

SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT
OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION AGENCY OF REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

Banja Luka, 10th of January 2017

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Annexes: Statute, RS HEAA Strategy 2016-2020, Annual Report 2014, Analysis of the stakeholder's opinions

1. Introduction

Ever since the mid-90s, the Higher Education of Republika Srpska has been undergoing permanent transformation lead by Bologna principles. This transformation, known as “*higher education reform*”, introduces systemic changes in the work of higher education institutions (*HEIs*) as well as in the functioning of republican institutions and bodies competent for this social sector, thus approximating higher education in Republika Srpska to the unique European higher education area.

The higher education reform in Republika Srpska gains its formal and obligatory form in 2006 through the legal regulations in form of Law on Higher Education as well as the BiH Framework Law on Higher Education from 2007. These laws introduce key systemic changes in the higher education such as integrated universities, treasury financing system, student organisations and their role in academic processes, private initiative and private capital investment as well as establishing the quality assurance system and infrastructure.

Activities on higher education quality assurance, as one of the pillars of Bologna process, have been ongoing since the start of reform activities, and its more intensive operationalisation has been realised since 2005 with the appearance of “*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*”, adopted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*ENQA*). These standards recognise three levels of activities within the unique quality assurance system:

- Internal quality assurance within HEI by means of applying suitable methods and their interaction into the unique System for Management and continued Improvement of Quality,
- External quality assurance by means of external supervision over the effectiveness and efficacy of Internal quality assurance systems of HEI, by means of independent evaluation methods (*external evaluation*) by national and international experts and accreditation by the relevant bodies (*agencies*),
- External quality assurance of competent bodies for quality assurance and accreditation (RS HEAA) and their recognition in European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The actual contribution to the overall intentions for quality improvement of higher education in Republic of Srpska comes from the Ministry of Education and Culture through the activities of Higher Education Department and Council for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance through establishing the procedure of licensing higher education institutions, in European standards recognised as a process of initial accreditation. These activities actually represent the introduction and precondition for a forthcoming accreditation process of higher education institutions and study programs they offer. With this purpose, the amended Law on Higher education of Republika Srpska dated 2010, foresees establishment of Higher Education Accreditation Agency of Republika Srpska (*here and after: Agency*) which should integrate and further contribute to the development of activities started on internal and external quality assurance in higher education through formalised accreditation process. RS HEAA was formally established in May 2011. Immediately after the foundation and completion of the administrative and status activities, RS HEAA has set three general goals in the initial phase of its functioning:

1. Recognition by the academic community

Correct start and assurance of trust and recognition by academic community and authorities in Republika Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the first year of work.

2. Establishing the quality system of HEI

Affirm the significance of establishing the quality system and its internal and external evaluation as a precondition for successful accreditation, by means of analysing the current state and through public expert consultations.

3. International recognition

Conduct the accreditation process, harmonised with European standards through professional work, suitable organisational structure and resources, thus providing international recognition through membership in international networks, associations and registers.

At the moment drafting this report, we can gladly say that the first two goals are completely realised, even before the planned deadlines, and they represent the good basis for the realisation of the third goal. The coming chapters of this report refer the reader towards the basic goals and RS HEAA action framework that enabled the realisation of set goals.

Nowadays RS HEAA acts as a significant factor in the higher education area of Republika Srpska and as a motion factor when it comes to quality improvement. The first purpose of self-evaluation report is to provide a proof of compliance with ESG and ENQA membership criteria. Secondly, the report shall serve as a basis for internal and external evaluation of the RS HEAA that should result in improvement projects.

2. Development of the self-assessment report

Self-assessment process involved a group of people organized in the working group with the task of analyzing the work of the Agency in all its aspects. This is a Team for self-evaluation of the Agency. The Team leader was Head of the Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department and it involved two members from the other departments of the Agency. Besides Agency employees, this Team involves representatives of stakeholders such as: representative of Chamber of Commerce of Republika Srpska, representative of the Accreditation forum and the representative of the Accreditation Council. Listed external representatives provided an input of stakeholders with reference to the work of the Agency, especially academic community and labour market which is also reflected through the analyses of questionnaires that Agency has collected earlier, with reference to possible improvements of all its processes and services.

