

2023

Annual Report

2024

Activity Plan



agency for science and higher education croatia

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For the publisher

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director

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Introduction

Dear readers,

It is a pleasure to greet you in this foreword to the latest annual report of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, which will provide you with an overview of Agency activities in 2023 and our plans for 2024.

Upon some consideration, I have decided to begin by saying thank you. The past year, which has seen my appointment as director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, has proven highly challenging for me both personally and professionally. I therefore wish to thank the academic community, our partners in building an internationally recognized higher education system of high quality, as well as all those with whom the Agency has collaborated in other state and public administration bodies. A special thanks is due to the Agency staff for their expert assistance and trust.

At the end of 2022, the Croatian Parliament passed the new Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Science, thereby tasking the Agency with the very demanding and extensive task of aligning all external

evaluation procedures with the provisions of the new Act. Over the past year, considerable effort has gone into the preparation of new documents which will govern the implementation of external evaluation procedures, taking into account the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and principles of good practice. These documents are intended for higher education institutions and research institutes, as well as expert panel members. The whole of 2023 has seen the Agency adapt to the changes in the legal framework regulating the area of quality assurance in higher education and science in accordance with European and international standards. This has also brought about a significant redefinition of the Agency's role.



ASSOC. PROF. DANIJELA HORVATEK TOMIĆ, PH.D., DIRECTOR OF
THE AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION
(PHOTO: GORAN PIRŠ)

Following public consultations, the following documents were adopted and published on the Agency website: those governing the procedures of initial accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions, the accreditation of joint studies, the re-accreditation of higher education institutions, and the initial accreditation and re-accreditation of research institutes.

The year 2023 has also seen the Agency continue as a project partner on the e-Universities project, one of the largest projects in the area of higher education in Croatia, valued at EUR 84 million and funded within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026. This project constitutes one of the largest investments in the infrastructure of public HEIs, aiming to bring about the

digital transformation of higher education. The Agency is coordinating a project activity which is being carried out in collaboration with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek: *“An investigation of study programmes to determine the extent to which the development of students’ digital competences is represented”*.

At the end of 2023, we were proud to host the heads of key European quality assurance associations of which our Agency is a long-time recognised member – Douglas Blackstock, president of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and Magalie Soenen, director of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). We discussed opportunities to strengthen the quality assurance of higher education in the region and our future cooperation in the European Higher Education Area.

In the coming year, the Agency will commence the third cycle of re-accreditation with the aim of evaluating the quality of higher education institutions against defined quality standards and legal regulations, as well as fostering further development of quality in higher education.

In 2024, the Agency will take additional steps to strengthen its project activity by taking part in international EU-funded projects, all with the aim of further developing the external quality assurance system of higher education in Croatia, strengthening internal quality assurance processes, building the

capacities of higher education institutions and enhancing Agency business processes.

Over the past year, the Agency has taken part in international activities in the sphere of public policy in higher education, primarily in Europe but also further afield. International visibility and the quality of our work has brought about an increased number of inquiries of foreign higher education institutions regarding the external evaluation of their study programmes, as well as the evaluation of joint international studies. This definitely serves as motivation to further strengthen this area of Agency activity in 2024.

Quality enhancement requires significant willpower, teamwork and mutual understanding. Even though the year ahead promises to be dynamic and challenging, we are confident that it will bring about positive solutions which we will develop together with our stakeholders and which will contribute to the development of the system of higher education and science as a driver of change in our society.

— **Assoc. prof. Danijela Horvatek Tomić, Ph.D.**

DIRECTOR OF THE AGENCY FOR SCIENCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

External quality assurance in science and higher education

In 2023, the following external evaluation documents were developed and published on the Agency website: those governing the procedures of initial accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions, the accreditation of joint studies, the re-accreditation of higher education institutions, and the initial accreditation and re-accreditation of research institutes.

Alignment of external evaluation procedures with the new legal framework

Because the new Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Science was passed in December of 2022, a major challenge to Agency operations in 2023 was the alignment of all external evaluation procedures in higher education and science with the new Act.

This was a significant task which comprised the development of a series of new documents which will henceforth be used in external evaluation procedures. The new legal framework constituted the basis for document development, while particular care was taken to ensure that the documents were aligned with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and experience acquired in previous procedures, especially in parts which cover procedures related to HEIs.

The development of new documents which regulate the conducting of external evaluation procedures included the development of sets of instructions, i.e. ordinances that define external evaluation procedures,

as well as the development of quality standards and accompanying forms intended for use by higher education institutions, research institutes and expert panels.

Initial proposals of new documents which regulate the conducting of external evaluation procedures were drafted at the Agency and subsequently discussed at Accreditation Council sessions. The Accreditation Council eventually adopted the final versions of these documents. In accordance with principles of good practice which envision stakeholder involvement in the development of new external evaluation documents, all documents were made available for public consultation and published on the Agency website.

The initial accreditation of study programmes is an external quality evaluation procedure which is a requirement for all study programmes proposed by public and private higher education institutions.

The initial accreditation of higher education institutions is an external quality evaluation procedure which is a requirement for all new public and private higher education institutions.

Initial accreditation of study programmes

Quality standards for evaluations in the procedure of initial accreditation of undergraduate, graduate, integrated, specialist and short-cycle programmes

Instructions for conducting the procedure of initial accreditation of study programmes

Annex 1a: Initial accreditation procedure application form – study programme (undergraduate, graduate, integrated, specialist and short-cycle programmes)

Annex 2a: Report form for the initial accreditation of undergraduate, graduate, integrated, specialist and short-cycle programmes

Annex 3: Higher education institution comment form

Annex 4: Action plan form

Initial accreditation of doctoral study programmes

Quality standards for evaluations in the procedure of initial accreditation of doctoral study programmes

Instructions for conducting the procedure of initial accreditation of study programmes

Annex 1b: Initial accreditation procedure application form – doctoral study programme

Annex 2b: Report form for the initial accreditation of doctoral study programmes

Annex 3: Higher education institution comment form

Annex 4: Action plan form

Initial accreditation of higher education institutions

Quality standards for evaluations in the procedure for initial accreditation of higher education institutions

Instructions for conducting the procedure of initial accreditation of higher education institutions

Analytic supplement to self-evaluation report

Annex 1: Application form for initial accreditation of the higher education institution

Annex 2: Report form for the initial accreditation of higher education institutions

Annex 3: Higher education institution comment form

Annex 4: Action plan form

The accreditation of joint studies is an external evaluation procedure which applies to joint studies offered by a Croatian and a foreign higher education institution and is conducted in accordance with the European QA approach to joint programmes.

The re-accreditation of higher education institutions is an external quality evaluation procedure which is a requirement for all public and private higher education institutions in five-year cycles.

Accreditation of joint study programmes

Quality standards in the accreditation procedure of joint study programmes offered by (a) Croatian and (a) foreign higher education institution(s)

Ordinance on implementation of accreditation of joint studies of domestic and/or foreign higher education institution(s)

Annex 1: Self-evaluation report form

Annex 2: Report form for the initial accreditation of joint study programmes

Re-accreditation of higher education institutions

Quality standards for evaluations in the procedure of re-accreditation of higher education institutions

Ordinance on conducting the procedure for the re-accreditation of higher education institutions

Annex 1: Self-evaluation report form

Annex 2: Information submission form

Annex 3: Expert panel report form

Annex 4: Higher education institution comment form

In addition to the above-mentioned, in 2023, the Accreditation Council adopted the Quality Standards for Evaluations in the Procedure of Initial Accreditation of Undergraduate, Graduate, Integrated, Specialist and Short-Cycle Online Programmes, which were submitted for public consultation, and the final version is expected to be adopted at the beginning of 2024.

The initial accreditation of research institutes is an external evaluation procedure which is a requirement for research institutes in case a new one is being established or in case of a change in the status of a research institute.

The re-accreditation of research institutes is an external quality evaluation procedure which is a requirement for all research institutes in five-year cycles.

Initial accreditation of research institutes

Quality standards for evaluations in the procedure for initial accreditation of research institutes

Instructions for conducting the procedure of initial accreditation of research institutes

Analytic supplement – tables and notes

Annex 1: Request form for the issuance of a licence for the research institute to operate

Annex 2: Report of the expert panel on the initial accreditation of the research institute

Annex 3: Research institute comment form

Annex 4: Research institute action plan form

Annex 5: Justification for reimbursement of travel expenses

Re-accreditation of research institutes

Quality standards for evaluations in the procedure for the re-accreditation of research institutes

Ordinance on conducting the procedure for the re-accreditation of the research institute

Analytic supplement to the self-evaluation report – tables and notes

Annex 1: Self-evaluation report of the research institute

Annex 2: Report of the expert panel on the re-accreditation of the research institute

Annex 3: Research institute comment form in the re-accreditation procedure

Annex 4: Research institute action plan form

Annex 5: Justification for reimbursement of travel expenses

Re-accreditation of higher education institutions

In 2022, the Agency for Science and Higher Education published the Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2023, which included the re-accreditation of the following higher education institutions: Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka; Catholic University of Croatia; University North and University of Dubrovnik. The Plan was amended in September of 2022 for the following HEIs, which were subsequently re-accredited: University of Zadar and Juraj Dobrila University of Pula.

The year 2023 also saw the re-accreditation of 10 higher education institutions which were included in the Re-accreditation Plan for 2022. These were the following: Faculty of Dental Medicine, University of Rijeka; Faculty of Kinesiology, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek; ARCA College; Faculty of Medicine, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek; College of Security and Safety; Academy of Fine Arts, University of Zagreb; Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb; Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, University of Zagreb; Faculty of Medicine, University of Zagreb and Faculty of Medicine, University of Split.

The procedures were carried out pursuant to the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (OG 45/09) during the spring and autumn, and, along with Croatian experts, international experts also took

part in the re-accreditations.

An online training module was made available via a learning management system for expert panel members who took part in re-accreditation procedures

in the autumn. The content of the training module was developed in English and consists of seven units which guide panel members through the re-accreditation procedure.

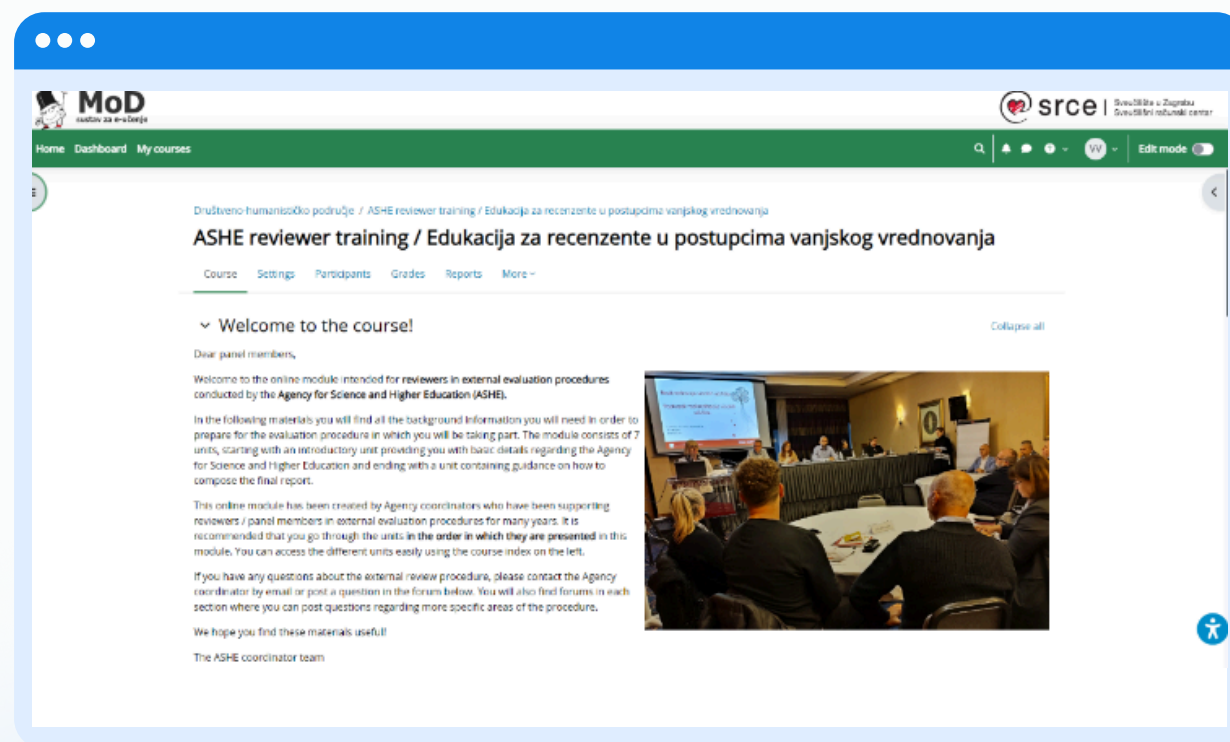
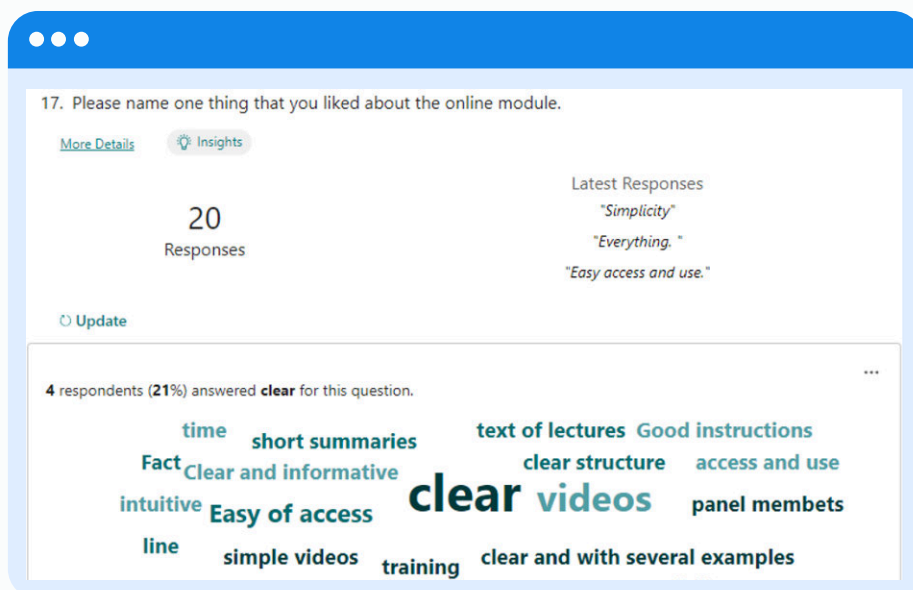
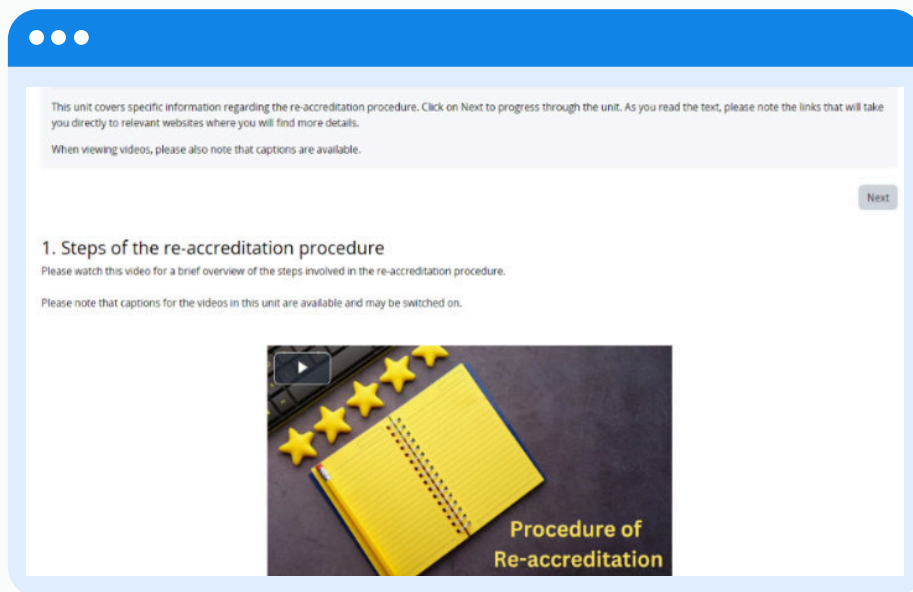


