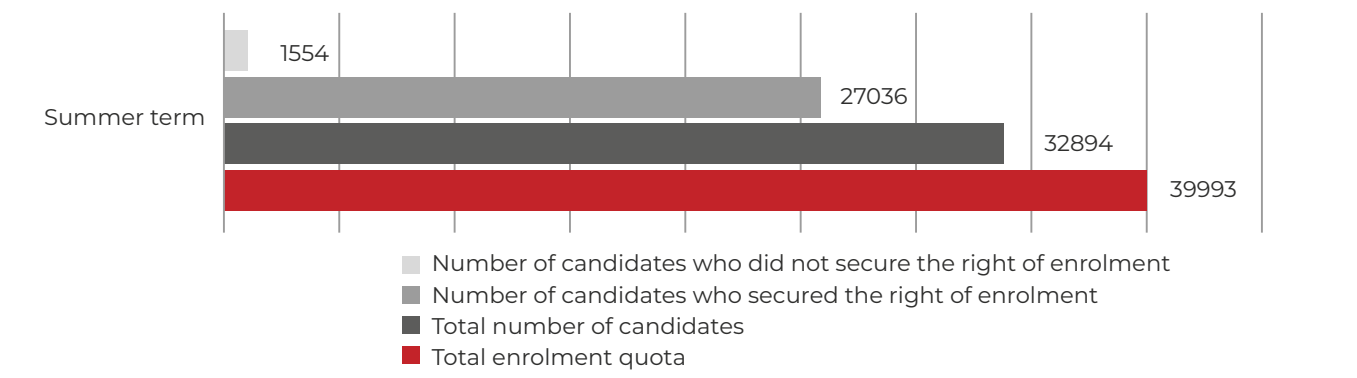


Chart 20: Number of candidates who secured the right of enrolment in undergraduate study programmes in the summer enrolment term

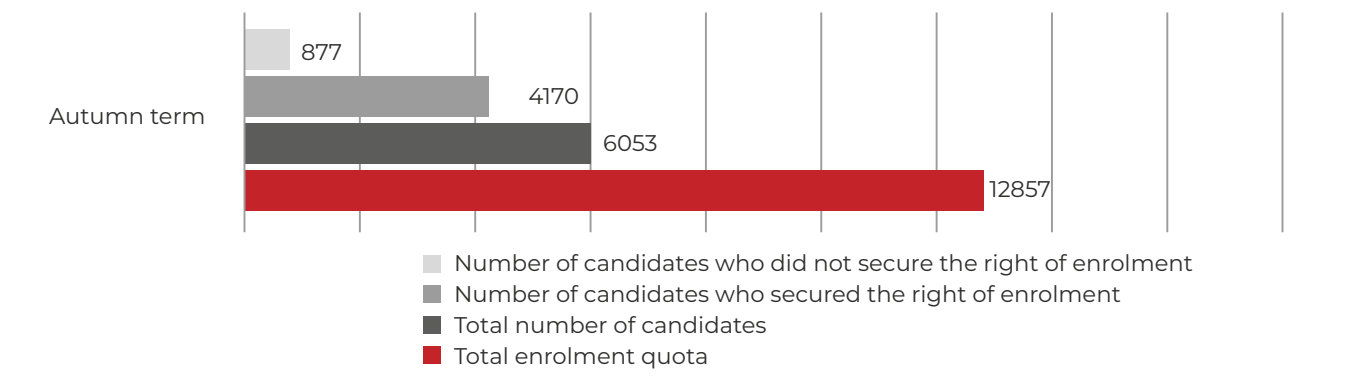


Chart 21: Number of candidates who secured the right of enrolment in undergraduate study programmes in the autumn enrolment term

During the entire year, the CAO replied to candidates' queries. A total of 5,896 telephone queries were responded to, as well as 3,142 e-mail queries and 2,475 queries submitted via the form available on the website [www.studij.hr](http://www.studij.hr). Moreover, CAO staff regularly updated all information on the [www.studij.hr](http://www.studij.hr) website, in both Croatian and English.

## APPLICATIONS TO GRADUATE STUDY PROGRAMMES

For the sixth consecutive year, the CAO successfully administered the centralised application to graduate study programmes through the National System of Applications to Graduate Studies (NSAGS). Applications took place between 1 July and 30 September 2020, when the final ranking lists for enrolment into graduate study programmes were published. This year, the centralised application through the NSAGS covered: three constituents of the J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek (Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Civil Engineering), the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, the Croatian Catholic University, nine constituents of the University of Rijeka (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Department of Polytechnics, Faculty of Teacher Education, Faculty of Health Studies, Department of Informatics, Department of Mathematics, Department of Biotechnology, Department of Physics), 21 constituents of the University of Zadar (Department of English, Department of Ecology, Agriculture and Aquaculture, Department of Economics, Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Department of Philosophy, Department of French and Iberoromance studies, Department of Geography, Department of German Studies, Department of Information Studies, Department for Teacher and Pre-school Teacher Education, Department of Classical Philology, Department of Croatian Language and Literature and Slavic Philology, Department of Linguistics, Department of Pedagogy, Department of History, Department of History of Art, Department of Psychology, Department of Sociology, Department of Italian Language and Literature, Department of Tourism and Communication Studies, Department of Theology and Catechism), Slavonski Brod Polytechnic, Polytechnic "Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar, Polytechnic "Marko Marulić" in Knin, Polytechnic of Požega, Polytechnic of Šibenik, Polytechnic of Rijeka, Međimurje Polytechnic in Čakovec and Istrian Polytechnic. There was a total of 4,341 open slots at higher education institutions conducting centralised applications to graduate study programmes through the NSAGS. The CAO received and processed documents from 533 candidates from a total of 2,911 applicants, of whom 2,476 or 85.05% secured the right to enrolment.

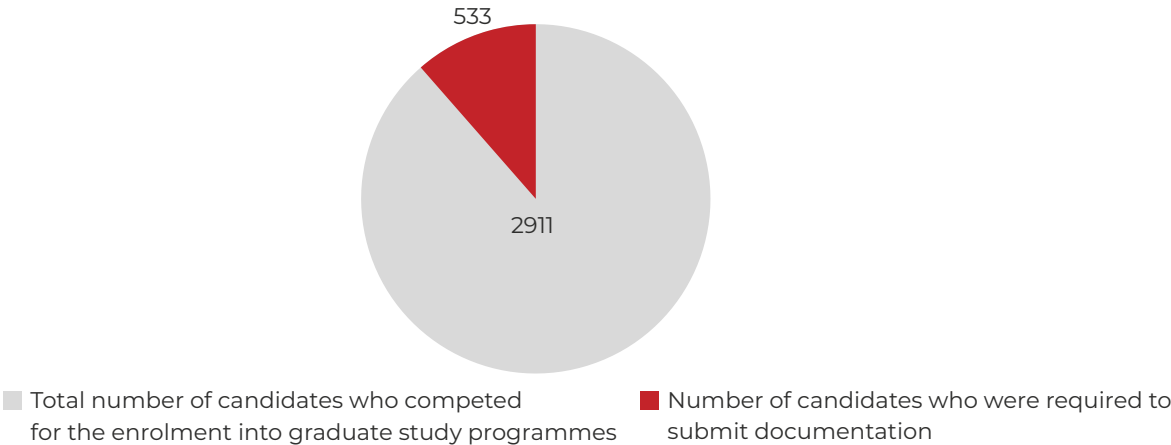


Chart 22: Number of candidates for enrolment into graduate study programmes

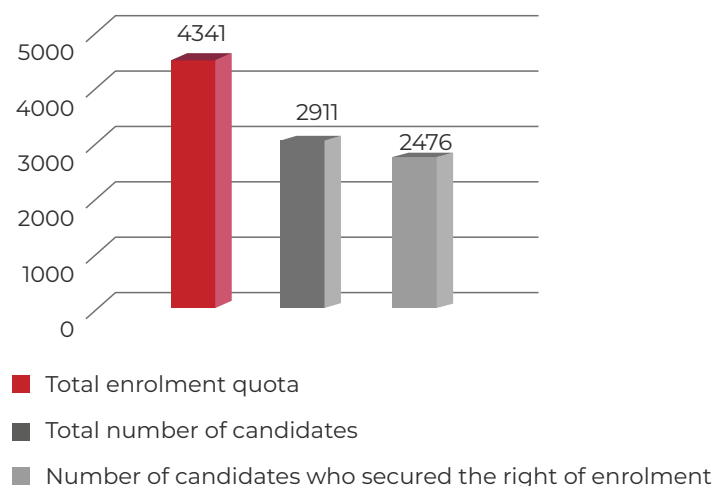


Chart 23: Secured rights to enrolment into graduate study programmes

## SUPPORT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Throughout 2020, the CAO, within the scope of its activities, provided continuous support to higher education institutions and informed the coordinators on all necessary activities in NISAHEI and NSAGS. The CAO received and responded to 193 telephone and 1,238 e-mail queries from coordinators.

## APPLICATIONS OF CANDIDATES COMING FROM OUTSIDE THE REGULAR CROATIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM FOR ENROLMENT INTO THE FIRST GRADE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL

The CAO has once again successfully participated in the process of application for enrolment into the first grade of secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia, which included candidate registration, verifying the accuracy of personal data and rating of candidates coming outside the regular educational system through the National Information System of Application and Enrolment into Secondary Schools (NISAESS), and providing information about the entire procedure. The CAO registered 387 candidates in the summer and 195 in the autumn enrolment term. In total, the CAO processed documents from 212 candidates, 130 in the summer enrolment term and 82 in the autumn enrolment term. From the total number of candidates registered by the CAO, i.e. 582 candidates, 370 submitted their application for both enrolment terms within the given deadline.

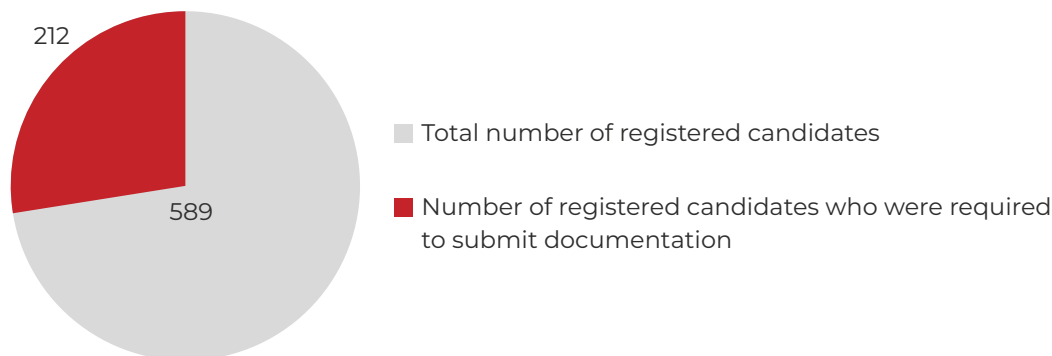


Chart 24: Number of applications of candidates coming from outside the regular education system of the Republic of Croatia for enrolment into the first grade of secondary school.

## APPLICATION SYSTEM UPGRADE

In 2020 work began on the implementation of a new e-service via the NISAHEI2 system. The new service concerns the application in English language for enrolment in undergraduate study programmes delivered in English. The registration is also planned to be carried out through the e-Citizens system.

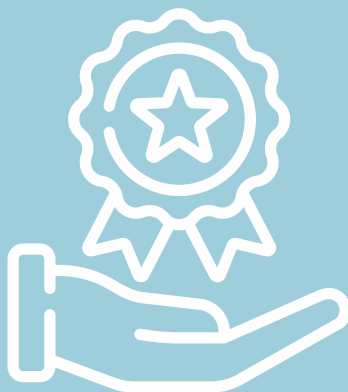
## MONITORING GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER SURVEYS

In 2020, ASHE continued to carry out activities related to the monitoring of the employability of graduated students. The aim of this project is to gather information from higher education graduates on their experience of higher education and transition to employment.

At the beginning of June 2020, the European Commission published the results of the EUROGRADUATE pilot study on the experience of studying and graduate employment as part of the Eurograduate project, carried out from October 2018 until February 2019, and in which ASHE participated as a partner. The results of the study are available on our website ([www.azvo.hr](http://www.azvo.hr)).