Based on those information and data the Team for writing self-assessment report wrote a report and in the process of writing the report this Team have used their own papers written for certain events, such as conferences, seminars and trainings in the area of quality assurance. Important source of information was also the Agency internal quality assurance system and the system documentation, as well as some other sources like previous self-assessment report.

The persons chosen to be a part of the team from our stakeholders were already Agencies' partners in different projects in past, such as chairman of the Accreditation Forum, the representative of the Accreditation Council coming from the academic community and representative of the Chamber of Commerce who have participated in organizing various seminars and trainings with the Agency.

Their contribution was in form of the discussions, analysis and scientific papers from the quality assurance field while representatives of the Agency were in charge of working on the report.

Keeping in mind that report should be comprehensive, thorough and with equable approach, one person was responsible for writing the report and collecting all the data - head of Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department.

The process of preparing the report started with appointment of the Team for self-evaluation, analysis of the Guidelines for ENQA agency reviews, it proceeded with setting the structure of the report based on compulsory form and content of the SAR and then with collecting data and documents and discussions with relevant persons on this subject.

Agency staff from Department of Accreditation have developed chapters of the SAR according to their responsibilities.

The process of preparing the report was much easier because it wasn't the first self-evaluation Agency had performed so the Team could use many data and experiences from the previous self-evaluation report. The process was already useful because it allowed management to perceive the internal imperfections within the documentation system, internal procedures etc.

From the start of the self-assessment process, i.e., first SAR and this SAR, Agency has identified areas for improvement, came up with projects for improvement and implemented it in its current activities.

3. Higher education and QA of higher education in the context of the agency

According to Dayton Peace Agreement, after the end of war in the 90s, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been established as a complex country comprised of three entities: Republika Srpska, Federation of BiH and Brcko district. Additionally, BiH Federation is structured out of 10 cantons with the high level of jurisdictions in regulating specific social sectors, including education.

3.1 System of education systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina

As many other aspects of BiH administrative system functioning, accreditation of universities in the country is a challenging and complex matter. Education, including higher education, falls within the legal competence of the ministries of education at the level of Republika Srpska, cantons and Brcko District. In accordance with different laws on Higher Education, there are different processes for accreditation established for Republika Srpska, each canton and Brcko district. There is an Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH established on BiH level with main competences for developing standards in higher education and some steps in coordinating accreditation process. There is a Higher Education Accreditation Agency of Republika Srpska formed for conducting the accreditation process of higher education institutions and study programs they perform. Ministries of education are competent for accreditation processes in the cantons of BiH Federation and Brcko district.

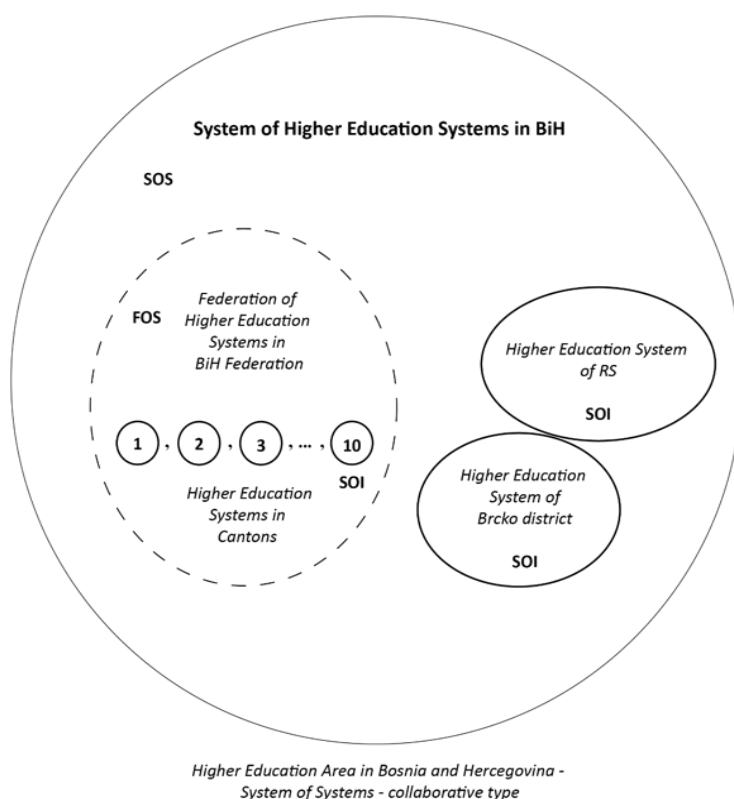
Since quality assurance can be seen as set of management tools related to particular system and bearing in mind complexity of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a society with several educational systems on different levels, we try to seek for answers in system engineering theory. Therefore it can be said that higher education systems, as most systems, are based on system engineering. System engineering practice is focused on different classes of engineered systems consisting of different type of resources (*information, technical, human, etc.*).

