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**Meta-evaluation of external quality assurance audits in 2012**

ZAGREB, September 2014



## Introduction

In the Republic of Croatia, the external quality assurance in higher education and science is regulated by the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (OG 45/09), by which all public and private higher education institutions need to establish a quality assurance system and continuously develop the quality of all their activities, on the basis on internal and external evaluations. In line with the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education, the Agency for Science and Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency or ASHE) carries out procedure of external quality assurance audit of higher education institutions (hereinafter: audit) in 5-year cycles. First cycle (ESG 2.7.) started in 2010. Since this is the first cycle of external evaluations after the adoption of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education, which in addition to audit also defines the procedure of re-accreditation of higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia, on the basis of data that has been collected on QA systems at higher education institutions, ASHE Accreditation Council decided that all polytechnics and public universities are to be evaluated in the first audit cycle. The external QA audit will additionally be carried out at those higher education institutions that show interest and/or meet the preconditions for the successful implementation of the procedure.

In accordance with the ESG standard 2.8., which calls for ENQA member agencies to analyse data collected during external evaluations - on existing conditions, trends, good practices and areas where improvements are needed - ASHE conducted an analysis of audit procedures carried out in 2012. Plan of external QA audits included 9 HEIs: 6 public universities (University of Dubrovnik was included in the 2011 Plan of audits) and 3 polytechnics. Data collected and analyses carried out form the basis for decision and policy making in terms of quality development of external QA audit procedure, higher education institutions, and higher education system in general.

## Methodology of external QA audit procedure

Every year the Agency surveys higher education institutions and collects information on their QA systems. Based on data collected, the Agency proposes an annual plan of external audits for the following year. In selecting higher education institutions that will be subject to external QA audit, ASHE selects those that meet the prerequisites for a successful implementation of the procedure.

The amended Plan of external QA audits for 2012 (CLASS: 003-08/11-02/0003, REG.NO.: 355-03-11-7) included the following institutions:

1. University of Zagreb
2. University of Rijeka
3. University of Josip Juraj Strossmayer in Osijek
4. University of Zadar
5. University of Split
6. Juraj Dobrila University of Pula
7. Polytechnic Velika Gorica
8. Polytechnic of Rijeka
9. Polytechnic of Požega

Quality assurance systems (hereinafter: QAS) at HEIs were evaluated in line with ESG standards 1.1 - 1.7., Ordinance on External Audit of Quality Assurance Systems at Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Croatia (CLASS:003-08/10-02/0004, REG.NO.:355-02-03-10-2) and Criteria for assessing the level of development and efficiency of QA systems at higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia, as defined by the Manual for Audit of Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Croatia (2nd edition, CLASS:003-08/10-02/0004, REG.NO.:355-01-10-5).

Criteria are:

- Preliminary phase - preliminary quality assurance activities are underway (agreements have been made at the level of HEI, documentation is being drafted)
- Initial phase - Quality assurance system is established but not fully functional (basic documents are drafted and adopted)
- Developed phase - Quality assurance system is functional, internal audit is implemented and system is improved on the basis of internal audit results
- Advanced phase - Quality assurance system is continuously developed on the basis of results of both internal and external audit.

All documents and criteria are published on ASHE website:

<https://www.azvo.hr/en/evaluations/evaluations-in-higher-education/audit-of-higher-education-institution> and are consistently used in all external QA audit procedures (ESG 2.2. and 2.3). Since the documents that define the external QA audit procedure have been tested through a pilot-project, there was no need to additionally revise/amend them.

The external quality assurance procedure includes the following elements: review of HEI's submitted documentation (the base of which is the adopted internal QA audit report); site-visit of the Audit Committee; drafting of the external QA audit report with recommendations for improvement (ESG 2.5.); the follow-up phase resulting in an analysis of the efficiency of activities carried out (ESG 2.6.); drafting of the final audit report, including a final assessment of the degree of development and efficiency of the evaluated QAS and recommendations for the following period, until the next external audit. The final audit report is adopted by ASHE Accreditation Council and published on Agency website.

Quality assurance systems that have met the set criteria and provided evidence of being functional, efficient and fit for purpose, in accordance with national and ESG standards, are awarded with a 5-year certificate by ASHE Accreditation Council, based on expert panel recommendation.