Furthermore, the results of the study on the employability of students graduated in the academic year 2017/2018, which was conducted from November until the end of 2019, will be published during 2021.

The study on the employability of the next cohort of graduated students, i.e. students that graduated in the academic year 2018/2019 is currently being conducted. The survey was sent to 15,923 e-mail addresses and the current total rate of response is 32%.



**RECOGNITION OF  
FOREIGN HIGHER EDUCATION  
QUALIFICATIONS**

Recognition is the formal acknowledgement of the value of a foreign education qualification or period of study. Recognition is conducted by the competent authority for the purpose of the continuation of education or employment. ASHE's National ENIC/NARIC Office conducts the procedure of professional recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for the purpose of accessing the labour market in Croatia for unregulated professions.

## NATIONAL ENIC/NARIC OFFICE

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

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

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

## RECOGNITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS

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

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

In 2020, which was marked by a global health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic whose consequences have made a profound impact on the society, including on the area of education, and consequently, on the recognition of foreign qualifications, the aim set by ENIC and NARIC Centres and stakeholders in the system of recognition of foreign education qualifications was to develop and enhance business processes in accordance with current challenges, while trying to

ensure, even under these unforeseeable circumstances, the quality and credibility of foreign qualifications recognition, as well as the application of principles of the Lisbon Convention.

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

As a consequence of the crisis caused by the pandemic, most countries made the transition to online teaching at all levels of education, which stimulated the development of criteria and tools for the recognition of "non-traditional" forms of learning, such as open learning platforms (for example, Massive Open Online Course - MOOC), the so called micro-credentials, etc.

### **Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications in Croatia**

From the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004, Croatia has been conducting the procedure of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications on the basis of the Lisbon Convention principles, or rather the Act on Approving the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, and in accordance with the [Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications](#), which replaced the Act on the Recognition of Foreign School Certificates and University Diplomas that prescribed the procedure of nostrification.

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

In accordance with the relevant legislation, ASHE conducts the procedure of professional recognition of foreign higher education qualifications (for the purpose of accessing the labour market in Croatia for unregulated professions), and the criteria that have to be met are:

- A higher education institution which awarded a qualification has to be accredited by a competent accreditation body in the country in which it is located;
- A foreign higher education programme has to be accredited by a competent accreditation body of the respective country;
- In case of a joint degree, all institutions that participate in the delivery of the study programme, as well as the study programme itself, have to be accredited by competent accreditation bodies of the respective countries in which the participating institutions are located.

The recognition procedure also includes the following criteria:

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

If the stated criteria are not met, ASHE cannot fully recognise a foreign higher education qualification, which is in accordance with the international practise.

In 2020, the National ENIC/NARIC Office:

- Fully recognised 1497 foreign higher education qualifications for the purpose of accessing the labour market;
- Replied to 176 requests for advice in the academic recognition of foreign higher education qualifications;
- Issued 74 clarifications of Croatian and foreign higher education qualifications;
- Replied to 71 requests for the verification of the accreditation of higher education institutions in the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications;
- Replied to 83 requests for the verification of qualification authenticity;
- Replied to more than 2,800 e-mail inquiries on the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications in the Republic of Croatia and abroad, as well as on foreign and Croatian higher education systems, or rather the foreign and Croatian higher education study programmes and qualifications.

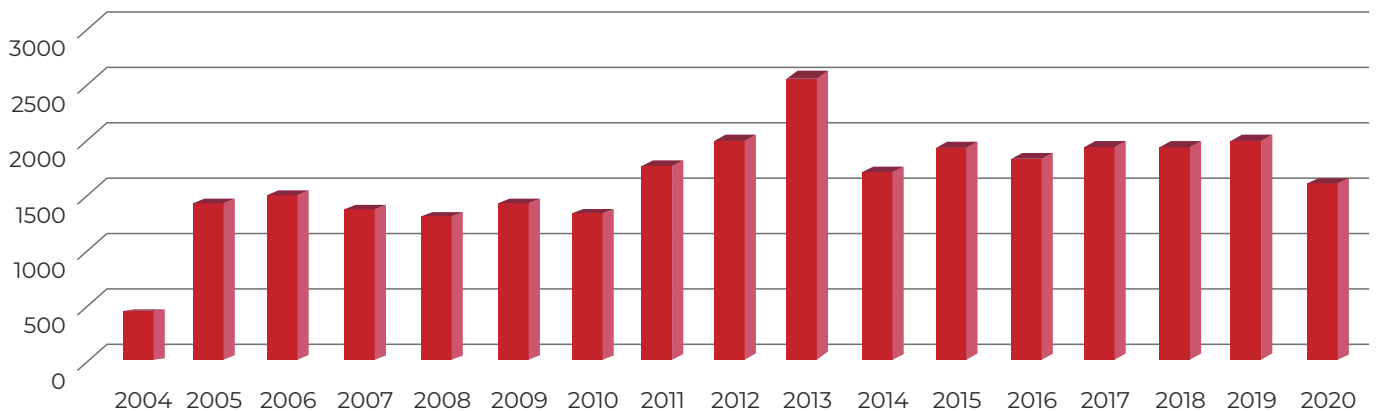


Chart 25: Number of requests for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications (2004–2020)



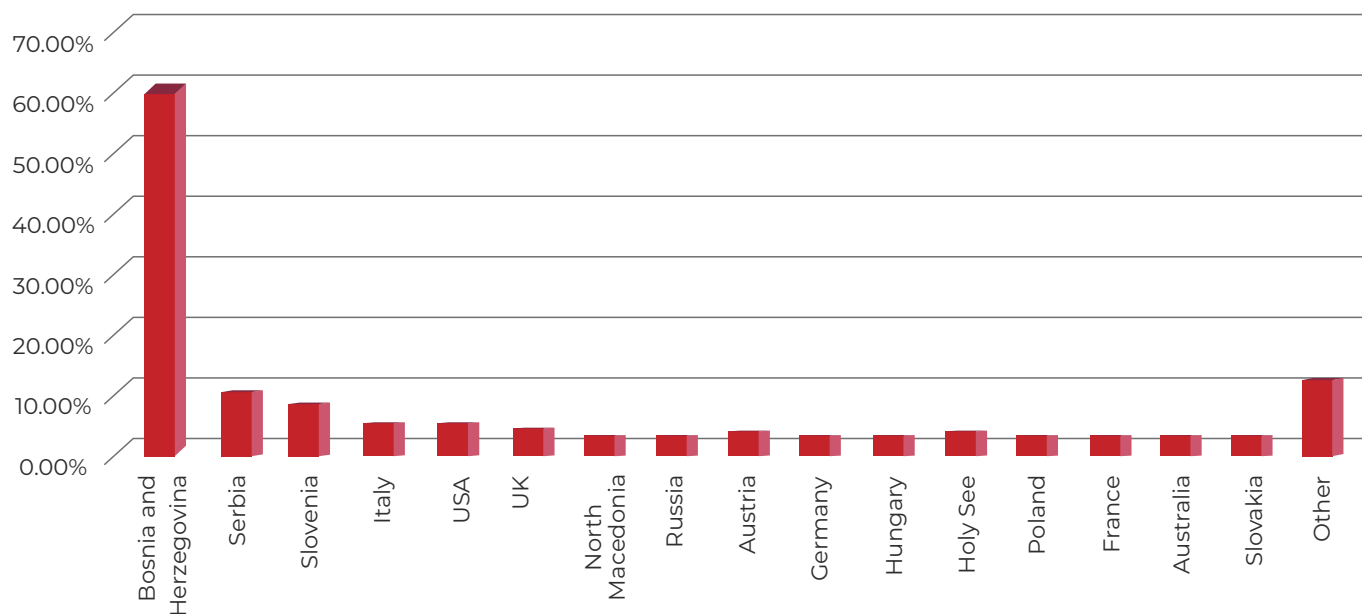


Chart 26: Percentage of higher education qualifications in the total number of requests received in 2020 (by country of origin)

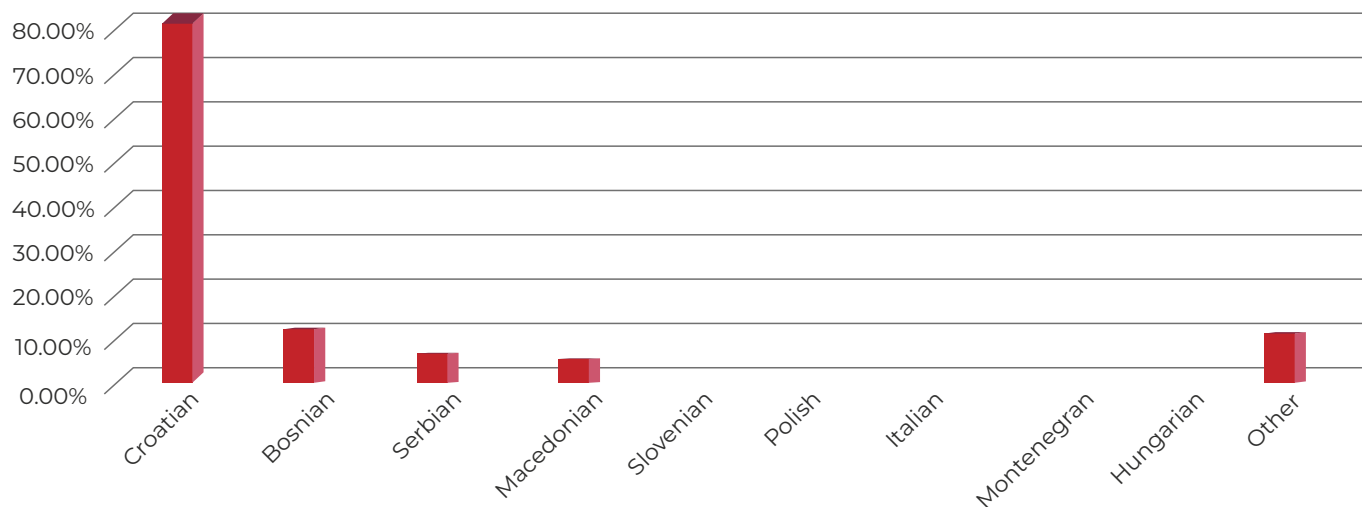


Chart 27: Percentage of higher education qualifications in the total number of requests received in 2020 (by applicant's nationality)

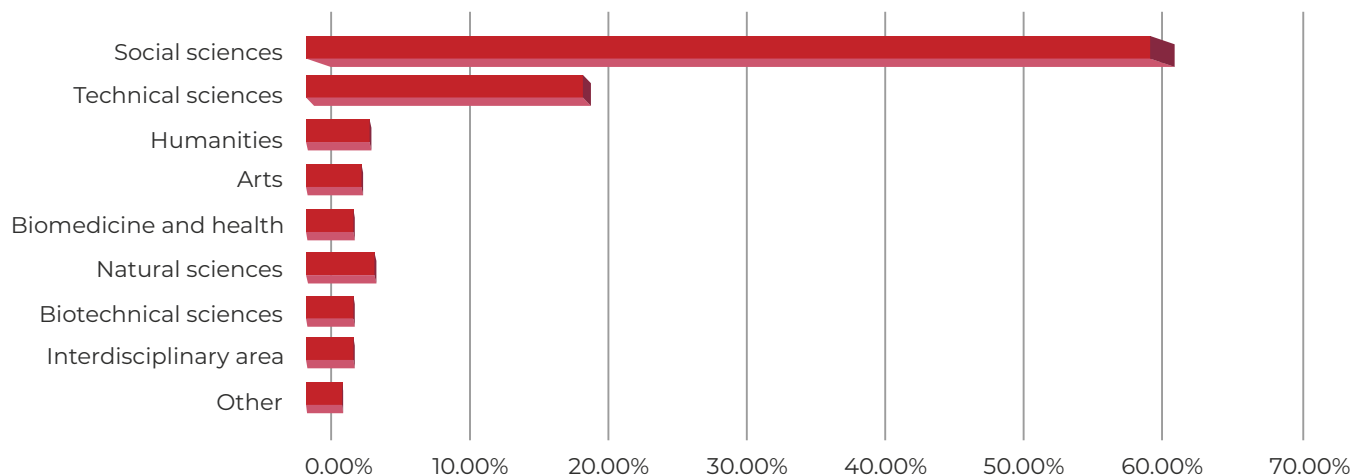


Chart 28: Percentage of higher education qualifications in the total number of requests received in 2020 (by scientific area)

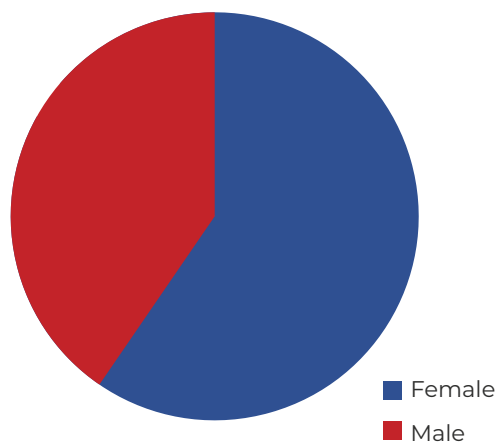


Chart 29: Percentage of higher education qualifications in the total number of requests received in 2020 (by applicant's gender)

## **ASSISTANCE CENTRE FOR PROVIDING INFORMATION ON THE RECOGNITION OF PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS**

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

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

In accordance with the Act on Regulated Professions and the Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications, i.e. Provisions of the Directive 2005/36/EC, the Assistance centre provides citizens and assistance centres of other European Economic Area (EEA) Contracting States with:

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

In 2020, the Assistance centre enhanced the modalities for providing information and the availability of relevant information within its competence, or rather modernised the bilingual digital approach. All information available online are part of the European platform *Your Europe*.