To explain different levels of systems' structure, system engineering uses terms:

- System of Interest (*SoI*) is a collective set of all elements of any system considered by a lifecycle, this may include both operational or enabling systems, but it applies to all systems irrespective of their purpose or lifecycle in an engineering sense,
- Federation of Systems (*FoS*) is concept that may apply when there is a very limited amount of centralized control and authority; each system in an FoS is very strongly in control of its own destiny, but "chooses" to participate in the FoS for its own good and the good of the "country",
- System of Systems (*SoS*) is defined as integration of finite number of constituent systems that are independent and operable and networked together to achieve a certain higher goal.

Higher education systems in BiH has characteristics of collaborative type of SoS with their own laws, different finance rules, systems of management and control - different ministries, inspections, agencies etc., but also with some common interests as recognition of diplomas, standards for accreditation and numerous projects with goal of achieving higher quality level.

Understanding and applying these concepts of system engineering in higher education area in BiH appears in the structure shown in picture 1.



Picture 1.

This approach can contribute to better understanding of institutional jurisdictions in area of quality assurance in higher education which are comprehended differently and as such are a matter of confusion.

3.2 Short overview of the national higher education system

Pursuant to the Law on Higher Education, higher education institutions in Republika Srpska are universities and colleges. University is a higher education institution that performs teaching and scientific and research work, has three cycles of studying and realises at least five study programs from at least three educational areas.

College is higher education institution that performs teaching and scientific and research work and teaches first cycle of study and realises at least one study program from one educational area.

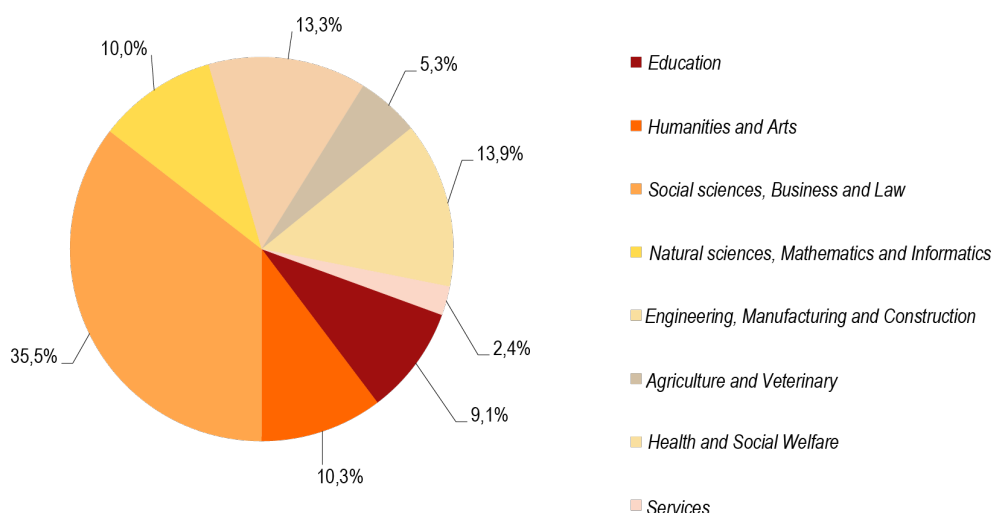
There are twenty two (22) higher education institutions enlisted in the Register of higher education institutions of Republika Srpska-nine universities and 13 colleges, out of which two universities and two colleges are public whereas the other higher education institutions are private. Eight institutions are accredited and three are in the process of accreditation.

It is important to mention that the percentage of students studying at the accredited higher education institutions is higher due to the fact that 91% out of total number of students study at the accredited HEIs in Republika Srpska.