IMAGE 1. SCREENSHOT OF ONLINE TRAINING MODULE CONTENT AND FEEDBACK PROVIDED BY EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS



1 panel member

Lithuania, Poland, Finland, Estonia, Denmark, Portugal, Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, Belgium

2 panel members

Germany, Sweden

4 panel members

Spain, United Kingdom, Austria

12 panel members

Slovenia

IMAGE 2. NUMBER OF FOREIGN PANEL MEMBERS IN 2023 RE-ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES BY COUNTRY OF EMPLOYMENT



IMAGE 3. WORKING MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF CROATIA DURING THE RE-ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE



IMAGE 4. EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS AND AGENCY COORDINATORS IN THE RE-ACCREDITATION OF THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF CROATIA



IMAGE 5. WORKING MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ZADAR DURING THE RE-ACCREDITATION PROCEDURE

Re-accreditation of doctoral studies

In 2023, the Accreditation Council of the Agency adopted 61 opinions of the Follow-up Committee in the procedure of re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes. Moreover, in 2023, eight doctoral study programmes successfully proved they had eliminated the deficiencies identified by expert panels in the re-accreditation procedures.

Initial accreditation in higher education

Initial accreditation of study programmes

In 2023, the Agency carried out initial accreditation procedures of study programmes pursuant to the new Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Science (OG 151/2022) which came into force on 22 December 2022, as well as pursuant to Article 20 of the old 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). All procedures initiated by an application submitted prior to the new Act coming into force were carried out pursuant to the old Act. This was a total of eight procedures and these were all completed by the end of June 2023.

The Agency successfully completed three evaluation procedures of new study programmes pursuant to the new Act.

The new procedure comprises the following steps: the Agency checks the application form submitted by the higher education institution, the expert panel visits the site of the evaluated HEI, the final report is written, the Accreditation Council issues a reasoned proposal to issue/deny a licence for the HEI to operate, and, finally, the Agency issues a final decision on whether to issue/deny a licence.

Initial accreditation of higher education institutions

The new Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Science (OG 151/2022) also regulates the manner of conducting the evaluation procedure when a new higher education institution is established. In 2023, no applications were submitted to the Agency initiating the

procedure of initial accreditation of a higher education institution.

Pursuant to Article 19 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (OG 45/2009) and the Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out a Study Programme and Re-Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (OG 24/2010) the Agency carried out an evaluation of the II. stage of the procedure of issuing a licence for performing higher education activity in the case of two HEIs.

Justification for public funding of new studies

The new Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Science (OG 151/2022) stipulates that all study programmes offered by public HEIs are required to undergo an initial accreditation procedure, thereby invalidating the requirement that compliance of the new study programme be checked against the strategic document Network of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes in the Republic of Croatia.

All applications submitted by public HEIs prior to the new Act coming into force were forwarded to the Agency by the Ministry of Science and Education so that, pursuant to the provisions of Article 20, Paragraph 10 of the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (OG 45/2009), the Agency may issue

an opinion on the justification for financing of study programmes for which public universities have requested additional funds from the state budget.

In 2023, the Agency received 46 applications from the Ministry of Science and Education for checking compliance of study programmes with the strategic document Network of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes in Republic of Croatia. Positive opinions were issued for 44 programmes and 2 study programmes did not meet the requirements for compliance with said document. Once the submitted information was revised, the requirements were met.

Initial accreditation for scientific activity

In 2023, the Agency received and processed three applications for initial accreditation for carrying out scientific activity. Out of these three applications, one was submitted by a public university, one by a private institution which is not a university, university constituent or a research institute, and one by a public institution which is not a university, university constituent or a research institute. Two applications were in the area of biomedicine and health, while the third was in the area of biotechnical sciences. All the applications submitted received a positive accreditation recommendation.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic during the first half of 2023, two initial accreditation procedures were carried out online, i.e. via Zoom. Expert panels members had videoconferences with the management boards and researchers of the higher education institutions which had submitted the applications, while a tour of the premises was substituted by photographs and video materials. The third visit was carried out in person, i.e. on-site in the second half of 2023.

The procedures were conducted pursuant to the old Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (OG 45/09).

Audit of higher education institutions

In accordance with the 2022 Annual Plan of Audits, expert panel members visited the following HEIs in November and December:

- **College for Information Technologies – VSITE**
- **RRiF College of Financial Management**
- **RIT Croatia (Rochester Institute of Technology Croatia),**
- **University of Applied Sciences in Criminal Investigation and Public Security.**

At its 146th session held on 28 February 2023, the Accreditation Council adopted the final reports of the

expert panels for RRiF College of Financial Management, University of Applied Sciences in Criminal Investigation and Public Security and College for Information Technologies – VSITE. At its 147th session held on 28 March 2023, the Accreditation Council adopted the final report of the expert panel for RIT Croatia.

Each adopted report comprised a number of recommendations for the enhancement of the quality assurance system of the evaluated HEI in the forthcoming period. In accordance with the audit procedure, the HEIs drew up action plans whereby they planned to carry out activities with the aim of further enhancing their QA systems and taking up various opportunities for development.

Six months after the adoption of the final reports, the audited HEIs submitted follow-up reports, which comprised a description of how the planned activities had been carried out, supporting evidence and an analysis of how effective the activities had been. The expert panels evaluated these follow-up reports and prepared final reports containing an efficiency analysis of the activities that were carried out during the follow-up stage. These were then sent to the HEIs in question. Finally, the chairs of the expert panels and an Agency coordinator visited the HEIs and in meetings with HEI representatives discussed the progress their institutions had made in carrying out follow-up activities. They also discussed the panel's recommendations for improvement in light of the remaining follow-up period.

Because the audit follow-up stage lasts for two years, another three institutions are currently also implementing recommendations for improvement listed in their action plans. These are: Polytechnic Baltazar Zaprrešić, Zagreb School of Business, and College for Law and Finance "Effectus". For these HEIs, the audit procedure will be concluded in the spring of 2024.

Management Board of the Agency for Science and Higher Education

The Agency for Science and Higher Education is governed by a Management Board with the rights and obligations defined by the Act on Quality Assurance in

Higher Education and Science (OG 151/2022), the Institutions Act (OG 76/1993, 29/1997, 47/1999, 35/2008, 127/2019), the Agency Statute (CLASS: 003-05/13-01/0001; FILE NUMBER: 355-01-23-29) and other general acts of the Agency. The Management Board of the Agency comprises eight members and a president. The president and seven members of the Management Board are appointed and relieved of their duty by the Government of the Republic of Croatia, while the ninth member, a representative of the Agency staff, is appointed and dismissed by the workers' council of the Agency. The president and members of the Management Board are appointed for a four-year term.

On 27 April 2023, the Government of the Republic of Croatia issued a Decision to relieve the president and members of the Management Board of their duty due to the expiry of their term of office and to appoint a president and members of the Management Board for a

new term of office (CLASS: 080-02/23-02/43; FILE NUMBER: 50301-15/07-23-02).

In 2023, the Management Board held a total of nine sessions: five were held by the members appointed on 5 April 2019 by a Decision of the Croatian Parliament (CLASS: 021-13/19-07/12). At its 75th session held on 25 January 2023, the Management Board, with prior consent of the Ministry of Science and Education, adopted the Statute of the Agency for Science and Higher Education (CLASS: 003-05/13-01/0001; FILE NUMBER: 355-01-23-29, in effect as of 2 February 2023). At its 78th session held on 7 March 2023, the Management Board, in accordance with the results of a public call to appoint the director of the Agency, adopted a Decision to appoint the director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education (CLASS: 112-01/23-01/03; FILE NUMBER: 355-01-02-23-06), thereby appointing Assoc. prof. Danijela Horvatek Tomić, Ph.D. director of the Agency for a four-year term. At its 79th session held on 4 April 2023, the Management Board adopted a Decision to appoint the deputy director of the Agency. Irena Petrušić, Ph.D. was appointed deputy director of the Agency.

The new members of the Management Board, appointed by Decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia of 27 April 2023, held four sessions in 2023. The constituting and operational session of the Management Board was held on 20 June 2023.

Management Board members: Prof. Dijana Vican, Ph.D., president; Prof. Bosiljka Britvić Vetma, Ph.D., member; Prof. Drago Šubarić, Ph.D., member; Prof. Tibor Pentek, Ph.D., member; Assoc. prof. Damir Jugo, Ph.D., prof. of professional studies, member; Ljubo Runjić, Ph.D., prof. of professional studies, member; Mr. Ivica Šušak, dipl. iur., member; Ms Dijana Mandić, dipl. iur., member and Ms Maja Šegvić, struč. spec. admin. publ., member (staff representative).

Accreditation Council

At its session held on 4 April 2023, the Management Board of the Agency for Science and Higher Education appointed the following members of the Accreditation Council of the Agency for a four-year term: Prof. Irena Burić, Ph.D.; Prof. Alen Host, Ph.D.; Prof. Danijel Labaš, Ph.D.; Prof. Ivanka Netinger Grubeša, Ph.D.; Prof. Katija Vojvodić, Ph.D.; Sanja Matić Skoko, Ph.D.; Tajana Sekelj Ivančan, Ph.D. and Nina Popović, Ph.D. At its session held on 20 June 2023, the Management Board of the Agency appointed the following members of the Accreditation Council: Stjepan Lacković, Ph.D.; Luka Jurčević and Katarina Podrug, while at the session held on 18 December 2023, they appointed Vedran Bajer.

Prof. Mirjana Hruškar, Ph.D. was unanimously elected President of the Accreditation Council

From the date it was appointed until 31 December 2023, the new Accreditation Council held eight regular and three special sessions. As the new Act came into force, the Accreditation Council, with prior consent of the Management Board, adopted the Rules of Procedure, the Activity Plan and the Code of Conduct for Members of the Accreditation Council.

In the same period, the Accreditation Council, pursuant to the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and

Science (OG 151/22), adopted the documents regulating the conducting of the following evaluation procedures: initial accreditation of study programmes, initial accreditation of HEIs, re-accreditation of HEIs, re-accreditation of research institutes, and Quality Standards for Evaluations in the Procedure of Initial Accreditation of Undergraduate, Graduate, Integrated, Specialist and Short-Cycle Online Programmes.