## **Seminars and workshops for HEIs**

Investing in development of human resources is one of priorities; one of the main tasks of the Agency is to carry out trainings of all the stakeholders in this procedure (HEIs and audit panels), and to continuously develop and improve the external QA audit procedure based on experience and data collected.

As part of preparations for audit procedure, on 28 September 2011 a workshop was organised for the representatives of HEIs (rectors, deans, representatives of QA units) included in the annual Plan of audits for 2012. Workshop was attended by 16 representatives of HEIs, who were informed on the procedure, standards, criteria, good national and international practice, and were provided with guidelines for preparing the necessary audit documentation. Participants assessed the quality of this workshop with an average grade of 4.6/5. The possibility to participate in discussion was rated the highest (5.0). At the request of some HEIs, additional, ASHE organised individual workshops as part of preparations for audit: on 24 September 2011 at the University of Zadar, and on 22 February at the Polytechnic Velika Gorica.

## **Training of audit panel members**

External QA audits are carried out by panels of trained and certified audit experts, selected from ASHE audit expert database.

Credibility and quality of QA audit directly depends on the selection of competent panel members and their training. The Agency periodically organises training of new audit experts. During 2012, ASHE organised a seminar (on 26 March) and a workshop (1 June) for 4th generation of ASHE auditors. After completing the training, the participants are awarded with a certificate and are included in ASHE audit expert database, from which panel members are selected. In June 2012, 16 new auditors were awarded their certificates. Certified audit experts are required to participate in audit workshops organised by the Agency.

Five-member audit panels comprise 1 Croatian and 1 foreign representative of HEIs, 1 student representative, 1 representative of the industry/business sector and 1 representative of ASHE. The experience so far shows that such a composition of panel provides for an objective implementation of the procedure, encourages synergy and stimulates discussion - both among the panel members and stakeholders at HEIs. It should also be noted that decisions regarding the final assessment of HEI's QAS, as well as recommendations for its improvement, are reached by consensus. Quality of audit committee's work also depends on the selection of committee chair.

Assessment of audit committee's work is carried out by satisfaction survey of committee members and HEI that was subject to external QA audit procedure (see: Tables 3 and 4).



## **External QA audit in 2012**

After the workshop for representatives of HEIs that were included in 2012 Plan of external QA audits, HEIs appointed their coordinators that coordinated the procedure together with ASHE coordinators and audit panel members.

All procedures were carried out within the agreed timescale, except for the University of Split that asked for a postponement, with a request that a site-visit is scheduled in May 2013, which was granted.

All the procedures were carried out without appeals. Final audit reports were adopted by the Accreditation Council and published on ASHE website (full version in Croatian and a summary in English). In accordance with recommendations included in final reports, Accreditation Council issued decisions on certification or re-audit after 18 months.

Final assessments of the evaluated QAS are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Efficiency assessment of the evaluated QAS at HEIs included in Plan of external QA audits for 2012

Higher education institution	ESG 1.1.	ESG 1.2.1.	ESG 1.2.2.	ESG 1.3.	ESG 1.4.	ESG 1.5.	ESG 1.6.	ESG 1.7.	Overall assessment of QA system:
University of J. J. Strossmayer in Osijek	INITIAL PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL PHASE	INITIAL PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE
University of Rijeka	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED/ADVANCED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	ADVANCED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE/CERTIFICATE
University of Split	PRELIMINARY/INITIAL PHASE	INITIAL PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	PRELIMINARY/INITIAL PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE
University of Zadar	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED/ADVANCED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE
University of Zagreb	INITIAL PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE
Polytechnic of Požega	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	-	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE
Polytechnic of Rijeka	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	-	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE CERTIFICATE
Velika Gorica Polytechnic	DEVELOPED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE	-	INITIAL PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	DEVELOPED PHASE	ADVANCED PHASE	INITIAL/DEVELOPED PHASE

Two out of nine HEI QAS audited in 2012 - that of University of Rijeka and Rijeka Polytechnic - were assessed as developed, therefore meeting the requirements for a certificate, which was awarded to them.