Speaking of a number of students per scientific areas, it is noticeable that students still rather opt for the social science studies. The following table provides an overview of number of students in the academic year of 2014/15, per fields of education on all HEIs:

Table 1. Enrolled students by field of education, academic year 2014/2015

FIELD OF EDUCATION	NUMBER OD STUDENTS
Education	3 631
Humanities and Arts	4 102
Social sciences, Business and Law	14 097
Natural sciences, Mathematics and Informatics	3 986
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	5 303
Agriculture and Veterinary	2 110
Health and Social Welfare	5 543
Services	963
TOTAL	39 735



Graph 2. Enrolled students by field of education in the academic year 2014/2015

3.2.1 Study levels

The teaching process on majority of universities in Republika Srpska is organised per 4+1+3 model, whereas colleges have first cycle of studies lasting for 3 and 4 years. All study programs at the University of East Sarajevo are organised per 4+1+3 model, while University of Banja Luka, besides that one, also conducts 3+2+3 model. Majority of private universities have created three-year study programs on the first cycle of studies, but in the meantime great deal of these study programs are re-licensed to last four years. This points out to the fact that students with three-year-degree are not really recognized by the labour market, since there is no National Qualification Framework and defined learning outcomes.

There were also cases when those students could not respond to requirements of certain job position held. Besides, due to a tradition of four-year studies, students and employers still have much more confidence in the four-year long first cycle of studies.

There is also a problem of structuring study programs according to new principles, since all the changes in study programs that were taught at that moment, frequently were just "aesthetic", superficial, not essential.

Subjects were modified to last one semester, while the scope and the content of the subjects were not adjusted to the number of lessons. Therefore, it happens that students have 8-9 subjects in one semester (*some subjects are worth only 2-3 ECTS*).

Allocation of credits for some subjects has been mostly based on number of lessons taught whereas the tendency in the European higher education area is to base this calculation on learning outcomes and the contribution of each subject to the attainment of those outcomes. The great difference has been spotted between same study programs on different higher education institutions due to which students have difficulties when transferring from one HEI to another (students are required to take some differential exams), thus questioning students' mobility as one of the basic goals of the higher education reform.

Higher education is organized in three cycles. First cycle lasts for at least three and mostly four years and is worth 180 ECTS, i.e. 240 ECTS. Second cycle of studies is organized after the first cycle, last for a year or two and is worth 60 ECTS, i.e. 120 ECTS, so the total of both cycles is 300 ECTS. Third cycle of studies is organized after the second cycle and is 180 ECTS worth. One semester of third cycle is 30 ECTS worth. Exceptions are medicine, dentistry, pharmaceutical medicine and veterinary medicine that last for five or six years and are at least 300 ECTS worth. These studies are integrated studies (unique study programs that comprise first and second cycle) and corresponding qualifications and titles.

Students' assessment system

After completed course lectures, student is taking an exam as planned in the study program and in accordance with the Statute of the Higher Education Institution. The assessment system is based on the assessment scale which is 5 (*insufficient-not input in the student booklet*) to 10 (*excellent*). For some other forms of teaching, the higher education institution can establish some other non-numerical assessment system.

3.2.2 Procedures for establishing new higher education institutions, study programs and courses

Higher education institutions can be private or public. The founder of public higher education institutions is National Assembly of Republika Srpska on behalf of the Republika Srpska. The founder of private higher education institution can be national legal or physical person, as well as foreign legal or physical person together with national higher education institution, according to relevant legislation. Law on higher education also regulates requirements for the founder in terms of his background when it comes to expertise, teaching and research-scientific work. Higher education institution can start work and can perform the higher education activity if meeting legally regulated requirements with reference to staff, premises, material and technical conditions for teaching process. The staff requirement is to have at least one half of teaching staff on full time employment contracts for all courses and all years of study. In terms of physical resources, public higher education institution must have ownership over the suitable premises or the premises are owned by the Republic or certain local self-management unit. Private higher education institutions must have ownership over their premises. Higher education institution performs the higher education activity in the main and branch locations if so licensed by the Ministry. Government of Republika Srpska passes the Act on the requirements for establishing and start of work of higher education institution and the procedure for checking fulfilment of the requirements.