The new Accreditation Council issued:

5 positive opinions on issuing a licence to deliver a study programme

5 opinions on issuing a letter of expectation

4 final opinions in the re-accreditations of higher education institutions

11 positive opinions on issuing a confirmation that the requirements for performing higher education and/or scientific activity have been met

1 negative opinion on denying a licence to perform higher education activity

2 positive opinions on issuing a licence to perform scientific activity

The new Accreditation Council adopted 28 opinions of the Follow-up Committee in the re-accreditations of HEIs and 47 opinions of the Follow-up Committee in the re-accreditations of doctoral study programmes. In addition, the Accreditation Council discussed and issued decisions on topics regarding which explanations were sought from the Ministry of Science and Education.

The old Accreditation Council held a total of four sessions in 2023 and issued the following:

1 negative and five positive opinions in the initial accreditation for delivering a study programme

1 positive opinion on performing scientific activity

2 positive opinions in the initial accreditation for performing higher education activity

2 positive opinions and four letters of expectation in the II. re-accreditation cycle of HEIs

7 positive opinions in the re-accreditation of postgraduate university (doctoral) studies

7 positive opinions in audits of HEIs

In addition, the old Accreditation Council adopted the Decision on higher education institutions which will be evaluated based on the hybrid model up to June of 2023, as well as seven opinions of the Follow-up Committee in re-accreditations of HEIs and 21 opinions in re-accreditations of doctoral programmes.

Follow-up Committee

The Follow-up Committee is an advisory body of the ASHE Accreditation Council whose task it is to provide expert assistance to the Accreditation Council on all follow-up issues, depending on the external evaluation procedure.

Pursuant to the new Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Science (OG 151/2022), on 11 May 2023, the Accreditation Council of the Agency appointed a Follow-up Committee for external evaluation procedures, consisting of the following members: Prof. Dario Đerđa, Ph.D.; Prof. Katija Vojvodić, Ph.D.; Prof. Jasenka Mršić-Pelčić, Ph.D.; Prof. Davor Petrinović, Ph.D.; Prof. Nenad Turk, Ph.D.; Prof. Mario Vinković, Ph.D. and Ivana Magnabosca. Prof. Katija Vojvodić, Ph.D. was elected president of the Follow-up Committee.

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 part of 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 actual action plan submitted by the higher education institution.

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

In 2023, the Follow-up Committee held a total of nine sessions.

Regarding re-accreditations of higher education institutions, a total of 33 procedures were completed, 21 of which in relation to action plans, and 12 in relation to the reports on the implementation of action plans. For 29 cases, the Follow-up Committee issued a positive opinion, while it issued a request for modification for four cases.

The new Accreditation Council adopted 28 opinions of the Follow-up Committee in the procedure of re-accreditations of HEIs, while the old Accreditation Council adopted seven opinions of the Follow-up Committee.

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

In 2023, the Accreditation Council adopted 68 opinions of the Follow-up Committee in the procedure of re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes: 21 opinions were adopted by the old Accreditation Council, while 47 opinions were adopted by the new one.

Moreover, in 2023, eight doctoral study programmes successfully proved they had eliminated the deficiencies which were the reason they were issued a letter of expectation.

Complaints Committee

In 2023, the Complaints Committee held four sessions, at which it decided on the merits of higher education institutions' complaints regarding the opinion of the Accreditation Council.

Two complaints were found to be justified and one partly justified. One complaint was found to be unjustified; however, one Committee member held a dissenting opinion.

IT systems supporting evaluation procedures

The Agency for Science and Higher Education plays an active role in the development and management of information and communication tools used in external evaluation procedures, in particular the MOZVAG2 system and the in-house information system Central Procedures Database.

In cooperation with the University Computing Centre (Srce), since 2018, ASHE has been developing and maintaining the MOZVAG2 information system (which replaced the MOZVAG system). This is the system to which all HEIs undergoing external evaluations add information about their activities and resources (data on study programmes, courses, teaching staff, projects and scientific output, and other information in accordance with the requirements of a specific evaluation procedure).

ASHE also maintains and updates the Directory of Study Programmes available on the Agency's website

in both Croatian and English. The Directory provides the public with an insight into the basic data on the accredited study programmes offered by Croatian higher education institutions.

ASHE also analyses data on higher education and science gathered by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics and presents them on the Agency website in simple and accessible format. ASHE independently collects and processes information about the state and efficiency of higher education and scientific activity required for the successful implementation of external evaluation procedures. Also, ASHE carries out system-

wide analyses and looks into specific assessment areas or quality standards.

Central Procedures Database information system

Data on all external evaluation procedures carried out by ASHE are recorded in the Central Procedures Database system, including the information on experts participating in the procedures, documents, procedure

outcomes and deadlines for specific phases of a procedure. In addition, ASHE's Operative plans, Risks and their assessment in relation to business activities and records on staff training are also stored in the Central Procedures Database.

Support provision for MOZVAG2 system administrators

MOZVAG2, developed by ASHE in cooperation with the University Computing Centre in 2018, was upgraded several times with the aim of optimizing the submission of required information by higher education institutions.

ASHE, Srce and HEI administrators use the address mozvag@azvo.hr to communicate and exchange experiences of working in MOZVAG2, as well as to address HEI inquiries and problems. More than 1400 inquiries were received regarding MOZVAG2 in 2023. This past year has also seen MOZVAG2 used to conduct 16 re-accreditation procedures of HEIs and two follow-up procedures, as well as to produce 119 analytic documents.

e-Universities project

The project is scheduled to last from March 2022 to December 2025.

The Agency for Science and Higher Education is a partner on the e-Universities project, which is headed by the Croatian Academic and Research Network - CARNET.

The e-Universities project aims to bring about the digital transformation of higher education in Croatia by enhancing digital teaching infrastructure, introducing digital tools into the teaching process and strengthening teachers' digital competences. The overall aim of the e-Universities project is to enhance the quality and availability of higher education by making public HEIs more flexible and innovative through investments in digital teaching infrastructure. The project is headed by the Croatian Academic and Research Network -CARNET, and includes the following partner institutions: ASHE, the University Computing Centre (Srce) and the National and University Library in Zagreb (NSK).

Research activities

A project research activity coordinated by ASHE is titled *An investigation of study programmes to determine the extent to which the development of students' digital competences is represented*. A simple procurement procedure was conducted as part of this activity and a contract was concluded with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek.

This research and the data analysed will yield an insight into the extent to which digital competences are represented in the learning outcomes of a representative sample of study programmes in Croatia. This may then serve as a basis to improve learning outcomes insofar as students' digital competences are concerned and to align learning outcomes more closely with labour market needs.

The research consists of four stages:

1. Developing a research methodology (deadline: October 2023)
2. Data collection and statistical analysis (deadline: end of 2023)
3. Data analysis and producing a publication (deadline: early 2024)
4. Presentation of research results (deadline: May 2024).

Development and experimental implementation of a modular educational programme for users at HEIs

The aim of the activity titled *Development and experimental implementation of a modular educational programme for users at HEIs* is to provide educational support for the strengthening of teacher competences and boosting the level of digital maturity of HEIs across Croatia. ASHE is contributing to this activity by providing Agency expertise to the working group responsible for producing the curriculum underpinning the educational programme.

Evaluations and advising HEIs on digital maturity

The aim of this activity is to develop a model of evaluating the digital maturity of HEIs. ASHE is responsible for conducting the external evaluations of digital maturity at 11 HEIs in the first half of 2025. ASHE is also contributing to preparatory activities by providing Agency expertise to the working group for the digitalization of higher education and quality assurance of the preparation and implementation of the e-Universities project.

Active participation in other project activities

The University Computing Centre (Srce), one of the project partners, is responsible for, among other things, developing and establishing the Information System of Records in Higher Education Institutions (ISeVO). This is meant to link and improve the existing system of information in higher education. ASHE is contributing to this activity by providing Agency expertise to the working group for the establishment of an Information System of Records in Higher Education Institutions (ISeVO). The working group is tasked with producing optimal solutions for the establishment of a central system of comprehensive, complete and reliable information which will enable quality decision-making in the Croatian higher education system.

Another project activity ASHE has taken part in is the organization and implementation of the conference titled *THECUC 2023: The Digital Transformation of Higher Education: Innovations for the Future of Learning & Teaching*, which took place in Vodice, Croatia from 8 to 10 November 2023.

The Agency contributed to the conference in the following ways:

- a presentation titled “What lies ahead in new external evaluation procedures?” was held by Assoc. prof. Danijela Horvatek Tomić, Ph.D., director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education (8 November 2023);

- a roundtable discussion titled “How will we evaluate online study programmes?” was set up and moderated by ASHE (8 November 2023);
- a presentation on the progress of the research activity coordinated by ASHE, titled “An investigation of study programmes to determine the extent to which the development of students’ digital competences is represented” was held by the research team from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek (10 November 2023).

Croatian Qualifications Framework Register

The CroQF Register is a database to which occupational standards are added and within which occupational standards are linked with qualification standards through units of competencies and units of learning outcomes.

In 2023, pursuant to the Croatian Qualifications Framework Act and the Ordinance on the Croatian Qualifications Framework Register, the Agency for Science and Higher Education continued to carry out formal and expert evaluations of applications for additions of qualification standards and standards of units of learning outcomes at the level of higher education to the Croatian Qualifications Framework Register (CroQF Register). ASHE also continued to adopt decisions on registration in the Sub-register of qualification standards and the Sub-register of units of learning outcomes.

The CroQF Register is a database to which occupational standards are added and within which occupational standards are linked with qualification standards through units of competencies and units of learning

outcomes. Proposals of qualification standards and/or units of learning outcomes in higher education for additions to the CroQF Register are made in accordance with the Guidelines for the Development of Qualification Standards in Higher Education, whose amended version was published in October 2023.

Pursuant to the Instructions on development, alignment and approval of educational programmes of HEIs at the level of higher education for the purpose of securing funding through the voucher system using funds from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026 (Ministry of Science and Education, 24 August 2022), the Agency evaluated the compliance of lifelong learning programmes at the level of higher education with the CroQF Register.

The Instructions refer to the development, alignment and approval of educational programmes of HEIs which are:

- at the level of higher education;
- based on lifelong learning principles;
- compliant with standards of units of learning outcomes which have been added to the CroQF Register;
- developed for the purposes of securing funding from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026,
- a result of internal development of lifelong learning at HEIs.

In 2023, ASHE carried out formal evaluations of 44 applications for additions of qualification standards to the CroQF Register. Expert evaluations were also carried out for 21 applications and a total of 11 qualification standards at the level of higher education were added to the Register. As for lifelong learning programmes, 26 such programmes at the level of higher education were found to be compliant with standards of units of learning outcomes added to the CroQF Register.

44

formally evaluated
applications for adding QS
to the CroQF Register

21

expertly evaluated
applications for adding QS
to the CroQF Register

11

qualification standards
added to the CroQF
Register

26

certificates of compliance
of lifelong learning
programmes with
standards of units of
learning outcomes from
the CroQF Register

34

national sector experts, representatives of the business
community, as well as the academic and scientific
community took part in expert evaluations of
applications for adding QS to the CroQF Register

IMAGE 6. APPLICATIONS IN THE PROCEDURE FOR ADDING QS TO
THE CROQF REGISTER WITHIN ASHE'S COMPETENCE IN 2023

International activities

In 2023, the Agency staff continued to play various roles and take part in a series of international events and processes in the area of public policy governing higher education, i.e. the quality enhancement of higher education, primarily in Europe but also further afield.

ASHE is a long-standing full member of key European associations – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) – and as such is involved in their regular activities and projects. In addition, some of the Agency staff serve as members of important bodies of these associations.

In 2023, Mía Đikić, Ph.D., the Agency's assistant director for science, was appointed to the ENQA Working Group on QA of Research. Quality assurance in research is a

highly relevant topic on the European policy agenda and ranks high among current trends in science evaluations. The topic also proved to be of considerable significance in the discussion on revising the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). This working group aims to explore the latest achievements in the areas of evaluating research-based learning, institutional research policies and the QA process in research.

Also, Vesna Dodiković-Jurković, Ph.D. is the Vice President of CEENQA and a member of their Executive Board, as well as a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher

Education (INQAAHE), which is conducting research titled *Global Trends in Tertiary Education Quality Assurance: Internal and External QA*. She is also a co-author of the chapter on the development of quality assurance in higher education in Eastern Europe. Following a two-year term on the board of the ENQA body ARC (*The Agency Review Committee*), mr. sc. Sandra Bezjak was appointed to the EQAR Council. As an ENQA certified expert, she took part in the international external evaluations of the *National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency* (NEAA) and the *Hungarian Accreditation Committee*.

ASHE continued to collaborate with partners on ongoing international projects and joined new international EU-funded projects.

International visibility and the quality of the Agency's work has brought about an increased number of inquiries of foreign higher education institutions regarding the external evaluation of their study programmes as well as the evaluation of joint international studies. This serves as additional motivation to further strengthen this area of Agency activity.