Table 5: Number of requests for the recognition of professional qualifications (2020)<sup>7</sup>

Competent authority in Croatia	The number of requests for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications (2020)
Croatian Psychological Chamber	14
Croatian Chamber of Medical Biochemists	6
Croatian Chamber of Midwives	10
Croatian Chamber of Pharmacists	39
Croatian Medical Chamber	54
Croatian Chamber of Civil Engineers	13
Central State Office for Sport	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>

<sup>7</sup> Data from the Database of Regulated Professions and Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications



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

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

Both information systems, Central Procedures Database and MOZVAG2 are continuously upgraded with the aim of a more efficient and high-quality implementation of external evaluations and provision of information to stakeholders in higher education as well as the general public.

## INFORMATION SYSTEMS

### Central Procedures Database information system

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

### MOZVAG2 information system

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

## Shut down of the old MOZVAG system and transition of all higher education institutions to the new MOZVAG2 system

Due to technical and financial challenges faced while simultaneously maintaining two systems, ASHE decided, in cooperation with the University Computing Centre (Srce), to transfer from the MOZVAG system to the MOZVAG2 system data from all higher education institutions which still haven't undergone the re-accreditation procedure in the second cycle (2017-2022), i.e. haven't received authorisation to work in the MOZVAG2 system, until the end of 2020.

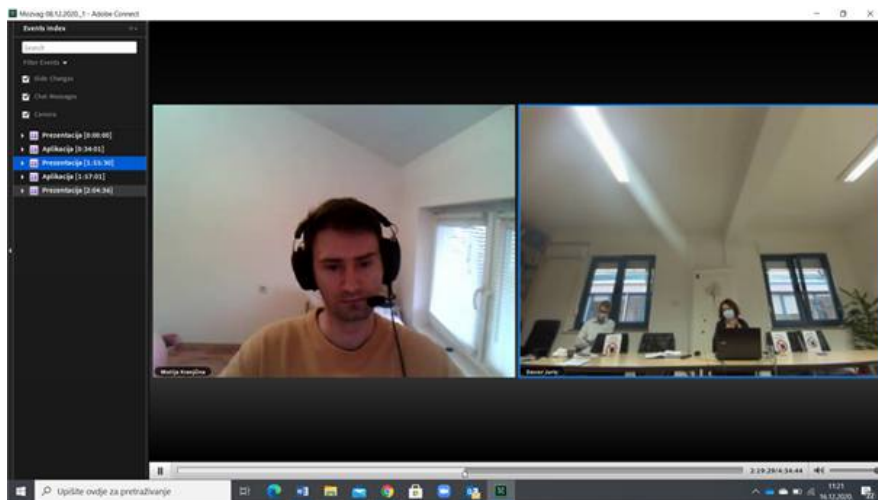
The transfer of data from the old to the new MOZVAG system was carried out in two phases - in the first phase, higher education institutions updated the information contained in the old system, and in the second phase they appointed system administrators who were trained in December 2020. All system administrators will receive authorisation to work in the MOZVAG2 system at the beginning of 2021, when the transfer of all data is planned to be completed and the "old" MOZVAG system will be shut down.

## Workshops for administrators of the upgraded MOZVAG2, CROSBİ and Project Database systems held

ASHE keeps records of authorised administrators for working with MOZVAG2 system, while the Centre for Scientific Information of the Ruđer Bošković Institute keeps records of administrators of the CROSBİ and POIROT systems. ASHE organizes regular workshops on the use of upgraded systems with the University Computing Centre and the Centre for Scientific Information of the Ruđer Bošković Institute. Based on the interest from users, it is evident that most higher education institutions are interested in using the new options.

A workshop on working in the reconstructed MOZVAG2, CROSBİ and Croatian Project Database systems for higher education institutions who underwent an evaluation procedure in 2020 took place on 25 February 2020 at the University Computing Centre. An additional workshop for CROSBİ administrators was held on 6 March 2020 at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb.

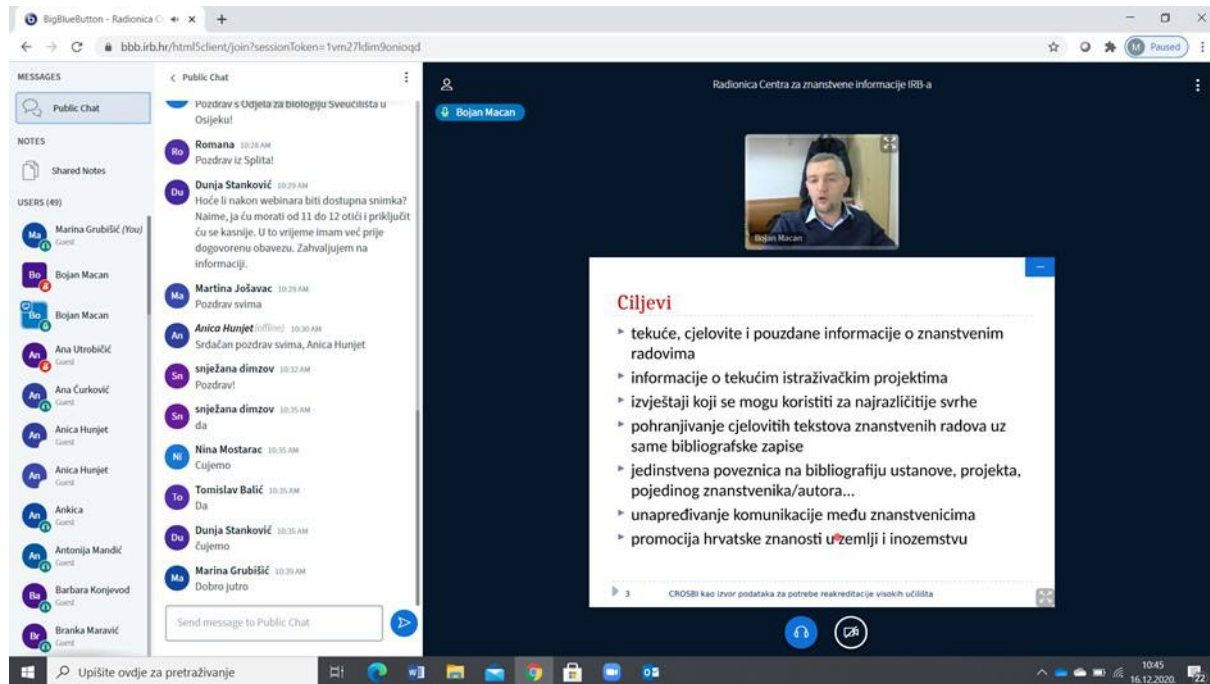
Due to the epidemiological situation, there were no additional workshops held until summer 2020. Because of the current situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, ASHE organised its first online workshop on 8 December 2020, in the form of a webinar held on the Adobe Connect platform. 86 representatives from 28 higher education institutions participated in the webinar. The webinar was primarily intended for appointed administrators of the MOZVAG2 system from higher education institutions that will undergo the re-accreditation procedure according to the 2021 Plan of re-accreditations, but also from all other higher education institutions that will complete the transition to the MOZVAG2 system by the end of 2020.



MOZVAG workshop, 8 December 2020

An additional workshop for CROSBİ administrators was held on 16 December also in a virtual environment by using the BigBlueButton application. 45 administrators from higher education institutions participated in the workshop.

An additional workshop for administrators of the POIROT Database of Project Activities was held on Thursday, 17 December 2020 in a virtual classroom by using the BigBlueButton application. 40 administrators from higher education institutions participated in the workshop.



CROSBİ workshop, 16 December 2020.

## Providing support to the work of MOZVAG2 system administrators

Communication and the exchange of opinions and experience in the work with MOZVAG2 system among ASHE, the University Computing Centre and HEI administrators is enabled within the Quality Forum on ASHE's website and through the e-mail address [mozvag@azvo.hr](mailto:mozvag@azvo.hr). Throughout 2020, more than 6000 inquiries on the work in MOZVAG2 system were received and for the purpose of a more efficient solving of user enquiries the Manual for working in MOZVAG2 system was amended. The manual is also available online. The Manual will be upgraded in the future based on frequently asked questions of users.





**ASHE INTERNATIONAL  
ACTIVITIES**

During 2020, the Agency continued its international activities in the new, changed circumstances; adjusting its operation to the current epidemiological situation, it carried out a number of cooperation activities in a virtual environment. At the beginning of the year, the Agency staff participated in international webinars and online meetings on the very topic of higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies transitioning to online work, and the challenges that arise from that. ASHE has opened a dialogue with higher education institutions in an effort to provide support and help them better prepare for the new challenges. In accordance with ENQA recommendations, ASHE conducted a part of the planned re-accreditation procedures online, by using a so-called hybrid model of re-accreditation, while maintaining a high quality of implementation and ensuring compliance with the ESG.

This year, ASHE submitted a request for international external evaluation by ENQA in order to confirm the compliance of its work with the ESG, i.e. to renew its full membership in ENQA and registration in EQAR. All European quality assurance agencies are required to undergo such an evaluation once every five years to prove the quality of their work. So far, the Agency has successfully completed this international evaluation twice, thus confirming the credibility and quality of its work, not only at the national, but also at the international level. The next external evaluation of the Agency is scheduled for the second half of 2021.

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

During 2020, the Agency also re-engaged in the implementation of a number of new international projects, and responded to calls from foreign higher education institutions for the implementation of external evaluation procedures and presentation of its work. In December 2020, ASHE participated in an online workshop “*Acquiring International Accreditation from EQAR-Registered Agencies in Europe*,” organised by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture and regional office of the *German Academic Exchange Office (DAAD)* in Jakarta with the aim of presenting the work of selected European agencies to the representatives of Indonesian higher education, i.e. public and government bodies. In addition, ASHE is currently finalising negotiations and agreement on the implementation of external evaluation of activities, i.e. re-accreditation of part of study programmes delivered by the Ukrainian *Interregional Academy of Personnel Management (IAPM)*.

Along with the implementation of the SKAZVO project and activities within other international projects in which ASHE participates as a project leader or partner, ASHE employees gave a number of presentations at international conferences, workshops and seminars, which have in 2020 mostly been held online.

ASHE continued to participate in the activities of international associations of which it is member, namely in the work of working groups of the [European Consortium for Accreditation](#) – ECA, dealing with topics such as internationalization of higher education, mutual recognition of accreditation decisions and joint studies, and innovation in accreditation procedures.

## MEMBERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

ASHE is part of an international quality assurance system in higher education and science as an established and active member.

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

## INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

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

Table 6: Projects funded by the European Union and other sources

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

Project name	Partners	Coordinating institution	Duration	EU programme source of funding
<i>Allocating Credit to European Professional Training Programmes (ACEPT)</i>	NARIC centres from Latvia, Malta, NUFFIC (Netherlands)	UK NARIC	Beginning of 2018 – March, 2020	Erasmus +
<a href="#"><i>Evaluating e-learning for academic recognition (e-Valuate)</i></a>	ENIC and NARIC centres from Denmark, Lithuania, Norway, Ireland, United Kingdom, vice president of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, ECA and KIRON representative	NUFFIC, NL	March, 2018 – March, 2020	Erasmus +
<i>Keep innovation in Multi Partnership Cooperation in Lifelong Guidance Services (KEEP IN PACT)</i>	Universcience-Cité des métiers de Paris (France), Learning digital (Italy), Municipio do Porto-Cidade das Profissoes (Portugal), LifeLong Learning Platform (Belgium)	French network <i>Réseau international des Cités des métiers</i>	September 2019 – December 2021	Erasmus +
<i>Enhancing the Coverage and Connectivity of QA in the EHEA through DEQAR (DEQAR CONNECT)</i>	ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE and representatives of stakeholders from the European higher education system (Education International - global union of teachers), and representatives of Bologna thematic groups	EQAR, CIMEA ITA	January 2020 – December 2021	Erasmus +

Project name	Partners	Coordinating institution	Duration	EU programme source of funding
<i>Effective partnership for enhanced recognition (EPER)</i>	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia	MSE, Republic of Croatia	May 2019 – April 2021	Erasmus +
<i>Stacking credits &amp; the future of the qualification (STACQ)</i>	UHR (Sweden), QQI (Ireland), Art of e-learning, (Great Britain), ECA (Netherlands), NARIC centre (Ectis Ltd., Great Britain), EADTU (Netherlands), NCFHE (Malta), SKVC (Lithuania)	NUFFIC, NL	June 2020 – May 2022	Erasmus +
<i>Automatic Recognition in the Adriatic Region (AdReN)</i>	NARIC centres of Croatia, Greece and Slovenia and IUAV (University of Venice)	CIMEA, ITA	June 2020 – May 2022	Erasmus +
<i>Online course catalogues and databases for transparency and recognition (OCTRA)</i>	NARIC centres of Latvia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia and Poland, ENIC centres of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Russia, higher education institutions from Latvia, Rectors' Conference and Student Union of Latvia, as well as the associated relevant stakeholders.	NARIC, LV	June 2020 – May 2022	Erasmus +

# OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME EFFICIENT HUMAN RESOURCES 2014-2020 EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND (ESF)

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

The SKAZVO project (Improvement of Quality Assurance and Enhancement Systems at Higher Education Institutions) was co-financed by the European Union within the framework of the Operational Programme "Efficient Human Resources" from the European Social Fund. Project activities include the improvement of existing and development of new models of external quality assurance procedures in higher education in Croatia and a series of activities aimed at strengthening the competencies of higher education staff, strengthening the internationalization of higher education institutions and further involving students in quality assurance.

The project will introduce a number of new activities, such as collecting information on about the higher education sector, informing the general public, and developing counselling services for present and future students. It will also strengthen the role of ASHE as an educator at the national and international levels, with thematic seminars and workshops for higher education institution and other relevant stakeholders, organised by ASHE either solely or jointly with experts from a particular field.

The activities financed by the SKAZVO project also include the participation of ASHE's employees in conferences and seminars, study visits, system reconstruction and improvement, analysis of business processes, improvement of information system and the link between higher education and labour market, developing visual identity, printing of professional publications, project conferences, etc.

On 23 September 2020, ASHE organised a conference "[Evaluation](#) of doctoral studies in Croatia - overview of re-accreditation" and also presented the publication "Overview of Re-accreditation of Doctoral Studies in the Republic of Croatia".

On account of high participant satisfaction with the workshops held over the last two years, the Agency for Science and Higher Education has in 2020 organized the third round of workshops for career advisers at HEIs, teachers, psychological counselling staff and employees of other student support services. A total of six workshops was organised. The aim of the new round of workshops was to expand their reach to all student support services, in order to strengthen their competencies, their role and mutual networking, with the purpose of continuous development of student experience in the context of student-centred approach to learning and teaching.

In July 2020, ASHE organised an online meeting of the national network of quality assurance units at higher education institutions (CroQAnet).

This was a seventh meeting of the CroQAnet network, attended by representatives of higher education institutions in charge of internal quality assurance. The participants discussed the social dimension of higher education and quality assurance and ASHE's measures for fulfilling goals of the National Plan for Enhancing the Social Dimension of Higher

Education in the Republic of Croatia for 2019-2021. A system of student support was also discussed, and participants also had the opportunity to learn about the ways in which HEIs can implement global sustainable development goals.

In cooperation with the University Computing Centre (SRCE) and the Centre for Scientific Information of the Ruđer Bošković Institute, ASHE organizes regular workshops on MOZVAG and CROSBİ information systems. In 2020, three such workshops were organised for administrators at higher education institutions.

In December, ASHE organised a webinar “The future is (not) online: ensuring the quality of online studies”. The aim of the webinar was to open a discussion on quality assurance of online study programmes, and to point out the difference between this form of study and the emergency online delivery of study programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were also presented with the Considerations for Quality Assurance of E-learning Provision of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), according to which higher education institutions conducting online or mixed study programmes should adapt their internal quality assurance systems to guarantee the quality of the learning and teaching processes. The participants of the webinar had the opportunity to learn about the accreditation of online studies, and the requirements which higher education institution and study programmes need to meet in order to obtain the license. The requirements include HEI's strategic commitment to online studies, student support aimed at reducing dropout rates, appropriate infrastructure and technical prerequisites, required level of digital competencies of teachers and students, customized teaching methods, appropriate student assessment system, etc. The participants were also presented with the results of the ASHE research from 2019 on the state of online studies in Croatia and the main motives of higher education institutions for their introduction.

As part of the SKAZVO project, ASHE conducted a research “Challenges in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation: experiences and needs of students and HEI staff”. The research was conducted with the aim of better understanding the impact of extraordinary circumstances, such as pandemic and social isolation, on study and teaching experiences.

Data were collected in June and July 2020 through an e-questionnaire, with participation of students and staff from all over Croatia. Through individual thematic units: technological conditions of studying in an online environment during extraordinary circumstances, quality of online teaching, quality of student support, assessment, student workload and socio-psychological aspects of teaching in an online environment, the participants were presented with different challenges of studying and working in extraordinary circumstances, and as well as desirable forms of support of higher education institutions and other relevant bodies in the system of higher education.

#### **SKAZVO seminars and workshops:**

- “The future is (not) online: ensuring the quality of online studies” webinar, 18/12/2020
- “MOZVAG2, CROSBİ and Project Database systems” webinar, 18/12/2020
- “Challenges in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation: experiences and needs of students and HEI staff” webinar, 30/9/2020
- “Evaluation of doctoral studies in Croatia - overview of re-accreditation” conference (live and streamed online), Zagreb, 23/9/2020
- 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Croatian National Network of IQA Units at HEI (CroQAnet), webinar, 2/7/2020

- Careerering: "Fear of public speaking" online workshop, 16/9/2020
- Careerering: "What lies behind the degree: competency-based career planning and management", online workshop, 29/4/2020
- Workshop for CROSBİ administrators, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, 6/3/2020
- Workshop on reconstructed MOZVAG2, CROSBİ and Project Database systems, Zagreb, 25/2/2020
- Careerering: "Millennial students", workshop, Zagreb, 27/1/2020

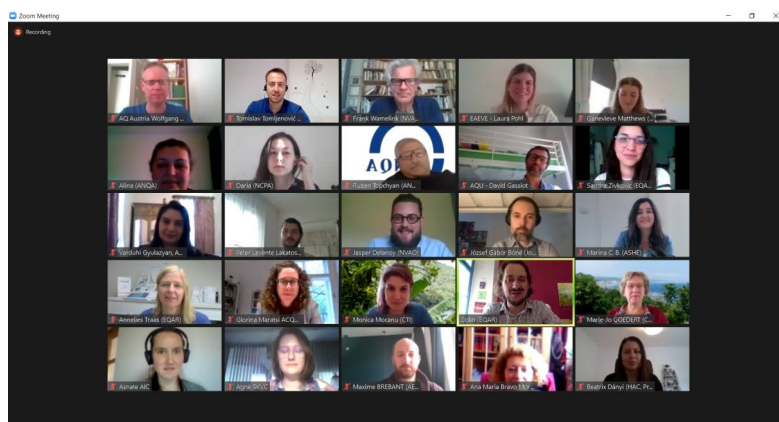
## ERASMUS + PROGRAMME

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

ASHE is a partner in the *Enhancing the Coverage and Connectivity of QA in the EHEA through DEQAR* (DEQAR CONNECT) project led by EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education), register of European [quality assurance](#) agencies. [DEQAR](#) CONNECT is a two-year project, lasting from January 2020 to 31 December 2021, which continues on several earlier projects financed by the European Commission, among which the *Database of External Quality Assurance Reports* (DEQAR). DEQAR aimed at developing a European database with information on the results of the evaluation on higher education institutions. ASHE was one of the partners in this project. DEQAR CONNECT, on the other hand, aims to expand this database to include agencies in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that were not previously covered by the DEQAR project, as well as to improve the use of DEQAR data.

In May 2020, the first meeting of project partners was organised, in addition to a kick-off webinar for European quality assurance agencies in higher education. Around forty participants had the opportunity to learn about the DEQAR database, which contains information on the HEI evaluation outcomes, its capabilities, and technical requirements that agencies need to meet in order to join the database.

As a project partner and webinar host, ASHE presented its experiences of joining DEQAR.



DEOAR project online meeting

The first virtual meeting of the Advisory Group, which monitors the project implementation, was also held within the project. In addition to representatives of partners and project leaders (EQAR, ASHE and CIMEA), the meeting was attended by representatives of associated project partners (ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE), and representatives of stakeholders from the European higher education system (*Education International* - global union of teachers), as well as representatives of the Bologna Follow up thematic groups, dealing with quality assurance and recognition of foreign qualifications.



## Stacking credits & the future of the qualification (STACQ)

Calls for funding of [NARIC network](#) projects within the ERASMUS+ KA3 programme were in 2020 thematically focused on improving the automatic recognition of all forms of learning, including digital or virtual learning. This trend poses a challenge in the current practice of foreign [qualification](#) recognition in Europe. It was also the reason for launching the *Stacking credits & the future of the qualification (STACQ)* project, the consortium consisting of ENIC and NARIC centres of the Netherlands, Malta, Lithuania, Sweden and Great Britain, while ASHE participates as a long-time member (and a *Steering Group* member) of the [ECA \(European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education\)](#). The project started in June 2020 and will last until the end of May 2022.

The project aims:

1. To develop an online application for easier evaluation of [MOOCs](#).

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

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

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

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

Target groups include ENIC-NARIC centres, LRC Committee Bureau, admissions officers at higher education institutions, students, quality assurance agencies in higher education, online education providers and policy makers. The project goals are to provide ENIC-NARIC centres and admissions officers at European HEIs with a tool for a more efficient assessment of learning outcomes obtained through online learning; to ensure a development of more effective recognition practices for e-learning; to enable ENIC-NARIC networks to prepare for the impact of the new types of learning units on current practices for recognition of foreign qualifications, and finally, to support learning mobility based on new forms of learning in the EU and EHEA. Project team's kick-off meeting was held online on 14 December 2020.

## Automatic Recognition in the Adriatic Region – AdReN

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

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

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

The project partners include the NARIC centres of Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia and the IUAV University of Venice, and planned activities include drafting of a comprehensive comparative table of Pre-Bologna and Bologna qualifications (academic qualifications and those ensuring access to higher education) in partner countries that are referenced to the EHEA Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework, together with a comparative study of the different higher education systems. As fostering automatic recognition also implies removing the obstacles towards it, the project is going to focus on substantial differences and transnational education in the region. The project started on 1 June 2020 and it will last until the 31 May 2022.