The process of establishing the higher education institution can be initiated by the local self-management unit, i.e. a number of self-management units or a legal person who prepares and submits the Elaboration on justification of HEI establishment to the Government. The Report serves as a proof of social need and purposes of establishing the HEI with the final goal of realizing the quality of knowledge equivalent to European standards, fills in the staff vacancies in certain

areas without jeopardizing the general interest. Elaboration contains proof of HEI founding justifiability, detailed description, status and the structure of HEI, length of studies, proposal of a study program, professional title obtained after the completion of studies, manner for fulfilling regulated requirements for the work of HEI, assessment and funding sources for establishing and conducting study programs. Ministry then seeks opinion of the Council for development of higher education and quality assurance (*hereinafter: Council*) and relevant ministries or other organisations. Elaboration is then passed on to the Government and the Government, in its decision, endorses the elaboration.

This is now the sufficient condition to start the licensing process of a study program or institution. Licensing is referred to as initial accreditation and the procedure is completed by the Decision of the Ministry of education and culture of Republika Srpska. Higher Education Institutions enlisted in the Register of Higher Education Institutions have the initial accreditation.

3.2.3 Internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions

Chapter in the Law on higher education of Republika Srpska regulates the Quality assurance in higher education. First part of this chapter refers to internal quality assurance in higher education institutions. Every higher education institution is obliged to conduct the procedure of self-evaluation and quality assessment of its study programs, teaching process and working conditions yearly, maximum in three year intervals. Higher education institution, i.e. its organizational unit, conducts the mentioned process in accordance with higher education institutions' quality assurance procedures and self-evaluation criteria. Self-evaluation and quality assessment report is published so it is available to the academic staff and students at the higher education institution. Upon the request of the Ministry or Expert panel, higher education institution submits the information on the procedure and results of self-evaluation as well as other data significant for quality assessment.

3.2.4 Institutions in the higher education system

Relevant bodies in the higher education system in Republika Srpska beside the Higher education accreditation agency of Republika Srpska, including their responsibilities, are listed below:

Higher Education Institutions

There are twenty two higher education institutions enlisted in the Register of higher education institutions of Republika Srpska-nine universities and 13 colleges, out of which two universities and two colleges are public whereas the other higher education institutions are private. Twelve institutions are accredited and one is in the process of accreditation but majority of the students (91%) are at accredited institutions.

Council for development of higher education and quality assurance of Republika Srpska

Council for the development of higher education and quality assurance of Republika Srpska has been established at the beginning of 2008. Council contributes to the development of higher education and overall education, proposes incentive measures, criteria and rules for licensing higher education institutions and study programs, provides opinion on establishing new higher education institutions and study programs as well as recommendations to the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska on the enrolment policy, scholarship system, student standard.

Rectors' Conference of Republika Srpska

Rector's Conference of Republika Srpska sets and represents joint interests of universities in Republika Srpska and realizes cooperation with institutions in the area of higher education in Republika Srpska, BiH, Europe and the world. Full members of the Rector's Conference are rectors of universities in the Republic.

Conference of Colleges

Conference of colleges sets and represents joint interests of colleges in Republika Srpska and realizes cooperation with institutions in the area of higher education in Republika Srpska, BiH, Europe and the world. Full members of the Conference of Colleges are directors of licensed colleges in Republika Srpska.

Commission for information and recognition of qualifications in higher education

Minister of education and culture appoints members to the Commission for information and recognitions of qualifications. Members are teaching staff with international experience from higher education institutions. Commission for information is competent for: information and recognition of qualifications in higher education area, for coordination of inter-entity and international exchange of academic staff, students and programs in the area of higher education, with the purpose of recognizing degrees and diplomas for further education on higher education institutions in Republika Srpska, BiH and representing Republika Srpska in those networks (*networks ENIC/NARIC*), etc.

Students' Union of Republika Srpska

Students' Union of Republika Srpska is the roof students' organization of Republika Srpska that synchronises the work of students' representation bodies in higher education institutions in Republika Srpska in terms of joint work programs, discussion on issues that are of common students' interest and manages activities in international cooperation.

Ministry of education and culture of Republika Srpska

Ministry of education and culture of Republika Srpska performs administrative and other expert affairs in the area of pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary education; preparation of educational cooperation programs with other states and international organizations in the area of education in accordance with the Constitution of Republika Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina; higher education; preparation of educational cooperation programs with the BiH Federation, other countries and international organizations and international educational agreements.

Ministry of science and technology of Republika Srpska

Ministry of science and technology performs administrative and other expert affairs that refer to scientific-research activity, strategy of technologic development of Republika Srpska, urging fundamental developmental applied research; development of national investment technologies, staff in science in research; innovations and technological improvements etc.