International projects and memberships

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

IMAGE 7. PROJECTS FUNDED FROM EU PROGRAMMES

Mediterranean Automatic Recognition Network (MAREN)

Project coordinator
CIMEA, Italy

Duration of the project
April 2023 – April 2025

EU programme
Erasmus+

Partners along with ASHE

France Education International (FEI), France; Ministério da Educação e Ciência (MEC), Portugal and Ministerio de Universidades (MUNI), Spain

Description of the project

The expected impact of the project is to set up automatic recognition of qualifications among countries in the Mediterranean region by developing tools, such as a comparison table intended for HEIs and other stakeholders. Another important aspect of this project is to strengthen collaboration among NARIC centres in the Mediterranean region and consequently among the ministries responsible for higher education in partner countries, which will be facilitated by means of a network secretariat.

Automatic Recognition in the EEA – 2025 (AR25)

Project coordinator
Nuffic, Netherlands

Duration of the project
April 2023 – April 2025

EU programme
Erasmus+

Partners along with ASHE

BMBWF (Austria), Danish Agency for Education and Research (Denmark), FEI (France), QQI (Ireland), CIMEA (Italy), SKVC (Lithuania), MFHEA (Malta), NOKUT (Norway), NAWA (Poland), UHS (Sweden), ECCTIS, ENIC (Ukraine), ECA, EADTU and EUA

Description of the project

The project aims to support the implementation of the Council Recommendation and achieve automatic recognition of international qualifications by 2025 by bringing institutional recognition procedures in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) principles through promotion of the Spotlight self-assessment tool and support to future work on the recognition of study periods in upper secondary education via mapping national arrangements in recognition. Another aim of the project is to identify areas for improvement and build capacity among higher education institutions on how to evaluate micro-credentials, including on automatic recognition and update of the STACQ app and EAR-HEI manual to support streamlining of recognition practices.

Strengthening Capacities and Mechanisms for Enhancement of Quality Assurance System in Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SMEQA)

Project coordinator
University of Zenica,
Bosnia and Herzegovina

Duration of the project
Started on 1 January
2024 (duration is approx.
36 months)

EU programme
Erasmus+

Partners along with ASHE

Four public universities from BiH (University of Mostar, University of Sarajevo, University of Banja Luka and University of Zenica); three private universities from BiH (Herzegovina University University Vitez and Apeiron University Banja Luka); two quality assurance agencies from BiH – HEA and AVORS; Centar za informisanje (CIP) BiH; ministries of education from the BiH entities / cantons where the HEIs in the consortium are located; two European agencies for QA in higher education (also EQAR members) – ASHE and NAKVIS from Slovenia; and HEIs from the EU – University of Ljubljana and University of Split.

Description of the project

The aim of the project is to enhance the QA system of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and capacity building of all institutions in BiH for future accreditation procedures of HEIs and study programmes in BiH. Project activities are aimed at institutional and national strengthening of accreditation mechanisms, process harmonization in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the consistent implementation of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Project results are aimed at the following: a detailed analysis of the current situation in BiH; capacity building of agencies, ministries and HEIs by developing, enhancement and implementation of an accreditation model for HEIs and study programmes; enhancement, coordination and alignment of accreditation procedures in BiH at different levels; establishment of mechanisms for the coordination and harmonization of the QA system in higher education in BiH; and development of Recommendations for the regulation of internal evaluation and reviewer training.

IMAGE 8. ASHE MEMBERSHIPS IN INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The Agency for Science and Higher Education is a full member of the following international organizations:



International cooperation in the area of science and higher education

- Regular monthly online meetings of CEENQA (*Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*) members throughout 2023;
- Regular monthly meetings of the CEENQA (*Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*) executive board organized by the CEENQA secretariat and held online throughout the year and in person in Braşov, Romania on 21 April 2023;
- Kick-off meeting of the MAREN (*Mediterranean Automatic Recognition Network*) project team, organized by CIMEA (*Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence*) in Rome, Italy on 13 April 2023;
- Study visit of representatives of ACQAHE (*Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education*) from Montenegro to ASHE on 18 and 19 April 2023;
- INQAAHE conference titled *Roadmap to Enabling Quality in Tertiary Education 2030*, held in Astana, Kazakhstan, from 29 May to 1 June 2023 and attended by ASHE director, Assoc. prof. Danijela Horvatek Tomić, Ph.D. and ASHE deputy director Irena Petrušić Ph.D.; the conference consisted of four workshops as well as oral and poster presentations on the topics of digitalization of teaching and learning, cross-border accreditations and QA in higher education in general;

- CEENQA (*Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*) workshop titled *People and Culture in QA Agencies*, workshop and research headed by: Vesna Dodiković-Jurković, Ph.D., ASHE, Astana, Kazakhstan, 2 June 2023;
- General assembly of CEENQA (*Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*), Astana, Kazakhstan, 3 June 2023;
- 30th joint annual meeting of ENIC and NARIC networks, organized by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO in Stockholm, Sweden from 11 to 13 June 2023;
- 32nd annual EURASHE conference (*European Association of Institutions in Higher Education*) titled *Skills for Europe*, held in Bucharest, Romania on 8 and 9 June 2023;
- Seminar *European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education*, held in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, on 22 and 23 June 2023; attended by ASHE director, Assoc. prof. Danijela Horvatek Tomić, Ph.D. and ASHE assistant director Mia Đikić, Ph.D.; the seminar marked the 20th anniversary of the consortium and dealt with QA in higher education
- Online meetings of INQAAHE (*International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*), *Second INQAAHE Global Study on Trends in Quality Assurance, II Global Study* extended team meeting, held online on 13 July and 9 November 2023;
- Online meetings of INQAAHE the Eastern Europe team (*EET*) for the second *Global Study on Trends in Quality Assurance*, 7 September and 2 November 2023;
- In September 2023, Mia Đikić, Ph.D., the Agency's assistant director for science, was appointed to the

ENQA Working Group on QA of Research. The working group has been appointed for the period up to September 2024.

- Kick-off meeting on the Erasmus+ project *Automatic Recognition in the EEA – 2025 (AR25)*, organized by Nuffic, The Hague, 10 September 2023;
- Regional meeting of ENIC and NARIC centres as part of the final project conference *Implementation of the Lisbon Convention in Bosnia and Herzegovina (ILIRIC)*, organized by the Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education of Bosnia and Herzegovina (CIP), Mostar, 27 October 2023;
- ENQA general assembly, Dublin, Ireland, from 25 to 27 October 2023; attended by ASHE director Assoc. prof. Danijela Horvatek Tomić, Ph.D. and ASHE deputy director Irena Petrušić, Ph.D.; the assembly was an occasion to hold meetings of ENQA member agency directors and thematic meetings on the subject of recognition of qualifications, ESG revision and the latest developmental policies and approaches in QA;
- Online annual meeting of the NARIC (*National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union*) network, organized by the European Commission, 21 November 2023;
- Study visit of representatives of ACQAHE (*Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education*) from Montenegro to ASHE as part of the project *I'MINQA Staff mobility in the field of quality assurance*, from 5 to 7 December 2023;
- Heads of ENQA and EQAR on a working visit to ASHE on 06 December 2023.

Presentations at Croatian and international conferences and research and professional papers published as a result of international cooperation

Presentations at Croatian and international conferences

- Horvatek Tomić, D. *Project e-Universities – activities of the Agency for Science and Higher Education*, The e-Infrastructure Days – Srce DEI 2023, Zagreb, Croatia, 28–30 March 2023
- Horvatek Tomić, D. *Evaluation procedures of the Agency for Science and Higher Education in an international environment*, 3rd international conference on quality in business, Zagreb, Croatia, 15 June 2023
- Horvatek Tomić, D. *Role of the Agency in supporting HEIs in their internal quality assurance systems and how to build “quality culture” at HEIs*; Consideration of internal quality assurance standards in external quality assurance – good practices; Quality culture from the perspective of HEIs, workshop of Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe, Zagreb, Croatia, 6 and 7 July 2023
- Horvatek Tomić, D. *Quality Assurance in building Quality Culture*, conference “Quality and Quality Assurance in Higher Education – Trends and developments in the EU and Western Balkans”, Skopje, 26 and 27 September 2023
- Horvatek Tomić, D. *What lies ahead in new external evaluation procedures?*, THECUC 2023: The Digital Transformation of Higher Education: Innovations for the Future of Learning & Teaching, Vodice, Croatia, 8 – 10 November 2023
- Bezjak, S.: *Key challenges in reaching compliance with the ESG in Western Balkans* (round table), meeting of representatives of ministries and quality assurance agencies on the topic *Legislative alignment with the ESG: the path towards meeting the Bologna Process key commitment on quality assurance in the Western Balkans*, ENQA and EQAR, Brussels, Belgium, 8 and 9 March 2023
- Bezjak S.: *Quality assurance in higher education and science, Odyssey conference “Happy hour with Deans and Friends”*, Poreč, Croatia, 11 May 2023
- Bezjak S.: *Part II of ESG, ERISSE Workshop on integration of ESG into the work of QA agencies in HE from the Western Balkans*, Zagreb, Croatia, 6 and 7 July 2023
- Bezjak S.: *Building a quality culture, a south-east European perspective*, KAA Conference on Higher Education, Pristina, Kosovo, 26 September 2023
- Bezjak S., Dodiković-Jurković V.: *How to encourage the involvement of students in QA activities-ASHE experiences, ESU Training: Diverse yet equal. (Inter)national quality assurance*, Rijeka, Croatia, 18–21 October 2023
- Bezjak S.: *International accreditation as a guarantee of quality*, Panel discussion as part of Universities Week in Zagreb 2023, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia, 7 November 2023
- Bezjak S., Dragičević J.: *Changes in Croatian legal framework to accommodate for the use of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes, Knowledge Café organised as a part of the EQAR Members’ Dialogue 2023: EQAR, quo vadis?*, Granada, Spain, 9 and 10 November 2023
- Blagdan, E. *Role of qualification standards and units of learning outcomes in CroQF implementation for developing programmes at the level of higher education*, workshop for institutions proposing occupational standards and stakeholders in the voucher system, University of Split, Split, 31 January 2023
- Blagdan, E. *Units of learning outcomes in higher education as a basis for the development of lifelong learning programmes – experiences from evaluation procedures*, webinar Linking micro-credentials in higher education with Croatian Qualifications Framework, 7 and 9 March 2023
- Blagdan, E. *Role of qualification standards and units of learning outcomes in CroQF implementation for*

- developing programmes at the level of higher education*, workshop "Alignment and approval of educational programmes of HEIs at the level of higher education, for the purpose of securing funding through the voucher system using funds from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021 – 2026", Faculty of Agriculture, University of Zagreb, 31 March 2023
- Blagdan, E. *Role of qualification standards in the application of CroQF for the development of educational programmes at the level of higher education*, webinar "Lifelong learning at the level of higher education (CroQF) – funding through the voucher system", Faculty of Law, University of Split, Split, Croatia, 16 May 2023
 - Blagdan, E. *Lifelong learning and micro-credentials in higher education*, workshop, Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia, 10 November 2023
 - Borošić, I. *Results of the second cycle of re-accreditation of universities regarding support to students from vulnerable and underrepresented groups*, symposium Ensuring the inclusivity of education through support for students (with disabilities): How far have we come and how to proceed?, organized by Coordination of the Ombudsperson for Persons with Disabilities for Support in Higher Education, Zoom platform, 24 January 2023
 - Borošić, I. *Overview of the previous cycle of re-accreditation and announcement of the new cycle of evaluation of polytechnics*, meeting of expert services of the Conference of Polytechnics of the Republic of Croatia, Polytechnic of Rijeka, Rijeka, 13 October 2023
 - Dodiković - Jurković, V. *Advancing ASHE internal quality assurance system and professional conduct, CEENQA Staff Exchange Scheme 2022/23 (hosting the staff members from Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education – SKVC)*, Zagreb, Croatia, 8 – 10 March 2023
 - Dodiković - Jurković, V. *New developments and progress at ASHE, Croatia, CEENQA's sixteenth bi-monthly meeting*, online, 17 May 2023
 - Dodiković - Jurković, V. *Developments in Human Resources Management in Quality Assurance Agencies, CEENQA Workshop "People and Culture in QA Agencies" and 2023 General Assembly*, Astana, Kazakhstan, 2 and 3 June 2023
 - Dodiković - Jurković V. *How standards of the ESG Part 3 are integrated into the work of the Agency, how they are measured and improved*, workshop Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe, ERI SEE, Zagreb, 6 and 7 July 2023
 - Dodiković - Jurković, V. *INQAAHE II Global Study on Trends in Tertiary Education Quality Assurance: Challenges and Opportunities in Internal and External Quality Assurance 2023-2025, CEENQA's eighteenth bi-monthly meeting*, online, 20 September 2023
 - Dodiković - Jurković, V. *Advancing ASHE internal quality assurance system and professional conduct, IMINQA: Staff Mobility (Agencija za kontrolu i obezbjeđenje kvaliteta visokog obrazovanja (AKOKVO) / Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education – ACQAHE)*, Zagreb, Croatia, 5 – 7 December 2023
 - Đikić, M. *Overview of re-accreditation of doctoral studies in the Republic of Croatia*, final dissemination event of Erasmus+ project SEA-EU Doc (Beyond academic – broadening the career horizons of doctoral students in marine and maritime sciences in Europe), University of Split, Split, Croatia, 22 May 2023
 - Petrušić, I. *Overview of re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes in the information-communication field with special emphasis on new guidelines in evaluation*, Panel discussion Modern trends in information-communication sciences, University North, Varaždin, Croatia, 26 February 2023
 - Petrušić, I.; Dragičević, J. *Quality assurance mechanisms in regards to work-based learning – findings from institutional accreditation in Croatia (2019 – 2021)*, INTED 2023 – 17th International Technology, Education and Development Conference, INTED, Valencia, Spain, 5–8 March 2023
 - Petrušić, I. *News in the quality assurance system of higher education and science – external evaluations of study programmes and institutions*, 7th University Quality Day "Achieving quality through networking: Synergy for excellence of the University of Zagreb", University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia, 30 November 2023
 - Petrušić, I. *Presenting Quality Standards in the Procedure of Re-Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions*, Conference of Polytechnics, Zagreb, Croatia, 12 December 2023

Publications

- Dodiković - Jurković, V., Đorđević, M. (2023). *Developments in Human Resources management in Quality Assurance Agencies. U: Engelmann, J. P. (ed.) Proceedings of Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education: Workshop People and Culture in QA Agencies. Laško: Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) e.V., 13-23*

Professional publications

- Petrušić, Irena. (2023) *Student-Centred Learning in the Context of External Quality Assurance* *MedicinaFluminensis*, vol. 59, no. 4 (2023), 504-509. https://doi.org/10.21860/medflum2023_309615.