### **Allocating Credit to European Professional Training Programmes (ACEPT)**

Croatian [ENIC/NARIC Office](#), together with Malta ENIC office and [NUFFIC](#) from the Netherlands participates in the ACEPT project as a partner. The project leader is UK NARIC. The project began in 2018, and ended in 2020. The goal of this project is to further strengthen the use of the European tools for the identification/recognition of qualifications and increasing the visibility of their content. Some of these tools are the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), qualification frameworks etc., for the purpose of promoting synergy among similar educational systems and practices to make the evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications as best as possible and based on trust among the states. The aim of this project was to encourage the usage of learning outcomes in the evaluation of foreign qualifications obtained in different forms of education - formal, informal and non-formal - which will additionally help in the creation of the methodology for the evaluation of professional training and similar lifelong learning programmes.

### **Evaluating e-learning for academic recognition (e-Valuate)**

The aim of the *e-Valuate* project was to contribute to the further development of public policies in the area of recognition of new forms of online learning in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The goal was to develop support for higher education institutions and ENIC and NARIC centres in the assessment of competencies, knowledge and skills acquired through new forms of online learning, such as MOOCs (*Massive Open Online Courses*) and SPOCs (*Small Personal Online Courses*). The project started on 1 March 2018 and ended on 29 February 2020.

Project consortium comprises representatives of ENIC and NARIC centres from Denmark, Lithuania, Norway, Ireland, United Kingdom and the Netherlands, as well as vice president of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, a representative of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA), and a representative of KIRON

Open Higher Education for Refugees. ASHE participated in this project as a member of the [ECA \(European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education\) Steering Group](#).

The e-Valuate project resulted in two publications: *Practitioner'S guide for recognition of e-learning; Introducing a step-by-step approach towards academic recognition of stand-alone e-learning* and [Academic recognition of e-learning; Recommendations for online learning providers](#).

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

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

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

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

In addition to the second transnational project meeting held on 20 February 2020 in Florence, a virtual focus group was organised in September for the topic of changing competencies in the world after COVID-19 pandemic (*Multi-partnership cooperation in lifelong career guidance: changing competences in a post-COVID-19 world*).

Participants of the focus group meeting discussed past experiences in managing multi-partnership cooperation, changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as possible improvements in multi-partnership cooperation in order to respond to future user needs in the context of the economic crisis. The discussion also touched on what tools to use to improve the multi-partnership cooperation in order to effectively adapt to the new situation, and what competencies (including digital) need to be developed to meet the new requirements regarding the management of partnership cooperation.

### **Effective partnership for enhanced recognition (EPER)**

EPER project was co-financed by the support of ERASMUS+ programme of the European union - Key action 3/KA3/ -

Support for policy reform. The Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia is lead partner in the project, while partner countries include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia. The project objective is to enhance the recognition procedures and practices in partner countries, strengthen capacities for the implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and strengthen regional cooperation in addition to the exchange of experience and good practices among partners from Southeast Europe. ASHE representatives contribute to the implementation of the project activities by providing expertise in the area of recognition of foreign higher education qualifications. On 21 September 2020, an online workshop was held on current trends in academic recognition of foreign education qualifications.

The representatives of the University of Ljubljana, University of Rijeka, Agency for Science and Higher Education and Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina (CIP), partner country, presented examples of good practice and challenges in current trends in academic recognition. Representatives of ASHE presented external quality assurance in higher education in the context of academic recognition, i.e. its quality implementation at higher education institutions. The key objectives of the workshop were to provide up-to-date information on policy developments and current practices related to the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications for the purpose of continuation of studies, and to enable discussion between representatives of higher education institutions and ENIC/NARIC offices from partner countries. The workshop was intended for representatives of higher education institutions and institutions responsible for the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.

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

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

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

OCTRA project partners include NARIC centres of Latvia, Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia and Poland, ENIC centres of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Russia, higher education institutions from Latvia, Rectors' Conference and Student Union of Latvia, as well as the associated relevant stakeholders. The project lasts from June 2020 to May 2022.

## EUROGRADUATE project - employability of graduates: survey results

Graduate tracking is key for improving the education system, is one of the conclusions of the pilot survey of graduate study and employment experience within the framework of the Eurograduate project, the results of which were published by the European Commission early in June 2020 as part of the publication entitled *Eurograduate Pilot Survey – Design and implementation of a pilot European graduate survey* and the overview of results of *Eurograduate Pilot Study – Key findings*. Along with Croatia, seven other European countries participated in the project: Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Malta and Norway, which enabled comparison of study and living conditions of graduates in different European countries. National survey reports will be published subsequently. The survey involved 21,000 graduates who graduated from an undergraduate or graduate study in the academic years 2012/2013 and 2016/2017, i.e. one and five years after graduation. The Croatian part of the survey was carried out from October to December 2018 by the Agency for Science and Higher Education and the Faculty of Law of the University of Zagreb. Comprehensive data were gathered on the respondents' origin, their mother tongue, socio-economic background, education, professional experience, current employment and family status, place of residence and mobility, as well as opinions about various topics, such as applicability of skills developed during higher education. Some of the conclusions of the survey indicate that experience abroad during the period of study enhances problem solving skills. Activating learning environments with mixed instruction styles, where problem / project-based learning supplements the traditional methods, enable better preparation for the labour market. The results of the pilot survey will enable insight into the issue of transition of graduates to the labour market, for the purpose of conducting more comprehensive surveys and improving the training and education in Europe.

## COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS FROM THE AREA OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENCE AND PRESENTATION OF ASHE'S WORK ABROAD

### ASHE presentation of Croatian QA system to Indonesian HEIs

At the online workshop *Acquiring International Accreditation from EQAR-Registered Agencies*, held on 9-10 December 2020, ASHE presented its activities and the Croatian quality assurance system to higher education institutions from Indonesia. The aim of the workshop was to encourage European [quality assurance](#) agencies to promote their work in Indonesia, as well as to provide relevant information regarding the standards and procedures they implement. One of the goals was also to improve the cooperation in the field of higher education between Europe and Indonesia.

As part of the Indonesian education reform programme, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia developed a Plan for international accreditation of study programmes of Indonesian higher education institutions, aimed at promoting international accreditation of study programmes. In order to achieve this goal, the German Academic Exchange Service, ([DAAD](#)), organised this 2-day online workshop in cooperation with the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. In addition to ASHE, ten other QA agencies registered in [EQAR](#) presented their work to Indonesian partners, namely the agencies from Germany, United Kingdom, France, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Lithuania.

On the second day of the event, the ASHE representatives, Ms. Ivana Borošić, Head of the Department for Accreditation in Higher Education, and Mr.Sc. Mina Đorđević, Head of the Department for International Cooperation, presented the work of ASHE, the system of higher education in Croatia, the evaluation procedures Agency conducts, and its experiences in previous international accreditations.

### **Meeting of Prof. Jasmina Havranek, Ph.D. with the Ambassador of India to the Republic of Croatia**

At the invitation of Mr. Raj Kumar Srivastava, the new ambassador of India to the Republic of Croatia, in December of 2020 the acting Director of ASHE, Prof. Jasmina Havranek, Ph.D., held a working meeting with the ambassador at the Indian Embassy in Zagreb. The meeting was an opportunity to present the work of the Agency and the results of successful cooperation with the Embassy of India, as well as the cooperation with Indian universities and research institutes, but also to discuss opportunities for future cooperation.



Front page of the publication *Advancing quality in European higher education: celebrating 20 years of ENQA*

### **ASHE paper in ENQA publication on quality development of European higher education**

Celebrating 20 years of its work for the European higher education, ENQA published an anniversary publication “Advancing quality in European higher education: celebrating 20 years of ENQA”; ASHE contributed with an article “Development and impact of a quality assurance system – a view from Croatia”, which describes the development of quality assurance system in Croatia, its current features in a broader context, and its impact on the national system of higher education and science. The publication was issued in December of 2020.

### **ENQA webinar for heads of European agencies**

On 20 May 2020, a webinar was held for the heads of European agencies for quality assurance in higher education. The Acting Director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, Prof. Jasmina Havranek, Ph.D., participated in the event. The webinar was organised by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in order to stimulate discussion on the challenges faced by the agencies during the COVID-19 pandemic, and ways in which agencies' operation should be adjusted.

Around 40 heads of European QA agencies participated in the webinar, and had an opportunity to hear experiences of the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Dutch Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), and to share experiences of their future organisations and directions of the future work. The webinar was moderated by the director of ENQA.

## ENQA General Assembly

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ENQA Board made a decision to cancel the ENQA General Assembly and 20th anniversary celebrations in their physical format. The events were planned to take place in October 2020 in Brussels, Belgium. In place of the physical events, a short online General Assembly was organised in October 2020, and the next Members' Forum and General Assembly, as well as the celebrations to mark ENQA's 20th anniversary, will take place in April 2021. The events will take place in Brussels, if the conditions permit, and will be hosted by AEQES, VLUHR-QA and MusiQuE.

As noted, this year's [ENQA General Assembly](#) was held online. The agenda included elections and prolongations of mandates for ENQA Board and Presidency, appointments of new members of ENQA Appeals and Complaints Committee, presentation of the Annual Activity Report, and other ongoing activities and plans.

## ENQA Leadership Programme

ASHE continuously invests in the professional development and education of its staff. To this end, one ASHE employee participated in three seminars of the ENQA Leadership 2019 programme. The host of the third and last seminar, held on 4-6 March 2020 in Den Haag, was the Dutch accreditation agency *De Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie* (NVAO). At the seminar, the participants learned about the work and role of the host agency, and had the opportunity to discuss the agency management and challenges with quality assurance with the head of the agency, Dr. Flierman. During the seminar, a panel discussion was held with stakeholders from the higher education system on the topic of ensuring and improving the quality of higher education. The emphasis of the third seminar was on the development of the higher education system and the management of evaluation teams. The practical part of the training was conducted through a simulation of building an education system by taking into account the geographical-sociological-political context.

The aim of the programme was for participants to learn about the managerial competencies in the context of QA agencies' work, including the complexity of cooperation of different stakeholders in evaluation processes. The programme was attended by 24 participants from 16 countries, i.e. 18 different ENQA member agencies.

## European Quality Assurance Forum

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2020 European Quality Assurance Forum ([EQAF 2020](#)) was organised in the form of online sessions. The 2020 EQAF online event, entitled flexible higher education: implications for QA - combined online sessions about European policies and trends, research, and practical case examples related to the Forum theme and more generally about current developments in quality assurance.

Responding to current societal changes, higher education institutions are increasingly inclusive and accommodate diverse student populations. In addition, as part of the move towards student-centred learning, institutions are expected to allow students to choose the pace, place and mode of delivery. These developments are leading to the emergence of more





agencies for quality assurance in higher education. The results will be summarized in a publication, providing information on various aspects of agencies - operation with regard to their independence.

The plan is to hold such short online meetings of CEENQA members every two months, with the aim of presenting the work of each member agency and creating a platform for cooperation, projects, etc. The second meeting was held in November 2020. At the meeting, CEENQA members discussed the challenges of working in a virtual environment.

### **Meetings of ECA Consortium**

Representatives of ASHE participated in the regular meeting of [ECA](#) (European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education - ECA) that took place on 20-21 January 2020 in Israel. The meetings were hosted by the *Israeli Council for Higher Education - CHE*. The participants were informed of the quality assurance system of higher education in Israel, and the challenges faced by its stakeholders.

In addition to the meetings of the working groups, a joint meeting of ECA members and ECA Board was also held.

In June and December 2020, the regular ECA Board meetings and meetings of ECA members were organised online. The participants discussed the new ECA strategic framework, joining of new potential ECA members, improvement of ECA online platform for the implementation of the *Certificate for Quality in Internationalization* evaluation, and topics for the new cycle of educational webinars.