Academy of Arts and Science of Republika Srpska

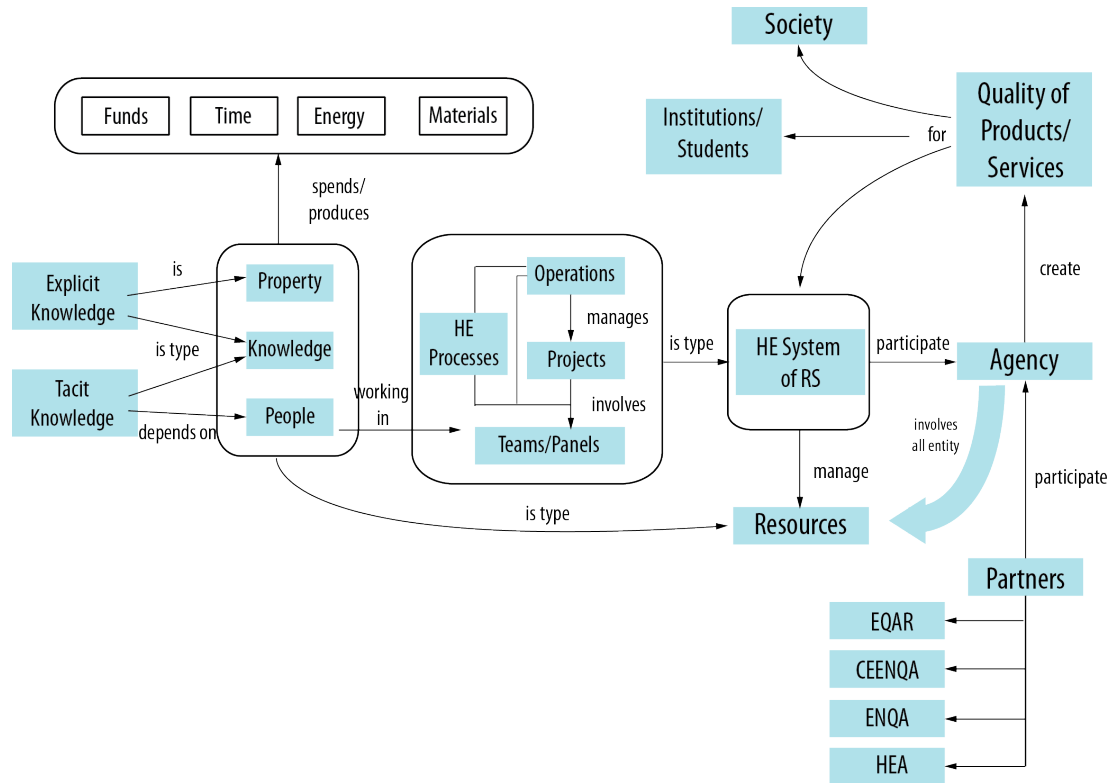
Academy of Arts and Science of Republika Srpska was founded in 1996 as the highest scientific, artistic and representational institution in Republika Srpska with the task of developing and improving science and art.

National Assembly of Republika Srpska

National Assembly of Republika Srpska passes strategic acts and reports on the realization of strategic documents in Republika Srpska, with reference to education as well as other areas.

Above mentioned institutions are among key stakeholders of the Agency and crucial in understanding context of the Higher education accreditation agency.

Context of RS HEAA functioning is presented in Figure 3 below:



4. History, profile and activities of the Agency

Law on higher education of Republika Srpska regulates accreditation as a quality assurance procedure based on the self-evaluation of higher education institution and evaluation of independent experts, with the purpose of recognizing and improving the quality of higher education within the European higher education area. Accreditation is conducted in three phases: a) self-evaluation by higher education institutions, b) external evaluation by a panel of experts and c) issuing a decision on accreditation. The accreditation procedure is conducted for: a) newly founded higher education institutions and for new study programs with the purpose of establishing to which level are the minimum standards met what represents the initial accreditation and b) for existing higher education institutions and study programs with the purpose of evaluating the reached quality level in accordance with valid standards and the criteria in the area of quality assurance. Licensing procedure results in initial accreditation and is conducted by MPiK RS. Accreditation that follows up on the licensing is conducted by the RS HEAA for accreditation of higher education institutions of Republika Srpska. RS HEAA has a status of a legal person with rights and liabilities set by this law, standards and instructions for quality assurance. RS HEAA is independent and non-profit institution.