Research papers

- Petrušić, Irena; Dragičević, Josipa. (2023) *Quality assurance mechanisms in regards to work-based learning – findings from institutional accreditation in Croatia (2019–2021) 17th International Technology, Education and Development Conference*, (2023), doi: 10.21125/inted.2023.1235
- Petrušić, Irena; Čeh Časni, Anita. (2023) *Investigating the Nexus of Quality Dimensions in Institutional Evaluation of Universities – Are Teaching and Research Related? // Croatian Journal of Education*, 25 (2023), 3; 947-976. doi: <https://doi.org/10.15516/cje.v25i3.4797>

Applications to study programmes at higher education institutions

Applications to undergraduate and integrated undergraduate and graduate study programmes

Applications to undergraduate and integrated undergraduate and graduate study programmes in the summer enrolment term began on 1 February 2022 and lasted until 19 July 2023, when the final ranking lists for study programmes were published. The autumn enrolment term lasted from 21 July until 18 September 2023.

IMAGE 9. NUMBER OF AVAILABLE SLOTS, STUDY PROGRAMMES AND PERCENTAGE OF CANDIDATES WHO SECURED THE RIGHT TO ENROL AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2023/2024

Summer enrolment term

39,066
slots

921
programmes

30,753
candidates

82.73 %
successful
applicants

17.27 %
not successful
applicants

Autumn enrolment term

15,559
slots

794
programmes

5,973
candidates

65.06 %
successful
applicants

34.94 %
not successful
applicants

Out of the total number of candidates in both enrolment terms who completed their secondary education outside Croatia (785), 118 (15%) did so in European Union member states, while 667 (85%) candidates did so further afield.

In the summer enrolment term, in terms of the ratio between first choice of student and available slots the study programmes that the biggest number of candidates listed as their first choice were the following: Nursing (part-time) (Polytechnic of Applied Health Studies in Zagreb), Physiotherapy (University Department of Health Studies, University of Split), Sport Coach Education; specialization: Physical Conditioning of Athletes (Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Zagreb), Nursing (Faculty of Dental Medicine and Health, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek), Graphic Design and Visual Communications (Academy of Applied Arts, University of Rijeka).

The study programmes that the biggest number of candidates listed as their first choice were the following: Business Economics (Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb), Electrical Engineering and Information Technology and Computing (Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, University of Zagreb), Business Economics (professional; Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb), Law (Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb), Medicine (Faculty of Medicine, University of Zagreb).

In the autumn enrolment term, in terms of the ratio between first choice of student and available slots, among studies with slots remaining after the summer

enrolment period, the study programmes that the biggest number of candidates listed as their first choice were the following: Acting (Academy of Dramatic Arts, University of Zagreb), Kinesiology (Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Split) Business Economics (Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb).

The study programmes that the biggest number of candidates listed as their first choice in the autumn enrolment period were the following: Acting (Academy

The last seven years have seen a decline in the number of candidates and an increase in the number of available slots (until 2020), but the number of available slots has declined over the last two years.

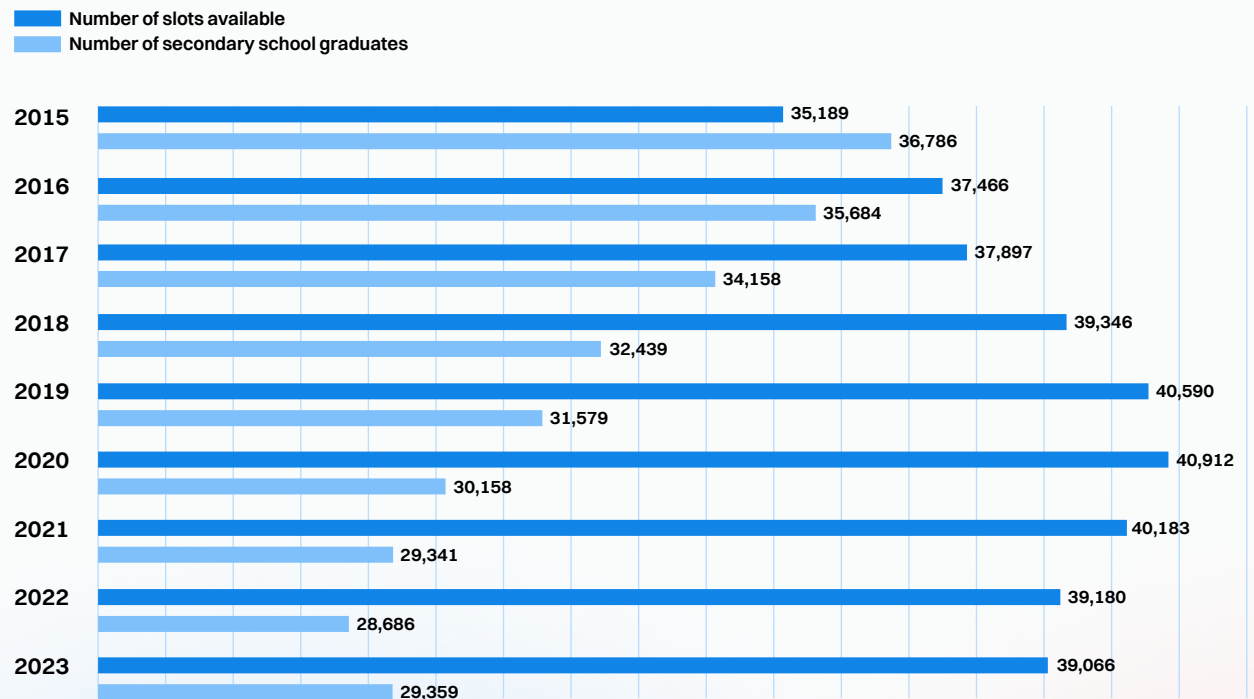


IMAGE 10. NUMBER OF AVAILABLE SLOTS AND SECONDARY SCHOOL GRADUATES BY YEAR

of Dramatic Arts, University of Zagreb), Business Economics; specializations: Finance, Entrepreneurship, Management (on-line, part-time; Faculty of Economics, University of Rijeka), Business Economics (professional; Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zagreb).

Applications to graduate study programmes

For the ninth consecutive year, the Central Applications Office (CAO) continued to administer centralised applications to graduate studies through the National System of Applications to Graduate Studies (NSaGS). Applications were submitted in the period between 1 July and 30 September 2023, when the final ranking lists for enrolment on graduate study programmes were published. The system is used by 24 higher education institutions for the procedure of candidate applications for enrolment on a total of 199 study programmes. The system was used by 2,681 candidates, while 2,048 candidates secured the right to enrol on a study programme. There was a total of 4,809 available slots.

Out of the total number of candidates who completed an undergraduate study programme outside of Croatia (35), 6 (17%) finished their undergraduate studies in EU

member states (Austria, Slovenia and the Czech Republic), while 29 (83%) candidates completed their undergraduate studies further afield (Bosnia and Herzegovina, India, USA, United Kingdom, Brazil, Pakistan, Russia and Ukraine).

Candidate applications outside the regular education system of the Republic of Croatia for enrolment in the first grade of secondary school

In the process of application for the first year of secondary school in the Republic of Croatia, the Central Applications Office performs candidate registration, verifying the accuracy of personal data and rating the candidates outside the regular education system through the National Information System of Applications and Enrolment in Secondary Schools. CAO also provides information about the entire procedure. CAO registered 503 candidates in the summer enrolment term, 98 in the autumn enrolment term and 33 in the

subsequent enrolment term and processed submitted documents.

Support for applicants and HEI coordinators

Throughout 2023, the Central Applications Office provided continuous support to candidates for all types of admissions (admission to secondary school for candidates outside the regular education system of the Republic of Croatia, applications for undergraduate, graduate and integrated studies), for the process of recognition of foreign education qualifications for the purpose of continuing education at a higher level (within the central application procedure or in cases where the education qualification is automatically recognized) and provided support to higher education institutions. The Office responded to 15,894 telephone queries, 10,055 e-mail queries and 1,911 queries submitted via the form available on the website www.studij.hr.

The Office received and processed the documents of 2,857 candidates for enrolment in secondary school, applications for undergraduate, graduate and integrated studies, and for conducting the procedure of recognition of foreign secondary school qualifications for the purpose of continuing one's education at a higher level within the central application procedure. CAO also processed and entered 110 requests for the

advanced enrolment in the system, and issued 1,098 decisions on recognition and 391 decisions on automatic recognition.

Graduate employability monitoring

In 2023, the Central Applications Office continued to carry out the project of graduate employability monitoring. The project aims to provide more information about the transition of graduates from the university to the job market, and their job satisfaction after graduation.

The survey began on 21 November and ended on 15 January 2024. The questionnaire involved 18,492 respondents who received the invitation to complete the survey by e-mail.

The results of the survey will be published in first half of 2024.

18,492

respondents involved in
the questionnaire

Recognition and evaluation of foreign education qualifications

Evaluation of foreign higher education qualifications

The procedure of recognising and evaluating foreign education qualifications in the Republic of Croatia is carried out in accordance with the Act on Recognition and Evaluation of Foreign Education Qualifications (OG 69/22). The said Act defines the method and procedures of evaluating foreign education qualifications for the purpose of entering the labour market in the case of professions which are not included in the List of Regulated Professions in Croatia, as well as the method and procedures of recognising foreign education qualifications and periods of study for the purpose of continuing one's education.

Furthermore, the Act defines the competent bodies which conduct the recognition and evaluation procedures, including the National ENIC/NARIC Office of the Agency for Science and Higher Education – the information centre on academic mobility and the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications

and a member of the European network of national information centres on academic mobility and recognition.

In accordance with the said act, the National ENIC/NARIC Office is in charge of conducting a non-administrative procedure of evaluating foreign higher education qualifications for the purpose of entering the labour market in the case of professions which are not included in the List of Regulated Professions in Croatia, on the basis of which the Office issues a non-administrative document – an opinion on the foreign higher education qualification.

The opinion on a foreign higher education qualification provides information on the foreign higher education qualification in question, as well as the opinion of this body regarding the level, scope and profile of the foreign education qualification in comparison with the relevant qualification gained in Croatia.

With the adoption of the said act, the recognition of foreign higher education qualifications which was conducted in accordance with the Act on Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications (OG 158/03, 198/03, 138/06 and 45/11) ceased to be conducted as an administrative procedure.