The efficiency of the internal quality assurance system at the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, University of Split, University of Zadar, University of Zagreb, Polytechnic in Požega and Polytechnic Velika Gorica were assessed with a transitory grade - between the initial and the developed phase - and Accreditation Council adopted panels' recommendation for a re-audit of these institutions after 18 months.

### **Efficiency analysis of the evaluated quality assurance systems at higher education institutions**

The adoption of Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education encouraged universities and most of the other higher education institutions to regulate quality assurance with adequate documentation, regulations and manuals that represent a guide through individual areas of QA for all the stakeholders.

At the level of universities, QA systems were established in the period between 2002 and 2009, with forming of QA bodies (committees, centres, departments) who provide expert and advisory support to the management in matters of quality assurance. These bodies usually consist of representatives of all university constituents (mainly chairs of QA units), and at some universities even vice-rectors (for quality assurance and/or study programmes/student affairs). Administrative support to these advisory bodies, as well as to QA system in general, is provided by QA offices. Quality assurance offices are also responsible for implementing and analysing student (and other) surveys.

At polytechnics, main QA bodies are quality assurance committees. Committees provide advisory and administrative support to the management, and their main task is to stimulate the development of quality culture at polytechnics.

It has been found that the majority of evaluated institutions developed and adopted their QA documentation (regulations, manuals) only after the adoption of Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education in 2009, and some only during the external QA audit procedures.

Table 2 shows the overview of quality assurance systems at all Croatian public universities, as well as polytechnics that were included in Plan of external QA audits for 2012

*Table 2 - Quality assurance systems at all Croatian public universities and polytechnics that were included in Plan of external QA audits for 2012 (\*University of Dubrovnik – included in the Plan of external QA audits for 2011 - was added to this list for a full overview of public universities)*

Name of higher education institution	Year in which QAS was established	Main QA body	Regulations (adopted on)	MANUAL (adopted on)	Internal audit
*University of Dubrovnik	2009	Committee for Internal Quality Assurance and Improvement	Regulations on System of Quality Assurance and Improvement at the University of Dubrovnik 23/9/2013	Quality Manual, 2/2/2014	YES
University of J. J. Strossmayer in Osijek	2005	Committee for the Advancement and Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek	Ordinance on the Quality Assurance System at the Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, 29/9/2006; Decision on the Amendments of the Ordinance, 26/6/2012;	Quality Manual, 15/7/2013;	YES
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula	2007	Main Quality Assurance Board	Regulations on Quality Assurance System of the Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, 1/3/2013	University of Juraj Dobrila in Pula Quality Manual, march 2013	YES
University of Rijeka	2004	Committee for quality assurance and improvement	Ordinance on the Quality Assurance and Improvement System at the University of Rijeka, 19/3/2013;	University of Rijeka - Manual for Quality of Studying, June 2012	YES
University of Split	2007	Quality Enhancement Centre	Regulations on the Quality Assurance System at the University of Split, 19/12/2013;	Quality Assurance Handbook of the University of Split 20/02/2014	YES
University of Zadar	2004	Quality Management Committee	Ordinance on the Quality Assurance System at the University of Zadar, 18/1/2011	Manual of Quality at the University of Zadar 19/03/2012	YES
University of Zagreb	2002	Quality Management Committee	Ordinance on the Quality Assurance System at the University of Zagreb, 18/1/2011	Handbook on Quality Assurance at the University of Zagreb, June 2012	YES
Polytechnic of Požega	2008	Quality Assurance Committee	Ordinance on the Quality Assurance System at the Polytechnic of Požega 2009;	Quality Assurance Manual of the Polytechnic of Požega, 2012	YES
Polytechnic of Rijeka	2008	Polytechnic Quality Assurance Committee	Regulations on Quality Assurance System of the Polytechnic of Požega, 07/02/2008	Quality Assurance Manual of the Polytechnic of Požega, 6/2/2012	YES
Polytechnic Velika Gorica	2004 - ISO; 2012 - integrated system	Committee for Quality Assurance and Implementation of QAS	Regulations on Quality Assurance System of the Polytechnic Velika Gorica, 19/9/2013	Quality Assurance Manual of the Polytechnic Velika Gorica, April 2012	YES

Evaluated HEIs are aware of the need to include all the stakeholders in QA system. Following the Agency guidelines, and with the increasing awareness of the third mission of higher education institutions, main QA bodies - in addition to teaching staff and students - often also include representatives of professional-administrative services and business/industry sector.