### **ECA webinar**

On 26 May 2020, ECA organised a webinar "*Responses to Covid-19 Pandemic Situation from ECA Agencies*" to exchange information on how the member agencies responded to the new circumstances caused by the pandemic. The focus was placed on two challenges the agencies face at this time: shift to online external QA procedures and support to HEIs in their adaptation to remote virtual learning.

This was the first of two ECA webinars organised for the purpose of encouraging a dialogue between members, and the exchange of experience and good practice. As a long-standing member of the Association, ASHE actively contributes to these important topics, and is involved in all ECA activities related to support for working online.

## ECA WG1 online meeting

On 24 September 2020, ECA Working Group 1 - in which ASHE has a representative - organised an online meeting.

ASHE is a long-standing member of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA). The vision of ECA is to act as internationally recognized driver of innovation in the field of accreditation and quality assurance in higher education. Representatives of ASHE actively contribute to the work of ECA bodies and working groups, which cover various topics and work towards improving the quality of higher education in Europe - internationalization of higher education, mutual recognition and joint studies, innovation in accreditation procedures, etc.

Working group 1, "Mutual recognition and joint programmes" focuses on mutual recognition of accreditation, of joint study programmes in particular. Evaluating the implementation of these agreements, further developing of the mutual recognition methodology and identifying the most useful areas of application in cooperation with stakeholders such as ENIC-NARICs and joint programmes are central features of the current work of WG 1. At the meeting, the WG exchanged information on the ongoing projects of NUFFIC (*The Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education*), in which ECA representatives also participate. These are the recently approved ERASMUS + projects, launched in October 2020: STACQ - *Stacking credits & the future of the qualification* and I-AR, a large project aimed at developing a platform for automatic recognition of foreign qualifications that brings together a number of stakeholders. The "I-AR" project aims to approach the implementation of the concept of automatic recognition from three levels - European, national and institutional, and is focused on developing instruments that will facilitate implementation, procedure improvement and strengthening of human resources.

Participants also continued discussion on the implementation of the principles of [\*European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes\*](#), adopted by European ministers for higher education with the aim of facilitating and improving quality assurance of joint study programmes. These standards are based on agreed instruments at the level of EHEA, without additional national requirements for the accreditation of joint studies. WG members also discussed the university consortia development projects and challenges of implementing quality evaluations of such consortia in the context of the ongoing pandemic, which does not allow for the traditional implementation external quality assurance procedures, i.e. site visits to HEIs.

## Final conference of ImpEA project

In December 2020, ASHE representatives participated in the final conference of the ERASMUS+ project *Facilitating Implementation of the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* ([\*ImpEA\*](#)), which was held online.

The project was led by the *Polish Accreditation Committee* (PKA), with partners *The European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education* (ECA), *The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA), *Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes* (AQAS), *The Basque University System Quality Assurance Agency* (Unibasq), *Adam Mickiewicz University* (AMU), *The University of Deusto* (UD), *The Warsaw School of*

*Tourism and Hospitality Management* and *The Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg*, and associated partner *The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)*.

The main aim of the project is to support efficient implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes by: (i) Identifying key obstacles in implementation of the European Approach in the European Higher Education Area in general, and project partner countries in particular, (ii) Supporting partner QA agencies in running EA-based programme accreditation procedures (*ex ante* and *ex post*), (iii) Supporting partner HEI in pursuing the external accreditation based on the European Approach, and (iv) Developing [EA implementation toolkit](#) - set of recommendations and proposed solutions for the policy makers and QA agencies.

The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (adopted by Ministers in 2015 in Yerevan) is considered a huge step forward in removing barriers in quality assurance of joint programmes. This approach makes it possible that one EQAR-registered agency carries out a single QA procedure of a joint programme using the agreed European criteria and methodology. The outcomes of this single QA procedure should then be accepted by the other EHEA countries that are involved in the joint programme.

### **Webinars and online meetings of ENIC and NARIC networks**

Representatives of [National ENIC NARIC Office at ASHE](#) have in 2020 participated in the 27<sup>th</sup> regular annual meeting of [ENIC \(European Network of Information Centres in the European Region\) and NARIC \(National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union\) networks](#). The online meeting was organised in two parts, held on 15 June and 6 October 2020. This year's topics were related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the plenary was dedicated to the recognition of foreign qualifications during the coronavirus crisis. This traditional international meeting of [ENIC and NARIC networks](#) was organized by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, and was accompanied by seven thematic seminars held during the autumn of 2020. Webinars included topics such as digitalization of the recognition process; recognition of e-learning, especially via digital platforms such as MOOCs; automatic (academic) recognition of foreign qualifications; and European Qualifications Passport for Refugees.

The traditional annual meeting of the members of NARIC network was in 2020 also organised online. The December meeting was attended by a representative of the National ENIC/NARIC Office of ASHE. Discussions revolved around the impact of the current situation on the procedures for recognition of foreign higher education qualifications. Special emphasis was put on the need for digitalisation of the recognition process, and the recognition of 'micro-credentials'.

### **MIPRO 2020**

The 43rd International Conference on Information, Communication and Electronic Technology - MIPRO 2020 was held in Opatija from 28 September to 2 October 2020. Due to the current epidemiological situation, the meeting was held in a hybrid form. The event was attended by a representative of ASHE, who presented her paper on the *Role of Business Intelligence Systems in Croatian Higher Education Quality Assurance*. The mission of the MIPRO conferences is to provide

guidelines for development of technology and society as a whole. Round tables on the topic of *GDPR - Are we on the right track?* and *Intelligent Production* were organised at the event, with the presentations of the participants.

### **ASHE representative appointed to EMREX Executive Committee**

A representative of ASHE in charge of applications to study programmes was appointed to the EMREX network Executive Committee for the period 2020 - 2022. The aim of this Network is to stimulate student mobility and encourage students to control their student data and their exchange more effectively, especially outside of their countries.

The Executive Committee was appointed at the Annual Assembly held in June, and also comprises the following members: Tor Fridell (LADOK, Sweden), Geir Vangen (UNIT, Norway), Jukka Kohtanen (CSC, Finland), Jan-Joost Norder (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs, The Netherlands) and Janina Mincer-Daszkiewicz (University of Warsaw, Poland). ASHE has been a member of EMREX since 2018.

### **International conference on EU funds**

A representative of ASHE attended the international conference on EU funds titled *Strategic preparations of development programmes and projects for ESI funding in the period 2021-2027*, which was held on 1-2 October 2020 in Trakošćan. This is an important year for all current and future beneficiaries of EU funds, on account of preparation of programmes, goals and priorities, development projects and strategic documents. Representatives of Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania shared their experiences and recommendations to the participants of this international conference. The aims of the conference were to inform the participants on the status of the national development strategy and operational programmes, to learn from the experiences of other member states how to strategically prepare for the new EU funding period 2021-2027, and how to start preparing own strategic development projects.

### **Online meeting on the rights of internationally displaced persons, refugees and asylum seekers**

A representative of the National ENIC/NARIC Office of ASHE participated in an online seminar "Forced Migration" that was held on 10-11 December 2020 within the *Legal Status and Protection of Internationally Displaced Persons, Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Invisible - Persons without IDs - [Forced Migrations](#)* project, organised by the Faculty of Law, University of Osijek.

A presentation on the procedures for the recognition of refugees and asylum seekers in the Republic of Croatia was held within the Labour Law and Social Insurance working group.

## PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLISHED PAPERS

- Havranek, J. *Synergy of higher education, science and economy for a more competitive society*, Prsten Business Forum 2020, Zagreb, Croatia, 12 February 2020
- Havranek, J. *Human resources in higher education*, Virtual Career Week, Faculty of Economics, University of Rijeka, 5 November 2020
- Havranek, J. *Challenges of higher education in the context of COVID-19 pandemic*, 2nd international scientific professional conference Innovation: Guaranteeing the future of agribusiness in Croatia, online meeting of the Croatian Society of Agricultural Economists, 27 November 2020
- Havranek J., *Human resources as an organisational quality factor*, undergraduate professional study programme in Nursing, course: Management in Healthcare (lecture), University North, Koprivnica, 21 December 2020
- Havranek, J.; Đorđević, M.; Plužarić, Ž. *The lesson from the corona crisis: care for students and teachers should be the highest priority*, Global University Network for Innovation (<http://www.guninetwork.org/report/lesson-corona-crisis-care-students-and-teachers-should-be-highest-priority>)
- Havranek, J., Petrušić, I., Plužarić, Ž., Biščan, I. *Development and impact of a quality assurance system – a view from Croatia*; in: Advancing quality in European higher education: celebrating 20 years of ENQA, Brussels, December 2020
- Havranek, J. (Editor); Petrušić, I. *Quality Assurance of Scientific Activity in Croatia - Analysis of Evaluation Methodologies*, Zagreb, December 2020
- Bezjak, S. *Fifteen Years of Bologna Study Programmes - Findings of Re-accreditation Procedures*, round table on the forms of education in future, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, 4 March 2020
- Bezjak, S. *Accreditation of online study programmes*, 4th University Quality Day: Studying and Teaching - Challenges 2020, webinar, 27 November 2020
- Bezjak, S., Đorđević, M., Plužarić, Ž. *Challenges in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic and social isolation: experiences and needs of students and HEI staff*, ASHE webinar, 30 September 2020
- Bezjak, S., Đorđević, M., Plužarić, Ž. *Results of research on studying at Croatian higher education institutions under exceptional circumstances*, 4th University Quality Day: Studying and Teaching - Challenges 2020, webinar, 27 November 2020
- Biščan I. *ENQA Considerations for quality assurance of e-learning provision* ASHE webinar *The future is (not) online: ensuring the quality of online studies*, 18 December 2020
- Biščan I. *Overview of online study programmes in the Republic of Croatia* ASHE webinar *The future is (not) online: ensuring the quality of online studies*, 18 December 2020
- Borošić, I., Đorđević, M. *Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education (Croatia)*, Acquiring International Accreditation from EQAR-Registered Agencies in Europe, Ministry of Education & Culture of the Republic of Indonesia & DAAD Joint Online Workshop, 9 - 10 December 2020
- Cvitanušić Brečić, M. *ASHE measures for the National Plan for Enhancing the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019-2021* CroQAnet webinar, Social dimension of higher education, Zagreb, 2 July 2020
- Cvitanušić Brečić, M. *Role of Business Intelligence Systems in Croatian Higher Education Quality Assurance*, 43<sup>rd</sup> International Convention on Information, Communication and Electronic Technology – MIPRO 2020, Opatija, 28 September - 2 October 2020
- Dodiković Jurković, V. participation in the “Development of career management modules at higher education institutions”, Dubrovnik, 6 March 2020

- Dodiković-Jurković, V. *Global goals of sustainable development and higher education institutions*, CroQAnet webinar, Social dimension of higher education, Zagreb, 2 July 2020
- Dodiković-Jurković, V. *Reshaping faculty development*, Virtual 8th Higher Education Institutions Conference: "Reinventing Higher Education", Zagreb, Zagreb School of Economics and Management, 27 November 2020
- Dodiković-Jurković, V. *ESG – Part I*, online workshop for higher education institutions, Zagreb, 11 December 2020
- Košutić, P. *National Monitoring of Graduate Employability*, online workshop "Professional Practice and Employability of Graduates at Higher Education Institutions", Centre for Student Support and Career Development of the Faculty of Organization and Informatics (CPSRK FOI), 1 December 2020
- Pavić, F. *Accreditation of online study programmes* ASHE webinar *The future is (not) online: ensuring the quality of online studies*, 18 December 2020
- Petrušić, I., Đikić, M., Košutar P., Cvrtila L., Šimić I., Grubišić M., Smiljanić S. *Overview of Re-accreditation of Doctoral Studies in the Republic of Croatia*, Zagreb, May 2020
- Tomljenović, T., Cvitanušić Brečić, M. *ASHE: Joining DEQAR - experience from practice*, DEQAR CONNECT project webinar, 11 May 2020.



Round table "Development of career management modules at higher education institutions",  
Dubrovnik, 6 March 2020



**INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

ASHE's management recognised the need for a functional and developed internal quality assurance system early on, and in 2006, ASHE Management Board adopted a decision on the establishment of internal quality management system. Today, this is an aspect of good business practice that also includes quality assurance agencies within the EHEA. ESG standards 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance and 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct guide the agencies to establish quality assurance systems.