1220

received requests for the evaluation of foreign higher education qualifications

93.69%

reviewed requests

90

received and reviewed complaints against issued opinions on foreign higher education qualifications

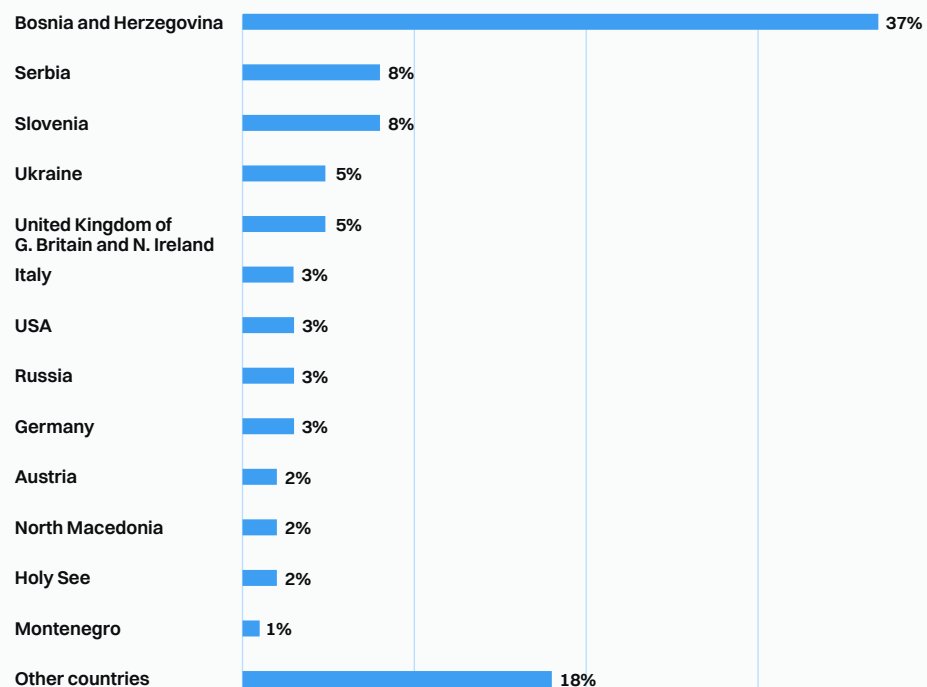


IMAGE 11. PERCENTAGE OF REQUESTS FOR FOREIGN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS OUT OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF REQUESTS WHICH THE OFFICE RECEIVED IN 2023 (ACCORDING TO THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN)

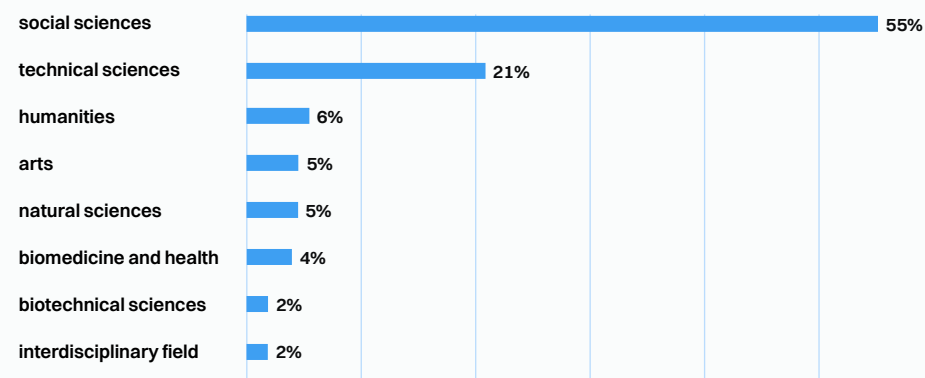


IMAGE 12. PERCENTAGE OF REQUESTS FOR FOREIGN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS OUT OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF REQUESTS WHICH THE OFFICE RECEIVED IN 2023 (BY SCIENTIFIC FIELD)

Recognition of foreign education qualifications for the purpose of continuing one's education at a higher level

From 1 July 2004 until 25 June 2022 the procedure of recognising foreign higher education qualifications in the Republic of Croatia was carried out in accordance with the Act on Recognition of Foreign Education Qualifications (OG 158/03, 198/03, 138/06 and 45/11).

The Act on Recognition and Evaluation of Foreign Education Qualifications (OG 69/22) entered into force on 25 June 2022, which has introduced some novelties into the procedures of recognising and evaluating qualifications for the purpose of continuing one's education. The said Act regulates the method, procedures and competences in recognizing foreign educational qualifications for the purpose of continuing one's education at a higher level, i.e. for the purpose of enrolment in undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate studies and studies in foreign languages.

It also determined the competent bodies that carry out evaluation and recognition procedures, which also include the Central Application Office, where tasks related to applications for studies and fulfilling the conditions for admission to higher education institutions are consolidated.

With the adoption of the Act on the Recognition and Evaluation of Foreign Education Qualifications, the administrative procedure of the recognition of foreign secondary school qualifications for the purpose of continuing one's education at a higher level will start as part of the central applications procedure, on the basis of which the Central Applications Office will issue an administrative act i.e. a decision on the recognition of foreign education qualification.

Education qualification is automatically recognized for candidates who obtained their foreign education qualification in a country whose national qualification framework is linked to the European Qualifications Framework or with which an international agreement on mutual automatic recognition of foreign education qualifications has been concluded, so in such cases no administrative procedure is carried out.

Educational activities and surveys

Online workshops “Initiating the procedure of initial accreditation of study programmes”

The Agency for Science and Higher Education organized two online workshops titled “Initiating the procedure of initial accreditation of study programmes” for representatives of higher education institutions, which were held on 4 and 6 October 2023.

The workshops took place via the Zoom platform and aroused exceptional interest and brought together a large number of representatives of higher education institutions and teaching and non-teaching staff involved in the coordination and implementation of procedures of initial accreditation of study programmes at their institutions. New documents were presented – Quality standards for evaluation in the procedure of initial accreditation of undergraduate, graduate,

integrated, specialist and short-cycle study programmes, Quality standards for initial accreditation of doctoral studies, Instructions for conducting the procedure of initial accreditation of study programmes and Request for initiation of the procedure of initial accreditation of study programmes.

“According to the new act, the Agency, as a public body in charge of carrying out procedures of initial accreditation of study programmes for all higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia – public and private – was assigned the new role of the final decision-maker in the said procedures, with the aim of strengthening the transparency of the system and its rationalization”, the Director of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, assoc. prof. Danijela Horvatek Tomić, Ph.D. remarked in a welcome speech. She stressed that the goal is to clarify and facilitate the process of preparing and coordinating this complex and demanding procedure for representatives of higher education institutions through training.



IMAGE 13. ONLINE WORKSHOP “INITIATING THE PROCEDURE OF INITIAL ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMMES” FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS



Diplomirati tijekom pandemije:

Rezultati četvrtog nacionalnog istraživanja
zapošljivosti diplomiranih studenata (2021.)



agencija za znanost i visoko obrazovanje

Publication titled “Graduating during the pandemic: Results of the fourth national survey of graduate employability (2021)”

At the end of 2023, the Agency for Science and Higher Education published the results of the fourth national survey of graduate employability in the publication titled “Graduating during the pandemic: Results of the fourth national survey of graduate employability (2021)”.

This survey was conducted at the end of 2021 and it involved a batch of students who graduated in 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was completed by 4,858 students, and a relevant number of consents was obtained from 79 higher education institutions.

IMAGE 14. PUBLICATION “GRADUATING DURING THE PANDEMIC: RESULTS OF THE FOURTH NATIONAL SURVEY OF GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY (2021)”

4,858

online survey
participants

79.6%

respondents found a job
in the field they are
qualified for

34%

respondents earn more
than HRK 7,000

43%

response rate

49.5%

respondents were
employed on an
indefinite basis

61%

of those unemployed
primarily ascribe their
unemployed status to an
insufficient number of job
openings in the field they
are qualified for

83.3%

respondents found
employment in the first
year following the
completion of their studies

32%

respondents were very
satisfied with the first job

30%

 respondents reached out to the employer
directly to find the first job

63%

respondents found their
first job in the private
sector

IMAGE 15. SUMMARY OF THE FOURTH NATIONAL SURVEY OF EMPLOYABILITY OF
GRADUATES WHO COMPLETED THEIR STUDIES IN 2020

ASHE expert support to various bodies in the science and higher education system

Scientific Field Committees

In 2023, the Office for Scientific Field Committees continued to provide support to the work of 23 scientific field committees. The Agency for Science and Higher Education provided administrative and technical support for the sessions of scientific field committees.

Since the new Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity (OG 119/22) entered into force on 22 October 2022, the Ministry of Science and Education passed on 16 December 2022 the Instructions regarding the implementation of provisions of the Act, which refer to the procedure of appointment i.e. re-appointment to scientific-teaching i.e. artistic-teaching positions, while it passed the Instructions regarding the implementation of provisions of the Act which refer to the procedure of appointment and re-appointment to scientific positions at public research institutes on 2 January 2023.

In accordance with the abovementioned, the scientific field committees checked compliance with scientific criteria i.e. conditions set out in the Ordinance on the Conditions of Appointment to Scientific Titles (OG 28/17, 72/19, 21/21, 111/22) in the procedures of appointment to vacant positions (Article 40 of the Act) and appointment to senior positions (Article 43 of the Act). In the procedures of re-appointment (Article 53 of the Act) they applied conditions set out in the Decision on minimum work requirements for the re-appointment to scientific, scientific-teaching, artistic-teaching, teaching and professional position and the form of expert commission report on the work of employees being re-appointed (OG 24/21).

During 2023, a total of 155 sessions of scientific field committees were held, with a total of 1374 decisions passed, of which 1339 were positive and 35 were negative.

Of the total number of decisions, 215 were passed as part of the procedures of appointments to vacant positions, while 76 decisions were issued as part of the

procedures of re-appointment to existing positions or nominal titles.

According to the processed data, these committees conducted the biggest number of procedures for appointment to titles:

1. **Scientific Field Committee for Biomedical Sciences and Health** – Fundamental Medical Sciences, Clinical Medical Sciences, Public Health and Health Protection, Dentistry and Pharmacy;
2. **Scientific Field Committee for Arts;**
3. **Scientific Field Committee for Humanities** – History, Art History, Art Science, Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology.

155

sessions of Scientific Field Committees held

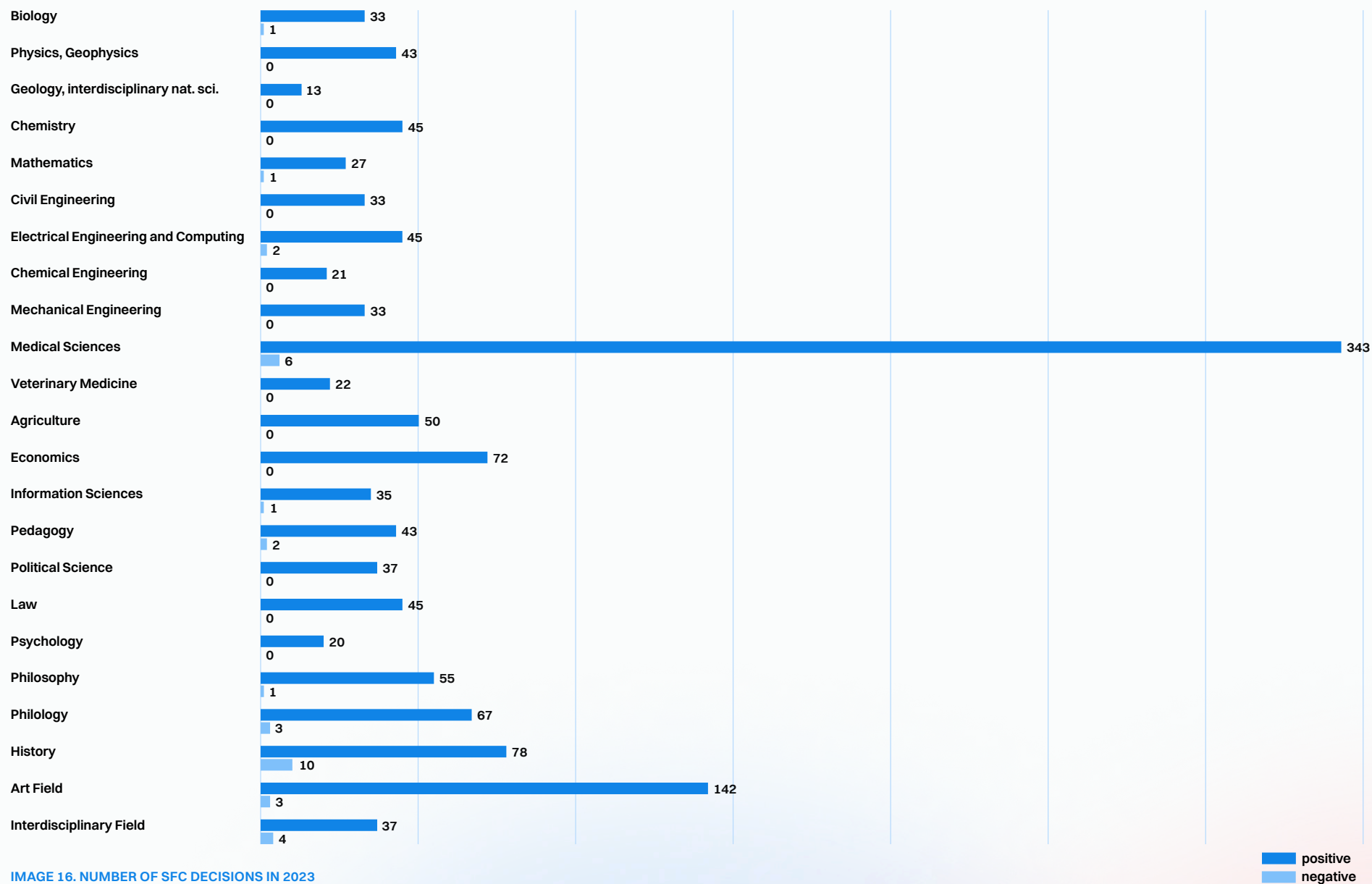


IMAGE 16. NUMBER OF SFC DECISIONS IN 2023

Scientific Field Committee	Number of sessions	Positive decisions	Negative decisions	Total
Biology	6	33	1	34
Physics (+ Geophysics)	5	43	1	44
Geology (+ interdisciplinary natural sciences)	5	13	0	13
Chemistry	6	45	0	45
Mathematics	5	27	1	28
Architecture and Urban Planning, Geodesy and Civil Engineering	4	33	0	33
Electrical Engineering and Computing	8	45	2	47
Chemical Engineering, Mining, Geology and Petroleum Engineering, Metallurgy, Textile Technology and Printing Technology	5	21	0	21
Mechanical Engineering, Naval Architecture, Traffic and Transportation Engineering, Aviation, Rocket and Space Technology	7	33	0	33
Fundamental Medical Sciences, Clinical Medical Sciences, Public Health and Health Protection, Dentistry and Pharmacy	10	343	6	349
Veterinary Medicine	5	22	0	22
Agricultural Sciences, Forestry, Wood Technology, Biotechnology, Food Technology and Nutrition	6	50	0	50
Economics	10	72	0	72
Information and Communication Sciences	6	35	1	36
Pedagogy, Educational and Rehabilitation Sciences, Logopaedics and Kinesiology	6	43	2	45
Political Science, Sociology, Demography, Social Work and Security and Defence	7	37	0	37
Law	5	45	0	45
Psychology	7	20	0	20
Philosophy and Theology	7	55	1	56
Philology	8	67	3	70
History, Art History, Art Science, Archaeology, Ethnology and Anthropology	11	78	10	88
Art Field	7	142	3	145
Interdisciplinary Field (science; art)	9	37	4	41
	155	1339	35	1374

**IMAGE 17. NUMBER OF SESSIONS HELD AND DECISIONS ISSUED
BY SCIENTIFIC FIELD COMMITTEES IN 2023**

Croatian Conference of Polytechnics

The Conference of Polytechnics is a national body in charge of deciding on the matters of common interest for the operation and development of polytechnics. It is composed of deans of all polytechnics in the Republic of Croatia. A representative of the Rectors' Conference, a representative of the Council of Students of Polytechnics and a representative of the representative trade unions in science and higher education participate in the work of the Conference of Polytechnics without voting rights. The Conference has 31 members, 13 of which are public polytechnics and 18 private polytechnics.