Evaluated HEIs recognize the need for systematic development of quality culture, in line with the ESG, and principle that HEIs are primarily responsible for quality of all their activities. Their positive attitude towards external evaluations should also be noted, as well as their understanding that a combination of internal and external evaluations contributes to an objective assessment of quality assurance system and all the activities at a HEI. Some of the institutions have had additional experience in similar, even international evaluation procedures.



Findings show that ESG 1.1. presents the greatest challenge for the evaluated institutions. One should, however, take into account the historical development of Croatian higher education institutions and their QAS. Croatian HEIs do not have a long tradition of developing and implementing documents related to ESG 1.1., which form the basis on which a functional quality assurance system is built. The majority of institutions developed and adopted the first versions of their QA documents - quality policy, regulations and manuals - only after the adoption of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education, which is reflected in the level of their implementation. A lack of monitoring and document revisions was also noted. External QA audits prompted HEIs to consider the ways in which they implement quality policies in their daily activities, and whether there is a need for their revision.

Some evaluated institutions did not have strategic documents with defined strategic goals. One of the main reasons for this, cited by HEIs, was the lack of a national strategy for higher education and science. External QA audits that have been carried out prompted those HEIs that had no strategic documents to draft and adopt them, and those that had no developed monitoring mechanisms to establish and implement them.

Evaluated HEIs carry out internal QA audits (depending on the institution, once every 1-3 years), and the procedure is defined by either QA regulations/manuals, or specific internal QA audit regulations. Procedures are carried out in accordance with ESG standards and ASHE criteria, and includes analysis of data collected, interviews with stakeholders (often, but not always), analysis of the results, and writing of a report containing conclusions and recommendations for improvement. Report structure is mostly defined by QAS documentation. Some documents also regulate the composition of internal audit panel. Panel members usually go through an in-house training on internal audit (organised by QA units); some panel members have also had some external trainings (either organised by ASHE or some other institution). Since the majority of institutions (and internal audit panels) do not have extensive experience in implementing internal QA audit procedure, some areas of improvement have been identified within their chosen audit models, and system documentation. Internal audit panels (and other QA bodies) generally include representatives of teachers and students, often representatives of associates and support staff, and at some HEIs representatives of external stakeholders.

Approving, monitoring and periodical revision of programmes is closely related to the monitoring of relevant national legislation, and adhering to minimum quality indicators as prerequisites for further quality improvement of study programmes.

Analyses of study programmes are based on collected data and monitoring of the quality of accredited study programmes, in line with the defined indicators. Conducted self-evaluations of study programmes provided basis for their review and improvement; for example, a need for revision of learning outcomes and redistribution of ECTS credits was identified at some HEIs.

Students are included in QAS activities, but the role of alumni and external stakeholders needs to be strengthened, particularly in revisions of study programmes and learning outcomes. Students are included in the evaluation of teaching, although they are not always informed of the results.

Resources allocated for student standard mostly satisfy students' needs.

Formal quality review of teaching staff is carried out within the process of election to teaching/scientific grade, in which the assessment of the quality of their work (via student survey) is taken into account. Some HEIs also use other forms of evaluation, like peer-review and self-evaluation. At most HEIs, best teachers are given recognition.

Some evaluated HEIs do not carry out systematic planning of professional development of teaching staff (development of teaching competencies).



At the level of universities, support to student mobility is mostly structured, however, additional efforts are needed in developing international exchange of teaching and administrative staff (some opportunities exist, but there is a lack of information and motivation).

Recommendation given to all HEIs was to choose similar institutions in Croatia and abroad, for the purpose of comparative analyses and the exchange of good practice.

Higher education institutions mostly publish their basic QAS documents, but should additionally intensify their efforts with regard to collecting, processing, analysing and publishing of data, as well as the use of analyses in planning. Once adopted, QAS documents are rarely revised. Higher education institutions were recommended to regularly revise and update their documentation on the basis of internal QA audit results, analyses and feedback from all the QAS stakeholders.

Highest grades were given for ESG 1.7. - publishing relevant, unbiased information on study programmes and levels.