ASHE developed an integrated quality assurance system, in line with both ESG and ISO 9001. The synergy in the application of said standards provided support to the development of ASHE business processes, but also to the development of an institutional self-evaluation culture. We are aware that critical thinking and finding ways of responding to risks and challenges in our environment contributes to our further development and encourages us to be innovative in order to fulfil our mission. ASHE is a public institution, and it has always been important to us that higher education institutions, scientific organisations and the general public have confidence in the quality of our work. This trust is based, among other things, on evidence of compliance with ESG. The Agency undergoes international external evaluation procedure every five years in order to renew its registration in EQAR and its full membership in ENQA for the next five-year period.

The results of the previous ENQA evaluation are included in the following report:  
[https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/publikacije/ENQA\\_izvje%C5%A1%C4%87e\\_2017.pdf](https://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/publikacije/ENQA_izvje%C5%A1%C4%87e_2017.pdf)

Based on the same report reviewed by the EQAR Board, ASHE has in 2017 renewed its status in the Register until 28 February 2022.

The report was also reviewed by the ENQA Board, which has extended ASHE's full membership in ENQA for the next five-year period.

ASHE initiated the procedure for the next ENQA evaluation, and is currently preparing a self-evaluation document in anticipation of the visit of international evaluation committee in June 2021.

ASHE's quality assurance system is subject to annual external audits (including a re-certification audit every 3 years) in line with the ISO 9001 standard, which is conducted by Det Norske Veritas GL (DNV GL). The last external audit was carried out on 24 September 2020, and ASHE QAS was assessed with the highest grade (5). The application of the risk management process, an up-to-date risk database and risk register, as well as the implementation of activities arising from risks, monitored by SMART criteria, were highlighted as positive indicators in the external audit report.

In order to collect data on the compliance of ASHE work with international standards, encourage focus on improvement and development of internal business processes, collect data on the implementation of strategic goals, analyse feedback on employee satisfaction and feedback from ASHE stakeholders, the Agency conducted an annual internal audit, covering all organisational units, in the period from 9-16 March and 21-22 May 2020. There were 17 observations, 6 commendations, 2 recommendations for development and 2 recommendation for improvement noted. Internal audit did not show any nonconformities.



During 2020, ASHE continued to collect feedback on client/stakeholder satisfaction with Agency services. The feedback was collected via online surveys, but also through a direct contact (e-mail and telephone). The analysis of the collected data indicated that, although this year required rapid adjustments in order to carry out the planned activities, our stakeholders still rated the quality of ASHE work with high grades, as shown in the following chart.

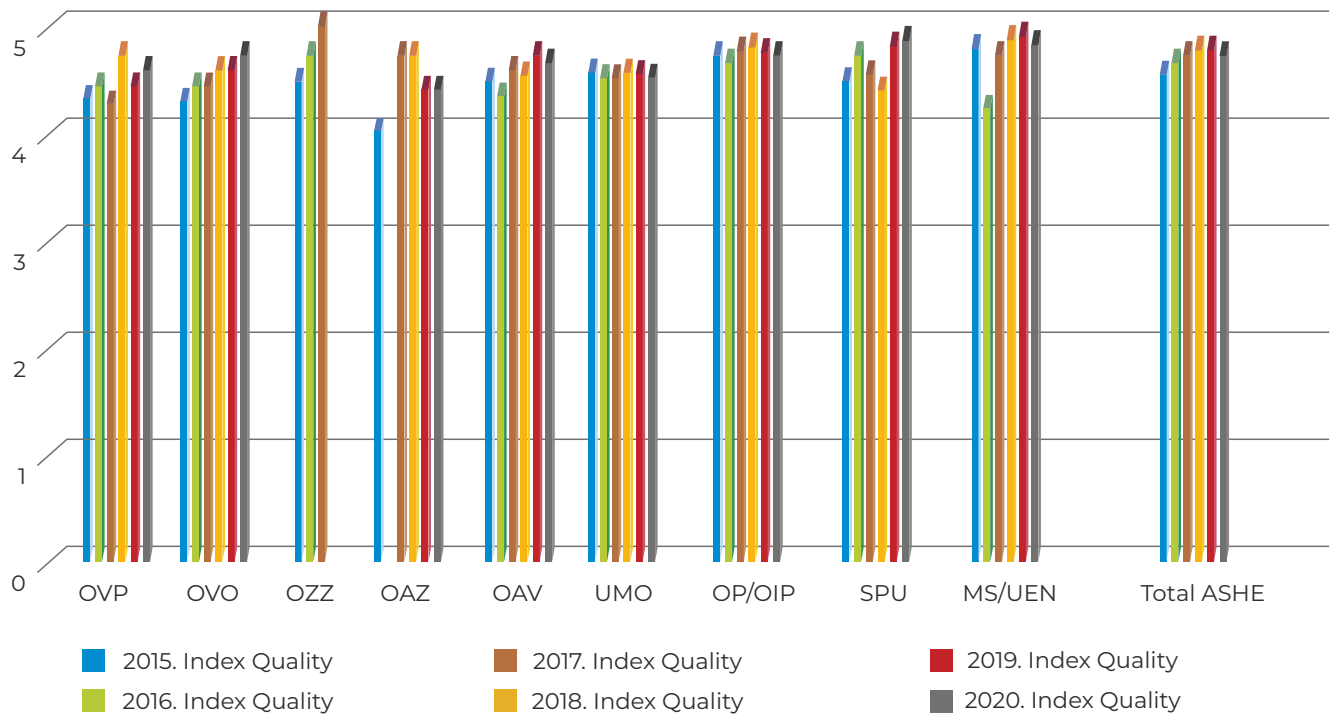


Chart 30. Client satisfaction with ASHE services from 2010-2020

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

The analysis of the collected feedback from ASHE clients/stakeholders showed the following:

- Regarding the cooperation with ASHE employees, clients/stakeholders commended the expertise, knowledge of quality assurance, professionalism, courtesy, timely response, clear and prompt feedbacks, focus and excellent presentation skills of ASHE employees.
- Satisfaction with trainings and seminars organised by ASHE, aimed at preparing higher education institutions for various external evaluation procedures, structured lectures, objective and fair approach to higher education institutions. Awareness of the importance of continuous implementation of external evaluation procedures, not only for further development of higher education institutions, but also as a confirmation of the integrity of their work.
- Satisfaction of expert panel members, especially international experts, with the overall support provided by ASHE coordinators throughout the evaluation process, clear instructions, excellent organization of evaluation procedures, and the quality of trainings.
- Satisfaction with activities carried out through the SKAZVO project, which allow for the development of competencies of different stakeholder groups within the academic community. As some activities were carried out online, while satisfied that the joint implementation of the planned activities was not interrupted, the stakeholders also expressed a wish to meet again in person as soon as the circumstances allow it.
- A significant number of users are satisfied with ASHE website, its up-to-date information, contacts, materials and visual identity; a smaller number of users, in particular those that use scientific field committees' web pages, pointed out that a more user-friendly access to documents is needed.
- Satisfaction with the fact that ASHE activities contribute to the increased visibility of the Croatian area of higher education.

We at ASHE believe that our employees, their expertise and satisfaction, are the most important factor of organisational success, and we aim to develop organisational relationships that are perceived as fair.

During February and March of 2020 - before the organisational operation was adjusted to the Covid-19 pandemic and Zagreb earthquakes - ASHE conducted an employee satisfaction survey. Data was collected via e-questionnaire. The survey was voluntary and completely anonymous; the collected data were processed by quantitative and qualitative methods, and made available in the report Analysis of different aspects of organisational climate and job satisfaction.

A review of the five-year estimates of the various aspects of organisational climate showed that ASHE employees consistently assess with highest grades various professional values and goals, employee development opportunities, and cooperation with the immediate superior, which was, incidentally, the best evaluated aspect in the 2020 survey.

Assessing various aspects of job satisfaction, ASHE employees gave the highest grades to the cooperation with colleagues and immediate superior, job security, workplace equipment, and flexibility regarding the working hours and the use of vacation days/days off.



**PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Providing information about the quality of higher education institutions, the higher education system in Croatia and reporting on the Agency's activities with the aim of promoting the importance of quality assurance in higher education and science is part of the Agency for Science and Higher Education's mission.

With the purpose of accomplishing this mission, during last year ASHE has carried out the following activities:

- The Agency published the *2019 Annual Report* and the *2021 Activities Plan*, in both Croatian and English. The report was submitted to the Croatian Parliament, the Government of the Republic of Croatia, higher education institutions and other stakeholders in the higher education and science system, as well as to ENQA, EQAR and European agencies specialised in quality assurance in higher education, and they were also published on the Agency's website [www.azvo.hr](http://www.azvo.hr).
- The Agency published the *Overview of Re-accreditation of Doctoral Studies in the Republic of Croatia and Quality Assurance of Scientific Activity in Croatia - Analysis of Evaluation Methodologies*, as well as a promotional leaflet with short descriptions of external evaluation procedures.
- In cooperation with TV Student, ASHE made and released a promotional video - 2019 in review
- ASHE newsletter was published - in Croatian and English - and submitted to the stakeholders. The newsletter was published on ASHE website and social networks, and the printed edition was sent to all higher education institutions.
- Higher education institutions were regularly informed about ASHE activities and news in the higher education and science system.
- Press releases regarding the more important ASHE activities and events were published on ASHE website and sent to relevant media and stakeholders. All media inquiries were promptly handled and relevant information sent to the representatives of the media.
- ASHE's website and Facebook and Twitter profiles were updated on a regular basis.
- In order to increase international visibility, news concerning ASHE's activities were published in the electronic newsletters issued by ENQA, EQAR, CEENQA and INQAAHE.



## 2020 FINANCIAL REPORT

ASHE is funded by the Ministry of Science and Education. ASHE revenue in 2020 comprised 19 accounts:

- A621155- Administration and general transactions
- A621179- National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development
- A621182- Council of Polytechnics and Colleges
- A621186- Evaluation of scientific organizations
- A621187- Evaluation of higher education institutions
- A621190- External audit of higher education institutions and scientific organisations
- A621191- Monitoring graduate employment
- A621192- Central Applications Office
- A867004- Committee for Ethics in Science and Higher Education
- K621178- Equipment and maintenance
- K621194- National Information System for Applications to Higher Education Institutions
- K867008- European Social Fund - SKAZVO project (Improvement of quality assurance and enhancement systems in higher education)
- A867005 - PROCSEE - Strengthening Professional Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in Central and South-Eastern Europe
- A867009 - HRMinHEI Project - Modernisation of Higher Education Institutions through enhancement of Human Resources Management function
- A867002 - EURASHE- Harmonisation of Approaches for Vocational Education in Europe
- A867010 - MEHR- Modernisation, Education and Human Rights
- A867013 - DEQAR - Database of External Quality Assurance Reports
- A867014 - ERASMUS - Keep innovation in multi partnership cooperation in lifelong guidance services - KEEP IN PACT.

Based on the financial reports, total revenue in 2020 amounted to HRK 19.785.179. It consisted of:

- State budget resources for 2020 – HRK 17.717.133
- Business revenue – HRK 568.350
- ESF project – Improvement of quality assurance and enhancement systems in higher education (SKAZVO)
  - HRK 1.103.488
- Other EC-funded projects – HRK 392.312
- Other revenue - HRK 3.896.

ASHE expenditure in 2020 amounted to HRK 19.305.835, consisting of business expenditure - HRK 18.486.637 and expenditure for acquisition of non-financial assets - HRK 819.198.