In 2023, the Agency for Science and Higher Education organized 8 regular sessions of the Conference of Polytechnics and two sessions of the Board of Public Polytechnics. In addition to the regular sessions, a special session of the Conference of Polytechnics was held in July 2023 at the House of Art Arsen in Šibenik, where acknowledgements and awards were given to organizations and individuals who regularly contributed to the development of polytechnics and professional studies in the Republic of Croatia.

Some of the main topics discussed at the sessions of the Conference of Polytechnics included internationalization, promotion and improving the quality of professional studies. The Conference of

Polytechnics and the regional media companies organized conferences on professional studies in Poreč in Šibenik in order to promote professional studies and polytechnics. In October 2023, the first meeting of professional services of the Conference of Polytechnics was held at the Polytechnic in Rijeka with the aim of exchanging experiences and raising quality. The participants of the meeting also discussed the upcoming third cycle of re-accreditation of higher education institutions and evaluation quality standards, and the Conference actively participated in public debates related to their adoption.

At the beginning of 2023, the Conference of Polytechnics adopted the National Criteria for the Appointments to Teaching Position at Polytechnics, which will enter into force on 1 October 2024, and which significantly raised the level of requirements for teachers.

At the proposal of the Conference of Polytechnics representatives of this body were also appointed to numerous committees and working groups in the field of higher education, as well as to the Management Board and the Accreditation Council of the Agency for Science and Higher Education.

President of the Conference of Polytechnics was elected.

Field Committees of the Croatian Conference of Polytechnics

Field committees of the Croatian Conference of Polytechnics held 58 sessions in the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023.

In accordance with provisions of the Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education (OG 123/03, 198/03, 105/04, 174/04, 2/07 - OUSRH, 46/07, 45/09, 63/11, 94/13, 139/13, 101/14, 60/15 and 131/17) field committees issued 50 opinions in the procedures of appointment to teaching titles, two negative opinions and requested for 17 documents to be amended. In accordance with the provisions of the said Act, the field committees issued five conclusions on the termination of the procedure.

Furthermore, in accordance with the provisions of the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity (OG 119/22) field committees issued 219 decisions in the procedures of appointment to teaching positions and the procedures of appointment of nominal teachers, two negative decisions and three decisions to dismiss the procedure. Pursuant to the provisions of the said Act the field

The dean of the Edward Bernays University of Applied Sciences, associate professor Damir Jugo, prof. prof. stud. was unanimously re(elected) for the period from 2023 to 2027.

committees requested amendments to documents 68 times, and issued 20 decisions to terminate the procedure.

The Field Committee for Humanities passed the highest number of positive decisions and opinions, 100 in total. It is followed by the Field Committee for Biomedicine and Health, which passed 53 positive decisions and opinions, and the Field Committee for Technical Sciences, which passed 51 positive decisions and opinions.

In the said period the Field Committees Coordination Board held 5 sessions. It responded to four inquiries regarding the interpretation of requirements defined in the Decision on the Conditions for Assessment of Teaching and Professional Activity in the Procedure of

Appointment to Teaching Titles (OG 20/12, 85/13 and 4/15) and issued two instructions for members of the Conference of Polytechnics (one regarding re-appointment procedures and the other regarding the submission of documents to field committees on appointed expert committees). The Board also issued the templates for the reporting entities pursuant to the provisions of the Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity (OG 119/22) and the Decision on the Conditions for Assessment of Teaching and Professional Activity in the Procedure of Appointment to Teaching Titles (OG 20/12, 85/13 and 4/15), which will apply until the National Criteria for Polytechnics enter into force (OG 36/2023).

Field committee	Number of sessions
Biomedicine and Health	10
Biotechnical Sciences	7
Social Sciences	9
Humanities	8
Natural Sciences	9
Technical Sciences	9
Arts	6
Field Committees Coordination Board	5
Total	63

IMAGE 18. NUMBER OF FC SESSIONS HELD IN 2023

Field committee	Biomedicine and Health	Biotechnical Sciences	Social Sciences	Humanities	Natural Sciences	Technical Sciences	Arts	Field Committees Coordination Board	Total number of decisions by title
Number of opinions for tenured college professor	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Number of opinions for college professor	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	1	6
Number of opinions for senior lecturer	3	0	3	2	5	2	0	0	15
Number of opinions for lecturer	4	1	15	1	2	3	0	0	26
Total number of opinions	8	2	21	4	9	5	0	1	50

IMAGE 19. DECISIONS ADOPTED BY FIELD COMMITTEES IN 2023

Field committee	Biomedicine and Health	Biotechnical Sciences	Social Sciences	Humanities	Natural Sciences	Technical Sciences	Arts	Field Committees Coordination Board	Total number of decisions per position
Number of decisions on the position of professor of prof. studies with tenure	2	1	6	0	2	3	0	0	14
Number of decisions for the nominal professor of professional studies with tenure	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Number of decisions for the position of professor of prof. studies	0	2	6	1	1	3	0	0	13
Number of decisions on re-appointment to the position of professor of professional studies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of decisions for nominal professors of prof. studies	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	4
Number of decisions on re-appointment of nominal professor of prof. studies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of decisions on appointment to the position of senior lecturer	2	0	1	0	1	8	1	0	13
Number of decisions on re-appointment to the position of senior lecturer	2	2	7	2	1	2	0	0	16
Number of decisions on appointment of nominal senior lecturer	9	0	3	0	1	3	2	0	18
Number of decisions on re-appointment of nominal senior lecturer	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	4
Number of decisions on appointment to the position of lecturer	2	1	16	6	2	11	1	0	39
Number of decisions on re-appointment to the position of lecturer	1	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	8
Number of decisions on appointment of nominal lecturer	23	4	29	6	1	13	2	0	78
Number of decisions on re-appointment of nominal lecturer	3	0	5	1	0	1	0	0	10
Total number of decisions	45	10	79	23	10	46	6	0	219

IMAGE 20. NUMBER OF DECISIONS ISSUED BY FIELD COMMITTEES IN 2023

Internal quality assurance

Based on the decision adopted by the Management Board of the Agency in 2006, the Agency for Science and Higher Education established and continuously improved the quality assurance system which is based on the application of the ESG standards and requirements of EN ISO 9001 standard.

Alignment of the Agency's work with the requirements of the said standards contributed to the continuous improvement of business processes and practices and the successful implementation of activities within the scope of the Agency's work.

The Agency for Science and Higher Education is part of the public administration system of the Republic of Croatia, which is covered by a series of reforms planned in the National Plan for the Development of Public Administration for the period from 2022 to 2027. The goal is to act in three directions: legislative, organizational and developmental, in order to ensure faster and better public services and the development of resilient and agile public administration. Special

goals have been defined aimed at the development of a user-friendly public administration capable of effectively providing public services, digitization of public administration, development of human resources in public administration while strengthening the capacity for shaping and implementing public policies and improving the functionality and sustainability of local and regional self-government.

The Ministry of Justice and Public Administration lead the project titled "Introduction of a Quality Management System in the Public Administration of the Republic of Croatia" as part of the Operational Programme "Efficient Human Resources 2014 – 2020 financed from the European Social Fund. The project aimed to

encourage public administration bodies to establish a quality management system that would contribute to more efficient management of the organization while optimizing business processes. A large amount of educational materials were produced and numerous training events were held that broadened and deepened the knowledge of project participants, enabled the exchange of business practices, experience and ideas, and the introduction and networking of employees working in the public administration in the Republic of Croatia. It is certainly a contribution to the strengthening of institutions that need to be able to respond successfully to numerous social challenges and take advantage of opportunities for development while taking care of the experiences

and satisfaction of users. One of the biggest challenges for public administration continues to be finding and retaining highly competent and motivated officials. The knowledge, skills and motivation of each official have a significant impact on the productivity and quality of public administration, and thus on the quality of public services. This is an incentive to take a systematic and planned approach to the development of human resources in public administration and to establish an environment that is conducive to work and development.

In June 2023, the Government adopted the Decision on the Adoption of Guidelines for Quality Management in Public Administration. The introduction of the quality assurance and management system in public administration is encouraged by applying a methodology based on the 2020 Common Assessment Framework (CAF). This sets the standard for increasing the level of quality of public administration, which will contribute to greater user trust. Public administration bodies are obliged to ensure the implementation of quality management requirements, which are elaborated in the document titled Requirements for quality management systems in public administration bodies of the Republic of Croatia and are available on the official website of the Ministry of Justice and Administration (<https://mpu.gov.hr/>). Maintenance and improvement of the quality assurance system is conducted in line with the document Procedure and Criteria for Internal and External Audits of QMS.

ASHE started the integration of CAF requirements in its quality system and carried out an initial self-evaluation

in accordance with the criteria given in the document "Procedure and Criteria for Internal and External Audits of QMS in Public Administration Bodies in the Republic of Croatia". The internal audit was based on the Methodology for Quality Management in the Public Administration of the Republic of Croatia, and the use of e-QMS platform. During the internal audit all areas covered by QMS were discussed and suggestions for improvement were collected and evaluated, and the suggestions for improvement from the DNV external audit and ENQA/EQAR international review and implemented improvements were also discussed.

The results of the self-evaluation, which included all organizational units of the Agency, the risk management process, the use of opportunities for development and improvement, and the achievement of operational goals, were elements of the external evaluation of QMS conducted by Det Norske Veritas (DNV) in October 2023 during the regular annual external audit according to EN ISO 9001:2015 standard. The DNV's report on external audit demonstrated that the Agency's QMS is compliant with the requirements of the HRN EN ISO 9001:2015 standard.

The Agency continuously monitors user/stakeholder satisfaction with its services. Questionnaires are sent to the stakeholders, and their answers are processed, analysed and used to identify good practices and opportunities for improvement. Moreover, stakeholders express their level of satisfaction with ASHE services via e-mail, telephone conversations and at various events organized by ASHE (conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.). Throughout the year, feedback is

continuously collected by means of questionnaires from members of expert panels and higher education institutions that have participated in different types of external evaluations. The collected information is processed, analysed and discussed at department meetings. These discussions lead to improvements and the identification of good practice. Feedback is further communicated to the Management Board, the Accreditation Council and other bodies and they are a basis for defining development goals.

An employee satisfaction survey was conducted in April 2023. A questionnaire was e-mailed to all employees. It was voluntary and completely anonymous. Questionnaires were filled out via an electronic form. The results have been processed and are available in the report titled "*An Examination of Certain Aspects of Organisational Climate and Job Satisfaction*".

The best-estimated job aspects in 2023 are "Connection between the individual work of employees and the business goals of the organizational unit" (4.34) and "Autonomy in the performance of work" (4.13), while room for development was identified in relation to the aspects "Work as a source of personal achievement" (3.56) and "Work being interesting" (3.81).

