A review from an agency’s perspective
Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education

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ENQA Training
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Croatian HE education system

- 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

- Croatia – 4.3 million people, 24% with higher education qualifications
HEIs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEI</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polytechnic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
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</table>

- 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASHE activities</th>
<th>Self-assessment</th>
<th>Peer review</th>
<th>Site visit</th>
<th>Publication of a report</th>
<th>Follow-up procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reaccreditation</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thematic evaluation</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Possible, not compulsory</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Not formally, but a negative outcome is followed up by reaccreditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audit</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ASHE Organisational Chart

ASHE

Management Board

Director

Director's Office
Deputy director
Assistant
Internal QA Advisor

Accreditation Council

Directorate for Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education

Central Applications Office
- procedure for application to study programmes at HEI

International Cooperation

General Administration
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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