## Business expenditure for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2020

Accounts in the chart of accounts	Item	Achieved in the previous 2019 reporting period	Achieved in the current 2020 reporting period
1	2	4	5
	<b>Total Expenditure (3+4)</b>	<b>23.426.094</b>	<b>19.305.835</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>BUSINESS EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>22.268.330</b>	<b>18.486.637</b>
31	Staff expenditure	<b>10.528.175</b>	<b>11.133.222</b>
<b>311</b>	<b>Salaries (gross)</b>	<b>8.849.546</b>	<b>9.294.440</b>
3111	Salaries for employment in normal working hours	8.849.546	9.294.440
<b>312</b>	<b>Other staff costs</b>	<b>251.429</b>	<b>328.616</b>
<b>313</b>	<b>Salary contributions</b>	<b>1.427.200</b>	<b>1.510.166</b>
3132	Compulsory social security contributions	1.416.140	1.510.166
3133	Compulsory unemployment insurance contributions	11.060	0
<b>32</b>	<b>Material costs</b>	<b>11.520.433</b>	<b>7.333.225</b>
<b>321</b>	<b>Staff reimbursement costs</b>	<b>3.306.270</b>	<b>1.034.347</b>
3211	Travel costs	2.695.951	565.962
3212	Reimbursement for expenditure on travel, field work and separation	247.808	245.319
3213	Professional training costs	362.511	223.066
<b>322</b>	<b>Material and energy expenditure</b>	<b>322.489</b>	<b>274.451</b>
3221	Office supplies and other material costs	289.111	242.585
3223	Energy	26.775	9.200
3224	Material and equipment for current and investment maintenance	6.603	9.764
3225	Small inventory and car tires	0	12.902
<b>323</b>	<b>Service costs</b>	<b>6.731.103</b>	<b>5.428.613</b>
3231	Telephone, post and transport costs	327.932	284.481
3232	Current and investment maintenance services	126.343	43.435
3233	Promotion and information services	234.400	17.034
3234	Communal services	19.353	32.759
3235	Costs of renting	827.015	787.969
3236	Healthcare and veterinary services	40.730	56.890
3237	Intellectual and personal services	4.948.725	3.960.147
3238	Computer services	54.757	59.504
3239	Other services	151.848	186.394
<b>324</b>	<b>Reimbursement for expenditures incurred by persons outside the employment relationship</b>	<b>5.206</b>	<b>3.896</b>
<b>329</b>	<b>Other expenditure not included above</b>	<b>1.155.365</b>	<b>591.919</b>

Accounts in the chart of accounts	Item	Achieved in the previous 2019 reporting period	Achieved in the current 2020 reporting period
1	2	4	5
	<b>Total Expenditure (3+4)</b>	<b>23.426.094</b>	<b>19.305.835</b>
3291	Temporary work contracts with members of representative and executive bodies, committees, etc.	102.694	92.588
3292	Insurance premiums	64.078	51.281
3293	Representation costs	476.133	177.676
3294	Membership fees and standards	145.872	136.394
3295	Fees and charges	30.815	21.750
3299	Other expenditure not included above	335.773	112.230
<b>34</b>	<b>Financial expenditure</b>	<b>49.087</b>	<b>11.618</b>
343	Other financial expenditure	<b>49.087</b>	<b>11.618</b>
3431	Bank and payment services	49.087	11.618
<b>35</b>	<b>Subsidies</b>	<b>48.392</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>352</b>	<b>Subsidies to companies, cooperatives, farmers and artisans outside the public sector</b>	<b>48.392</b>	<b>0</b>
3522	Subsidies to companies and cooperatives outside the public sector	48.392	0
<b>36</b>	<b>Grants given abroad and to the users of the public budget</b>	<b>122.243</b>	<b>8.572</b>
<b>361</b>	<b>Aids to foreign governments</b>	<b>62.470</b>	<b>0</b>
3611	Current aids to foreign governments	62.470	0
<b>369</b>	<b>Transfer between users of the public budget</b>	<b>59.773</b>	<b>8.572</b>
3693	Current transfers between users of the public budget based on the transfer of EU funds	59.773	8.572
<b>4</b>	<b>Acquisition of non-financial assets</b>	<b>1.157.764</b>	<b>819.198</b>
<b>41</b>	<b>Acquisition of non-produced fixed assets</b>	<b>58.542</b>	<b>60.417</b>
<b>412</b>	<b>Intangible assets</b>	<b>58.542</b>	<b>60.417</b>
4123	Licences	58.542	60.417
<b>42</b>	<b>Acquisition of produced fixed assets</b>	<b>1.099.222</b>	<b>758.781</b>
<b>422</b>	<b>Space and equipment</b>	<b>211.897</b>	<b>177.831</b>
4221	Office equipment and furniture	192.429	117.620
4222	Communication equipment	3.500	20.646
4223	Maintenance and protection equipment	0	0
4227	Installations, machines and equipment for other purposes	15.968	39.565
<b>426</b>	<b>Intangible produced assets</b>	<b>887.325</b>	<b>580.950</b>
4262	Investment for computer programmes	887.325	580.950



## **Business expenditure:**

### **1. Staff expenditure includes:**

- Salaries (gross) and salary contributions
- Other staff expenditures (length of service awards, gifts for children, help after an extended sick leave, retirement severance allowances).

### **2. Material costs include:**

- 2.1. Travel costs and other remunerations
- 2.2. Material and energy expenditure
- 2.3. Service costs
- 2.4. Other expenditure not included above.

#### **2.1. Travel costs and other remunerations that includes:**

- Travel costs for Croatian and foreign members of expert panels working on external quality assurance procedures implemented by the Agency (accreditation, re-accreditation, thematic evaluation of higher education institutions and research organisation, external quality assurance audits)
- Travel costs for members of ASHE professional bodies, and other external associates and employees,
- travel costs for ASHE employees incurred while travelling on official business, including on all re-accreditation procedures and for the purpose of attending workshops organised by all Croatian universities
- costs of educational programmes (for ASHE employees and other stakeholders participating in quality assurance procedures in science and higher education) such as seminars, conferences and professional trainings in Croatia and abroad.

#### **2.2. Material and energy expenditure includes:**

- Office supplies expenditure
- Energy, materials for current and investment maintenance, small inventory,
- Car tires
- and other costs.

#### **2.3. Service costs includes:**

- Maintenance of other information systems - Centrix system for administration and data management, IP telephone centre and contact centre, software for financial administration, and other programmes)
- Rent (offices, spaces for seminars, workshops, training courses and sessions of committees, working groups and other bodies);
- Intellectual services
  - Temporary work contracts with Croatian and foreign members of expert panels working on external quality assurance procedures implemented by the Agency (initial accreditation, re-accreditation, thematic

- evaluation of higher education institutions and research organisation, external quality assurance audits)
- Temporary work contracts with members of professional and administrative bodies working with the Agency (members of the Accreditation Council, NCSHETD, Committee for Ethics in Science and Higher Education, Scientific Field Committees, Scientific Area Councils, CPC, and other committees established in accordance with the work plan and as required);
- Expenditure student work for Central Applications Office.
- Telephone, postage (Scientific Field Committees, ENIC/NARIC, SPU) and transport costs
- Promotion and information services (ASHE Annual Report, contracts for SKAZVO promotional campaign services, leaflets, flyers, materials for ASHE conferences and other events)
- Expenditures for other services (car registration and technical inspection, document archiving services, design and printing services for brochures, leaflets and certificates).

#### 2.4. Other expenditure not included above that includes:

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

#### **Acquisition of non-financial assets:**

- Software licences;
- Expenditure IT programmes costs (contracts for the maintenance and upgrading of NISpVU system - National Information System for Applications to Study Programmes in Croatia), costs of maintenance and upgrading of the information system MOZVAG;
- Expenditure office, computer and communication equipment, equipment for the maintenance of heating and ventilation system, etc.

#### **Contracts awarded in public procurement in 2020**

During 2020, 15 straightforward procurement contracts (worth up to HRK 200,000) were awarded. The cumulative value of the contracts amounts to HRK 870,149.94, exclusive of VAT.

Based on the public procurement procedure carried out by the Central State Office for Central Public Procurement, two contracts expiring 2022 were awarded to the Croatian Post. Furthermore, two insurance policies were made (automobile liability insurance and casco insurance policy) which are valid until 2021. The cumulative value of contracts and policies amounts to 206,708.92, exclusive of VAT.

## PLAN OF ACTIVITIES FOR 2021

- Drafting of self-evaluation and international evaluation of ASHE; renewal of registration in EQAR and of full membership in ENQA.
- Drafting and adopting ASHE Strategy 2021-2025.
- Implementation of the re-accreditation procedure in accordance according with the *Re-accreditation Plan* adopted by ASHE Accreditation Council (19 higher education institutions), in addition to the re-accreditation of five higher education institutions which requested a postponement in 2020.
- Implementation of the initial accreditation for performing higher education activity upon request.
- Implementation of the initial accreditation for performing scientific activity upon request.
- Implementation of the initial accreditation of study programmes upon request.
- Implementation of the initial accreditation of online study programmes upon request.
- Implementation of the audit procedure in accordance with the *Audit Plan* adopted by ASHE Accreditation Council (3 higher education institutions), in addition to the audit of two higher education institutions which requested a postponement in 2020.
- Implementation of thematic evaluation upon request.
- Implementation of the evaluation of joint study programmes upon request.
- Implementation of the cross-border evaluation upon request;
- Re-accreditation of public scientific institutes and scientific organisations outside the system of higher education (other legal entities).
- Collecting and processing data, producing statistics and analytics on the system level, following trends.
- Conducting activities from the *Strategy of Education, Science and Technology*.
- Supporting Croatian HEIs in the implementation of CROQF and the ESG.
- Monitoring graduate satisfaction and employment.
- Professional, administrative and IT support to the work of strategic and professional bodies in the system of science and higher education (National Council for Science, Higher Education and Technological Development, Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, scientific field committees, scientific area councils and the arts councils).
- Participating in the ongoing international projects and applying for the new ones.
- Developing human resources – life-long learning (training of ASHE employees).

- Training activities – training of expert panels that conduct procedures of external evaluation, thematic training of HEIs and scientific organisations, organising conferences, seminars and workshops.
- Regular activities of the national network of QA units at higher education institutions.
- Improving the internal quality assurance system at ASHE, in accordance with the ESG and the ISO 9001, implementation of the annual internal audit.
- Active participation in the development of the national information system for science and higher education.
- Informing the public on the conditions of enrolment, application deadlines and other relevant information on applying for, competing and obtaining the right to enrol in study programmes (through the *Become a student* website, the official web site of the Central Applications Office and by direct contact with the candidates submitting inquiries to the Central Applications Office).
- Collecting documentation and entering personal data and grades into the National Information System for Applications to Study Programmes in Croatia for candidates who have completed high school education before 2010, or outside the Republic of Croatia, in order to compete for enrolment in study programmes with other candidates.
- Conducting the procedure of application to integrated undergraduate and graduate study programmes at Croatian HEIs.
- Conducting centralised applications to graduate study programmes.
- Creating ranking lists based on points obtained according to the terms of enrolment in the study programmes for candidates applying for study programmes with the aim of enrolling in higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia.
- Collecting and analysing data of candidates outside the regular education system in Croatia enrolling in the first grades of secondary schools.
- Providing information on the national education system, foreign education systems and the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.
- Providing information on the recognition of foreign professional qualifications.
- Recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.
- Active cooperation with external stakeholders (Ministry of Science and Education, Parliament Committee for Education, Science and Culture, Croatian Rectors' Conference, Council of Polytechnics and Colleges, State Archives, Croatian Employment Board, Ministry of Public Administration, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, etc.).
- Cooperating with institutions from public and private sector, non-governmental and non-profit organisations.
- Providing IT support to ASHE business processes and ensuring information security.
- Exchange of experts in the area of higher education and science.
- Presenting at professional conferences.
- Informing the public about activities carried out by ASHE.
- Promotional activities.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ASHE – Agency for Science and Higher Education

CAO – Central Applications Office

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

CPC – Council of Polytechnics and Colleges

CROQF – Croatian Qualifications Framework

ECA – European Consortium for Accreditation

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

ENIC – European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility

ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

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

FC – Field Committee

MSE – Ministry of Science and Education

NARIC – National Academic Recognition Information Centres

NISpVU – National Information System for Applications to Higher Education Institutions

NCHE – National Council for Higher Education

NCS – the National Council for Science

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

NISpVU – National Information System of Application to Higher Education Institutions

QAS – Quality Assurance System

CPC – Council of Polytechnics and Colleges

AFEQ – Act on Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications.

SFC – Scientific Field Committee

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