



agency for science and higher education

A review from an agency's perspective

Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education

Đurđica Dragojević

ENQA Training
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Croatian HE education system



- Croatia – 4.3 million people, 24% with higher education qualifications
- A binary system; establishment of private HEIs enabled in 1993
- National Councils (science and HE) set up: strategic role plus external quality assurance
- 1999 – 2004: approval of new institutions (paper-based) plus evaluations of about 30 existing institutions – self-evaluation, peer review (1 or 2 foreigners), site visit and final report
- 2003 – introduction of the Bologna reform

HEIs

HEI	Public	Private
University	7	3
Polytechnic	13	2
College	3	27

- the number of students and HEIs doubles: from 70 000 in 1990 to almost 140 000 in 2007; driven partly by the national strategy of decentralization, but mostly by tuition fees

Full-fledged QA: Phase I

- the need to accredit all newly restructured programmes
- 2005: **ASHE established** as an agency supporting the National Councils (also, promotion of researchers) and recognizing foreign higher education qualifications (as part of ENIC network)
- 2005: 800 programmes accredited
- paper-based accreditation (minimal standard: staff number); peer review (1 foreigner)
- outcome: yes/no/conditional
- 2005/06 – first „Bologna” students enrolled
- 2005 – 2009: 400 programmes accredited (mostly postgraduate)

Problems identified

- In 2007 ASHE applies to ENQA: accepted only as an associate member, due to the small number of staff and lack of independence
- Although there is independence in practice, it is not formalized: the National Council for HE makes the accreditation decisions and the minister is not legally obliged to accept them
- ASHE starts to call for reforms in order to tackle these problems, to align Croatian higher education with the European systems and to join the relevant associations; possible as presented within the 'approaching the EU' agenda

2009 - Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education:Phase II

- the act written in the spirit of ESG: peer review (foreigners), student participation, site visit and other ESG elements entered the legal text, as well as deadlines for ENQA membership/ EQAR inclusion
- Councils remain with the strategic role
- minimal standards (S T ratio, resources); for new HEIs
 - „mentoring” period and the strategic document
- „Network of HEIs” introduced to tackle the rise in the number of HEIs and excessive enrolment quotas