HEIs were recommended to publish information on their comparative advantages and employability of their graduates.

HEIs were also recommended to align Croatian and English versions of their web sites.

## Quality analysis of external QA audits in 2012

Table 3 shows the results of the questionnaire on the effectiveness of external QA audits in 2012 that was sent to panel members.

Analysis of the panel members' feedback (a survey that was carried out as a form of self-evaluation and evaluation of implemented procedures) shows that all procedures have been carried out in line with the adopted documents, standards and criteria (average grade of 4.9). Panel members assessed their own performance and efficiency with the average grade of 4.5. The overall procedure was assessed with a high grade of 4.7.

Assessing the work of panel members in audit procedures so far, we can point out their accuracy, active participation in analysing the submitted documentation, ability to analyse data and provide suggestions for improvement, their teamwork, objectivity, affirmative approach to objects of evaluation, external evaluation procedure and the overall building of quality culture, and their openness to self-evaluation, learning and self-improvement.

Table 4 shows the results of the questionnaires sent to HEIs that were audited in 2012.

Questionnaires that are used for collecting feedback on satisfaction with the procedure are sent to higher education institutions at the end of audit procedure, upon the adoption of the final audit report. It has been noted that, when assessing the audit procedure, majority of stakeholders from HEIs focus only on site-visit of the audit committee.

Since external QA audit is a year-long procedure, with a 6 months follow-up phase, some stakeholders found it difficult to assess their satisfaction so long after the site-visit. In future seminars for the representatives of HEIs, special attention needs to be paid to the issue of collecting feedback and its use in development of audit procedure, as well as the added value of the overall procedure on internal quality culture at HEI. Survey analysis showed that the question of applicability of standards and criteria is particularly challenging to HEIs, receiving an average grade of 3.8. Cooperation with ASHE coordinator was assessed by the evaluated HEIs with the highest average grade of 4.4, and high grades were also given for expert panels' competencies and their affirmative approach.

Table 3 - Results of the satisfaction surveys for audit committees in 2012 external QA audits

Higher education institution	University of J. J. Strossmayer in Osijek	Juraj Dobrila University of Pula	University of Rijeka	University of Split	University of Zadar	University of Zagreb	Polytechnic of Požega	Polytechnic of Rijeka	Velika Gorica Polytechnic	Average grade
Clarity of the QA audit procedure	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.80	5.00	5.00	<b>4.87</b>
Clarity of QA audit standards and criteria	4.50	4.75	4.50	4.75	4.50	4.33	4.80	4.75	5.00	<b>4.65</b>
Applicability of QA audit standards and criteria	4.50	4.75	4.50	4.75	5.00	3.66	4.80	4.75	4.60	<b>4.59</b>
Clarity of guidelines for preparing audit documentation	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.33	4.80	5.00	5.00	<b>4.90</b>
Usefulness of training for QA audit procedure	5.00	4.75	4.50	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.75	5.00	<b>4.78</b>
Cooperation with coordinator: a) before the site-visit	5.00	5.00	4.50	5.00	5.00	4.66	5.00	5.00	5.00	<b>4.91</b>
b) during the procedure	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.66	5.00	5.00	5.00	<b>4.96</b>
Overall assessment of the procedure	5.00	4.75	5.00	4.50	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.75	4.40	<b>4.71</b>
Quality of panel's work at the 1st panel meeting	5.00	4.25	4.50	4.25	5.00	4.33	5.00	4.25	4.40	<b>4.55</b>
Quality of panel's work at the 2nd panel meeting	5.00	4.75	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.33	5.00	4.75	4.80	<b>4.85</b>
Audit was conducted in accordance with the ASHE QA Manual, ASHE QA Ordinance and ESG	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.66	5.00	5.00	5.00	<b>4.96</b>
All the stages of audit procedure were carried out in accordance with planned goals and adopted methods of work	5.00	4.75	5.00	4.50	5.00	4.33	5.00	4.75	5.00	<b>4.81</b>
Satisfaction with own performance	5.00	4.25	4.50	4.75	4.50	4.00	5.00	4.25	4.40	<b>4.52</b>
<b>Average grade</b>	<b>4.92</b>	<b>4.77</b>	<b>4.77</b>	<b>4.81</b>	<b>4.92</b>	<b>4.25</b>	<b>4.94</b>	<b>4.77</b>	<b>4.82</b>	<b>4.77</b>