4.1 Mission statement

Committing and establishing mission, vision and values point out to the purpose of existence of quality assurance systems in higher education, intentions on their future role and affirmation of values that shall benefit the realization of desired growth and development objectives. Mission, vision and values are integrated categories (*Figure 4*) and their constant analysis and reconsideration are means of tracing strategic and future development directions.

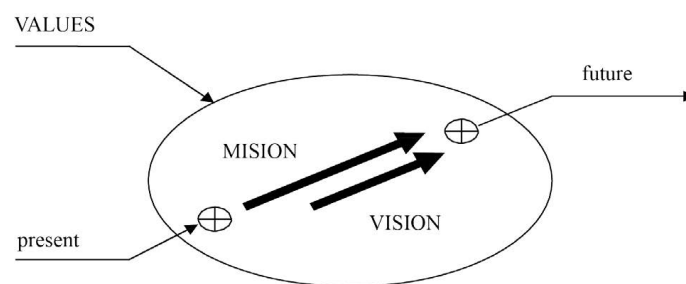


Figure 4. Mission, vision and values relations

Mission:

Mission of Higher Education Accreditation Agency is continuous build-up and improvement of quality assurance in Republika Srpska higher education system through the implementation of European standards and best practices in the area of quality assurance.

Vision:

Higher education system of Republika Srpska is recognized in the European higher education area through the membership of the Agency in international networks, associations and registers. Quality assurance systems are implemented on all higher education institutions in Republika Srpska and the quality culture is constantly built up and improved. Academic community and all participants in the higher education process support the quality culture and actively participate in the quality assurance system.

Values:

Benevolence – Agency approaches all higher education institutions within the system, with good intentions and with the final goal of improving the quality of the institutions' work and the wellbeing of students.

Credibility – all Agency employees and experts engaged in expert panels complete their tasks knowingly and fairly and all decisions are made on the basis of collected objective indicators.

Openness – the work of the Agency is based on the public trust and it is completely opened through various publications, reports, web page, etc.

Based on the Agency's mission and vision, there are two basic strategic objectives identified:

OBJECTIVE 1 – building the quality culture in the higher education system and

OBJECTIVE 2 – building the Agency's capacities and status

Within the context of functioning, Agency's mission and vision are realized through products and services offered by higher education institutions. Figure 5 presents products and services:

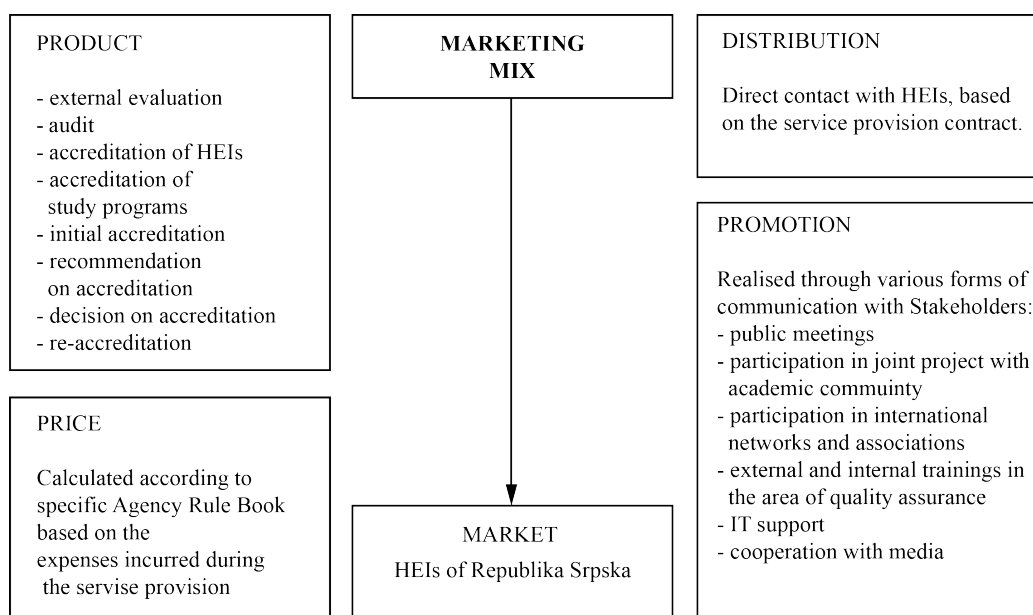


Figure 5.