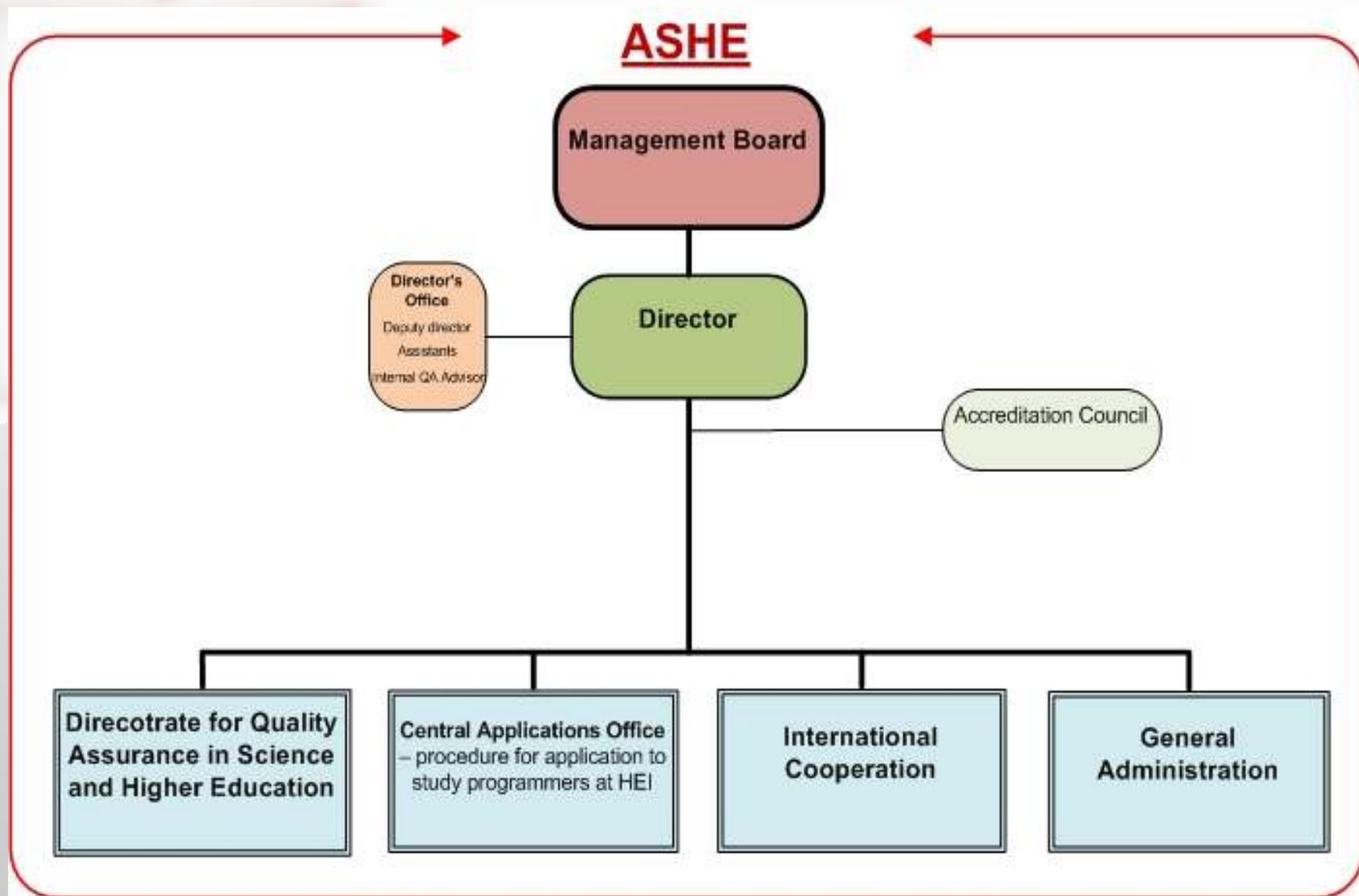
Independence enters the law

- Act reinforced the ASHE role, strengthened its independence; operational costs funded from the budget, ability to collect fees and get project funds
- The Accreditation Council of the ASHE: an independent stakeholder body (NGO observer member) – not institutional representatives
- Minister obliged to accept the Council decisions
- HEI autonomy enforced: public universities self-accredit their study programs (ASHE assesses the need for public funding)

New procedures introduced

ASHE activities	Self - assessment	Peer review	Site visit	Publication of a report	Follow-up procedure
Reaccreditation	+	+	+	+	+
Thematic evaluation	+	+	Possible, not compulsory	+	Not formally, but a negative outcome is followed up by reaccreditation
Audit	+	+	+	+	+

ASHE Organisational Chart



External evaluation of ASHE: goals

Not only join ENQA, but also:

- Gain legitimacy towards HEIs/ government
- Get an independent opinion on issues in our work
- A 'team building' process
- Look into other aspects of our work (administrative support, qualification recognition, science): Type B review

Direct preparations

- May 2011: setting up the self-evaluation team - the team that was previously working on the institutional strategy, about 10 people
- The strategy team identified values which will serve as a basis of future self-evaluation work (ESG 2.1 and 2.2): **reliability, professionalism, accountability, flexibility, cooperation, openness**
- Choosing the coordinator: national institutions reported lack of necessary resources; searching a similar foreign agency – Spanish AGAE (which also performs evaluations of both science and HE)

Involving the stakeholders

- Annual ISO survey of customer satisfaction, annual reports, newsletter, press releases, workshops; all documents published and publicly discussed before adoption
- Work not only on providing information, but providing clear, concise and *attractive* information which stakeholders will use
- External review – ESG-specific survey on values: 500 questionnaires sent, 139 filled out
- Information regularly sent to all stakeholders from the process start
- Questions remain: who to *really* collect feedback and involve them

Drafting the self-evaluation

- The final phase of a **5-yr work** which required substantial legislative and institutional changes
- Support: meeting with the review coordinator; workshops with other agencies; careful study of other agencies' self-evaluations before the drafting process started
- 8 months' work : May 2010-January 2011
- **Evidence** for each criteria had to be collected in one place (internal document sharing system) – and translated to English

Issues:

- General problems of collective authorship
- We believe our work is aligned with the ESG – but how to present it, especially the work before and after the reforms?
- Details of the HE system: how deep can you go?
- Misunderstanding of some standards and guidelines - no ENQA-trained staff

Review panel and site visit

- The coordinator appoints the panel – no Croatian experts, but the secretary from a similar system (Slovenia, one member from Austria) and members from a country with similar QA system (Spain)
- Practical problems with ASHE foreign reviewers and stakeholders' participation in the site visit

Lessons learned:

- the panel did a very good job with understanding the system and identifying issues – still, a national member could save them work and maybe provide additional insights
- first reaction to the report: we hoped for a harsher one!
- type B – may just be too much
- necessary to improve stakeholders' involvement



THANK YOU!

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