*Table 4 - Results of the satisfaction surveys for evaluated HEIs in 2012 external QA audits*

Higher education institution	University of J. J. Strossmayer in Osijek	Juraj Dobrila University of Pula	University of Rijeka	University of Split	University of Zadar	University of Zagreb	Polytechnic of Požega	Polytechnic of Rijeka	Velika Gorica Polytechnic	Average grade
Clarity of the QA audit procedure	4.41	3.50	4.00	4.09	4.20	4.66	3.80	4.60	4.10	<b>4.15</b>
Clarity of QA audit standards and criteria	4.26	3.25	3.50	3.92	3.70	4.33	3.90	4.40	4.10	<b>3.93</b>
Applicability of QA audit standards and criteria	4.06	3.87	3.50	3.00	3.70	3.66	3.70	4.60	4.00	<b>3.79</b>
Clarity of guidelines for preparing audit documentation	4.26	3.25	3.50	3.83	3.90	3.83	3.80	4.30	4.00	<b>3.85</b>
Overall assessment of the procedure	4.36	3.12	3.50	3.83	3.90	4.16	3.90	4.60	4.00	<b>3.93</b>
Cooperation with ASHE coordinator during the procedure	4.41	3.50	4.50	3.82	4.20	4.00	4.50	4.80	4.75	<b>4.28</b>
HEI was given opportunity to adequately present its QAS	4.46	3.62	4.00	3.92	4.20	4.00	3.80	4.80	4.40	<b>4.13</b>
Communication between audit panel and QAS stakeholders	4.48	3.75	3.50	3.33	4.30	4.16	4.00	4.70	4.10	<b>4.04</b>
Audit Committee was: a) Competent	4.70	4.25	3.50	3.83	4.10	3.83	4.10	4.70	4.25	<b>4.14</b>
b) Objective	4.41	4.00	3.50	3.92	4.10	3.83	4.10	4.40	4.10	<b>4.04</b>
c) Well-informed	4.23	3.25	3.00	3.75	4.20	3.33	4.00	4.80	3.90	<b>3.83</b>
d) Well-intentioned	4.48	4.12	3.50	3.92	4.20	4.16	4.20	4.40	4.10	<b>4.12</b>
e) Constructive	4.40	4.00	2.50	3.50	4.00	4.00	4.30	4.70	3.60	<b>3.89</b>
Observations were clearly, objectively and appropriately presented in the reports	4.33	3.62	3.50	3.75	3.90	3.83	3.50	4.50	3.50	<b>3.83</b>
Recommendations for improvement are clear and applicable	4.35	3.62	3.50	3.67	4.00	4.00	3.70	4.40	3.90	<b>3.90</b>
External QA audit provided added value to HEI	4.31	3.50	3.50	3.36	4.10	4.00	4.40	4.80	4.10	<b>4.01</b>



Assessment of own contribution to discussions with audit panel during the site-visit:	4.14	3.50	3.50	3.33	3.90	3.83	3.80	4.30	3.75	<b>3.78</b>
External QA audit allows for improvement of HEI QAS	4.68	4.25	4.00	3.42	4.10	4.50	4.20	4.70	3.75	<b>4.18</b>
<b>Average grade</b>	<b>4.37</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>3.68</b>	<b>4.04</b>	<b>4.01</b>	<b>3.98</b>	<b>4.58</b>	<b>4.02</b>	<b>3.99</b>



### **Conclusion:**

External QA audit procedure contributed to better understanding of how significant management's support is to quality assurance system at HEIs, and that a functional QA system brings added value to the institution.

Although the majority of HEIs collect information on their activities and results, these need to be regularly analysed in accordance with quality indicators, for the purpose of improvement, development, and recognition of good practice and excellence, as well as deficiencies and risks. It is necessary to continuously inform all the QAS stakeholders on the importance of their contribution to development of QAS, to encourage their cooperation and promote development of quality culture in academic and non-academic environment.

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Made by:

Dr. sc. Vesna Dodiković-Jurković

Davorka Androić

Goran Briški