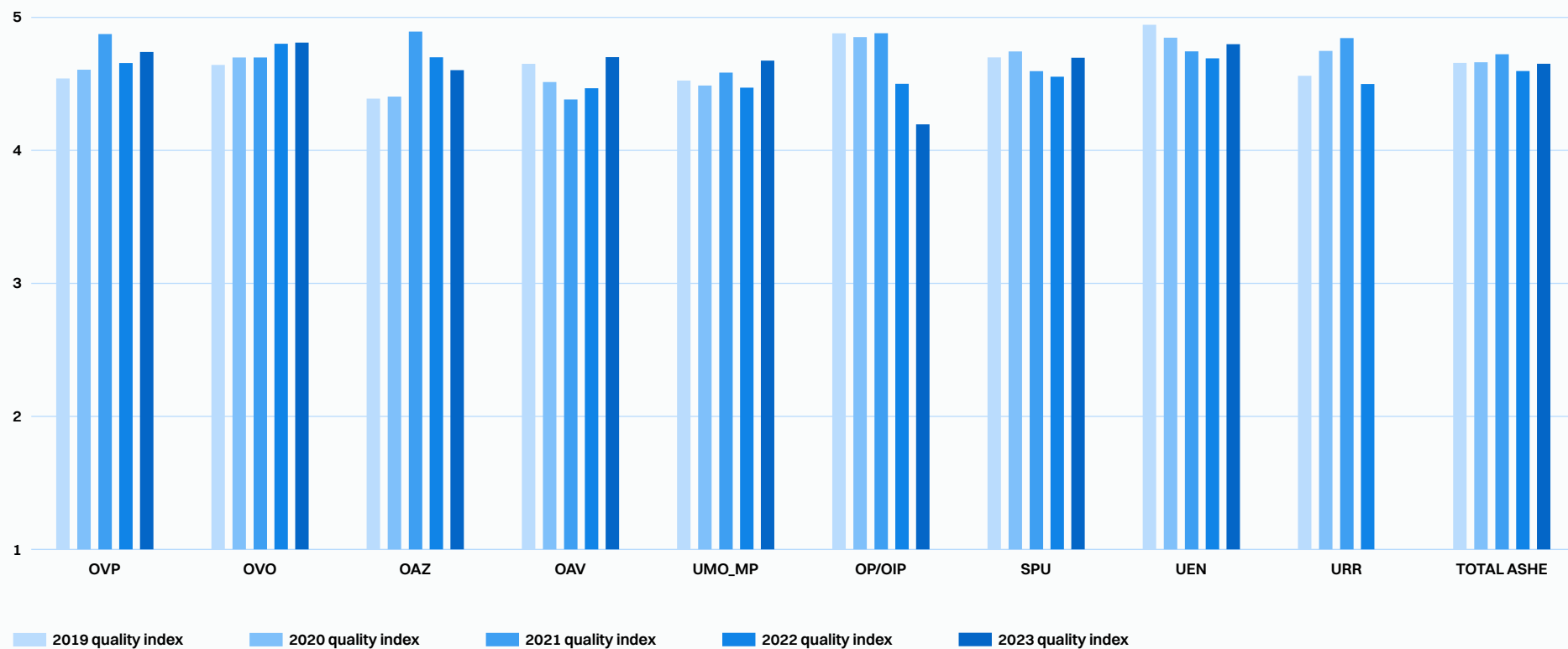


IMAGE 21. OVERVIEW OF USER SATISFACTION WITH ASHE SERVICES EXPRESSED IN QUALITY INDEX VALUES WITH DATA FOR THE PERIOD 2019-2023

2023 Financial Report

ASHE is funded by the Ministry of Science and Education and there were 12 open activities in the budget in 2023.

The Financial Report comprises the Agency's revenues and expenditures for the reporting period – reporting year 2023.

The Agency's activities:

- **A621155** – Administration and general transactions
- **A621182** – Conference of Polytechnics
- **A621186** – Evaluation of research organizations
- **A621187** – Evaluation of higher education institutions
- **A621190** – Audit of higher education institutions and research organisations
- **A621191** – Graduate employment monitoring
- **A621192** – Central Applications Office
- **A867018** – Implementation of the Croatian Qualifications Framework in Higher Education
- **A867019** – Digital transformation of higher education – e-Universities – NRRP

- **A867021** – ERASMUS PLUS – PROJECTS
- **K621178** – Equipment and maintenance of the Agency
- **K621194** – National Information System for Applications to Higher Education Institutions

The Agency's total revenues amounted to EUR 3,032,825.73. The Agency's revenues are posted to accounts of groups 63 *Grants from abroad and grants from other subjects within the general budget*, 65 *Revenues from administrative charges, charges calculated in compliance with special regulations and fees* and 67 *Revenues from the dedicated budget and the Croatian Health Insurance Fund based on contractual obligations*. The allocated budget resources amounted to EUR 2,906,793.56, earmarked revenues amounted to EUR 63,358.28, while other projects amounted to EUR 62,673.89.

Total expenditures comprise Operating expenses and Expenses for the acquisition of non-financial assets.

Class 3 **Operating expenses** comprises *Staff costs* (accounts of group 31), *Material costs* (accounts of group 32), while class **Expenses for the acquisition of non-financial assets** comprises accounts 41 *Expenses for the acquisition of non-financial assets* and 42 *Expenses for the acquisition of produced fixed assets*.

Staff costs include subgroups of accounts **311 Gross salaries**, **312 Other employee related expenses** and **313 Contributions on salaries**, in which expenses of gross salaries and contributions on salaries and other employee related expenses (vacation bonuses, Christmas bonuses, years of service awards, gifts for children, help for longer periods of sick leave, severance pays for retirement and others) are recorded.

Material costs include staff reimbursement costs and reimbursement to persons who are not employed, expenses for material, energy and services and other costs not included.

On item **321 Staff reimbursement costs**, business trips, transportation allowances, professional development of employees and other reimbursements of expenses to employees are recorded.

Expenses for office supplies, material and raw materials, energy, material and spare parts for current and investment maintenance, small inventory and tires are recorded on account **322 Material and energy expenses**.

Account **323 Service costs** comprises costs of telephone, postal and transportation services, current and investment maintenance services, promotion and dissemination services, utilities, leases and rents, health services, intellectual services (remuneration to foreign and Croatian members of expert panels in the procedures of initial accreditation, re-accreditation and audit of internal quality assurance and enhancement systems of higher education institutions), IT and other services.

Account **324 Reimbursement of expenses incurred by persons who are not employed** comprises reimbursements of business trip expenses incurred by members of expert panels participating in the procedures of external evaluation in higher education and science and reimbursements of business trips of members of the bodies within the Agency (the Management Board, the Accreditation Council, the

Complaints Committee, the Follow-up Committee, the National Council for Higher Education, Science and Technological Development, field committees, scientific field committees, scientific area councils, the Conference of Polytechnics).

Item **329 Other expenses not included above** comprise remuneration to members of representative and executive bodies, committees, etc. (members of the Management Board, the Accreditation Council, the Complaints Committee, the Follow-up Committee, the National Council for Higher Education, Science and Technological Development, scientific field committees, field committees, scientific area councils, the Conference of Polytechnics and other committees established as needed and in accordance with the activity plan), insurance premium costs, representation costs, membership fees and other costs not included above.

In class 4 **Expenses for the acquisition of non-financial assets**, costs for the acquisition of non-produced and produced fixed assets are recorded in sections **4123 Licenses, 4221 Office equipment and furniture, 4222 Communication equipment, 4223 Maintenance and protection equipment, 4227 Machinery, devices and equipment for other purposes** and **4262 Investments in software**.

IMAGE 22. REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES TABLE

Account	Item description	Achieved in the reporting year 2023	Account	Item description	Achieved in the reporting year 2023	Account	Item description	Achieved in the reporting year 2023
6	TOTAL REVENUES	3,032,825.73	313	Salary contributions	230,544.82	3239	Other services	59,076.05
63	Grants from abroad and grants from other subjects within the general budget	62,673.89	3132	Health insurance contributions	230,544.82	324	Reimbursement of expenses incurred by persons who are not employed	88,662.39
632	Grants from international organizations and EU institutions and bodies	62,673.89	32	Material costs	1,214,362.89	329	Other costs (not included above)	250,383.90
6323	Current grants from EU institutions and bodies	62,673.89	321	Staff reimbursement costs	136,636.71	3291	Remuneration to representative and executive bodies, committees and similar	201,607.19
65	Revenues from administrative charges, charges calculated in compliance with special regulations and fees	63,358.28	3211	Business travel costs	84,141.41	3292	Insurance premiums	637.37
651	Administrative charges	63,358.28	3212	Transportation, field work and separation allowance	32,185.85	3293	Representation costs	19,969.76
6514	Other fees and charges	63,358.28	3213	Professional development of employees	20,309.45	3294	Membership fees and standards	16,333.49
67	Revenues from the dedicated budget and the Croatian Health Insurance Fund arising from contractual obligations	2,906,793.56	322	Material and energy expenses	53,833.13	3295	Other fees and charges	3,763.99
671	Revenues from the dedicated budget for financing regular activities of budget users	2,906,793.56	3221	Office supplies and other material expenses	35,499.82	3299	Other costs (not included above)	8,072.10
6711	Revenues from the dedicated budget for financing operating expenses	2,849,811.77	3223	Energy	17,718.11	4	Expenses for the acquisition of non-financial assets	56,981.79
6712	Revenues from the dedicated budget for financing expenditures for the procurement of non-financial assets	56,981.79	3224	Material and spare parts for current and investment maintenance	129.16	41	Acquisition of non-produced fixed assets	2,319.09
	TOTAL EXPENDITURES (3+4)	2,996,476.43	3225	Small inventory and car tires	486.04	412	Intangible assets	2,319.09
3	Operating expenses	2,939,494.64	323	Service costs	684,846.76	4123	Licences	2,319.09
31	Staff costs	1,725,131.75	3231	Telephone, postal and transportation services	32,449.22	42	Acquisition of produced fixed assets	54,662.70
311	Gross salaries	1,435,481.81	3232	Current and investment maintenance services	8,760.12	422	Plants and equipment	24,410.20
3111	Salaries for employment in normal working hours	1,398,042.43	3233	Promotion and information services	18,847.63	4221	Office equipment and furniture	20,285.60
3113	Salaries for overtime	37,439.38	3234	Communal services	5,180.55	4222	Communication equipment	2,818.35
312	Other employee related expenses	59,105.12	3235	Leases and rents	138,092.67	4227	Machinery, devices and equipment for other purposes	1,306.25
			3236	Healthcare and veterinary services	1,712.70	426	Intangible produced assets	30,252.50
			3237	Intellectual and personal services	312,053.13	4262	Investment in software	30,252.50
			3238	IT services	108,674.69			

2024 Activity Plan

- Adopting and implementing the 2024 operational plan of the Agency for Science and Higher Education.
- Initial accreditation (IA) of study programmes; IA of online study programmes; IA of higher education institutions; IA of research institutes.
- Re-accreditation of HEIs in accordance with the Higher Education Institutions Re-accreditation Plan for 2024; adopting and implementing the Research Institutes Re-accreditation Plan.
- Carrying out follow-up phase during the procedure of external evaluation of the quality of higher education institutions.
- Developing a methodology for the implementation of thematic evaluations, adopting and applying the Ordinance on the implementation of thematic evaluation procedure.
- Developing the methodology for the implementation of extraordinary evaluation, adopting and applying the Ordinance on extraordinary evaluation.
- Conducting accreditation of joint studies and cross-border evaluations upon request.
- Establishing a model of evaluation of implementation of programme agreements.
- Educational activities for HEIs, students and research institutes.
- Development and implementation of the Croatian Qualifications Framework: carrying out procedures for the evaluation of applications for additions of qualification standards and standards of units of learning outcomes at the level of higher education to the Croatian Qualifications Framework Register and the support to the work of 11 sectoral councils.
- Providing information regarding the national and foreign education systems and foreign higher education qualifications.
- Conducting procedures of evaluation of foreign higher education qualifications.
- Carrying out centralised applications to undergraduate and integrated study programmes and producing ranking lists.
- Carrying out centralised applications to graduate study programmes and producing ranking lists.
- Collecting and analysing data of candidates outside the regular education system in Croatia who are enrolling in the first grade of secondary school.
- Recognition of foreign higher education qualifications.
- Monitoring graduate satisfaction and employment.
- Support to the work of expert bodies in the system of science and higher education (the Complaints Committee, the Croatian Conference of Polytechnics, field committees, scientific field committees).
- Participating in national and international projects aimed at further development of the higher education system and applying for new ones.
- The start of implementation of the new ESF project “Quality assurance in higher education” and ongoing use of the funds from the European Social Fund.
- Implementation of public and simple procurement procedures within project activities and implementation of simple procurement procedures for which funds are provided in the State Budget.
- Continued digitalisation of the business processes of the Agency, providing user (IT) support to business processes of the Agency and ensuring information security by applying prescribed standard measures.
- Continuing with the digitalization of ASHE's business processes, providing IT support to ASHE's business processes and providing information security.
- Harmonization of the internal structure with the Act on the Wages of Public and Civil Servants and the

corresponding Regulation for Public Sector.

- Human resources development – lifelong learning (training and development of ASHE staff); further development of staff competences for risk management and the contribution to the implementation of the measures defined in the action plan for the implementation of the National Plan for Public Administration Development in the period from 2022 to 2024, revision and implementation of the performance management system.
- Improvement of ASHE's internal quality assurance system in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and EN ISO 9001 standard and the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Croatia to adopt Guidelines for quality management in the Croatian public administration and conducting internal and external annual audit.
- Active cooperation with external stakeholders (Ministry of Science and Education, Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Croatian Parliament, Croatian Rectors' Conference, National Council for Higher Education, Science and Technological Development, Conference of Polytechnics of the Republic of Croatia, State Archives, Croatian Employment Service, Ministry of Justice and Public Administration, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, etc.).
- Cooperating with the public and private sector institutions, non-governmental and non-profit organisations.
- Exchanging experts in higher education and science; delivering presentations at national and international professional conferences; dissemination and promotion activities.

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