Realisation of set objectives is made possible through the engagement of all participants in the accreditation process by affirmation of the following policies:

1. Professional profile

RS HEAA is more of an expert than administrative body. Employees are well familiarized with ENQA, BiH and RS standards, criteria and normative, and other methods and techniques for the implementation of Quality assurance systems in higher education. At the beginning of its work, the RS HEAA had a small number of employees and wide range of associates already available in Republika Srpska and region. The number of employed staff has slightly increased and there are some new formal forms for the inclusion of associates and stakeholders in the work of the RS HEAA. Those are Accreditation Forum, Accreditation Council and expert panels. Hence, the knowledge and competences of these experts is formally an RS HEAA resource.

2. Activity

With the purpose of providing independency and increasing professional competence, besides the jurisdiction set by the Law on higher education, RS HEAA conducts other activities in the area of quality assurance, such as:

- Organisation of events
- Organisation of trainings and certification of staff engaging in quality assurance
- Issuance of information, statistical reports, publications
- Participation in international projects in this area,
- Other activities according to the needs of HEIs

3. Publicity and transparency

All of the set goals bear social responsibility and are generally significant for the society so they cannot be reached without all forms of public participation. In that respect all acts and key decisions have been and shall be passed in consultations with stakeholders. All relevant information are available on the web site of the RS HEAA and portal: "e-obrazovanje". There is constantly present interest of the media for the work of the RS HEAA.

4.2 Legislation and other regulations that refer to RS HEAA

Initiative for quality improvement of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina comes from the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska, its Higher Education Department and Council for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance through establishing the procedure of licensing higher education institutions which is in European standards recognized as process of initial accreditation. These activities actually represent the introduction and precondition for a forthcoming accreditation process of higher education institutions and study programs they offer. With this purpose, the amended Law on higher education of Republika Srpska dated 2010 foresees the establishment of RS HEAA which should integrate and further contribute to the development of activities started on internal and external quality assurance in higher education through formalized accreditation process. RS HEAA was formally established in May 2011.

Besides the Law on Higher Education of Republika Srpska which is the main act for the work of RS HEAA, there are other acts that closer regulate the accreditation process. Law states that the RS HEAA passes acts that closely regulate the process and therefore RS HEAA has firstly established The Rulebook on accreditation of Higher Education Institutions. The Rulebook describes the process of institutional accreditation and is available on the RS HEAA web site. This Rulebook (*Procedure*) is followed by two Instructions. One is Instruction for accessing the accreditation process, act that defines the set of preconditions that every HEI must have fulfilled in order to start preparing the Application for accreditation. Second Instruction is actually contained in a Rulebook on forming expert panels and instructions for the work of expert panels. This act defines the procedure for selecting experts in the expert panels that perform the external evaluation and provide recommendation for accreditation of HEI in the process. The document closely defines every step that refers to the selection of experts, their responsibilities and tasks in the process and code of conduct during the process. Every experts signs the contract of engagement with RS HEAA as well as Conflict of interest statement thus confirming that their work in the panel is not conflicted with some personal interests or stakes. Each panel is coordinated by the secretary who is most often one of the RS HEAA staff. The Rulebook on accreditation of Higher Education Institutions also regulates the procedure for outsourcing a secretary to the Panel of experts should there be no one available for the task within the RS HEAA.

In terms of study programs there is a Rulebook on accreditation of study programs adopted last year and the accreditation of study programs is planned to start in September 2015.

Panels of experts work in accordance with set of Criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs and Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in European higher education area (*ESG*). The first document is valid for the whole area of BiH and it was passed by the Agency for the development of higher education and quality assurance of BiH. Criteria referring to study programs is very general in all its parts, hence the delay in the start of accreditation of study programs. Another obstacle to proper management of this process is lack of National Qualification framework which is being created for many years in BiH, but still no final document is in place.

All the documents brought by the RS HEAA and used in the accreditation process are available on the RS HEAA web site: www.heaars.com

4.3 RS HEAA financing system

RS HEAA financing system is defined by the RS HEAA Statute and the Budget of Republika Srpska, in accordance with the Law on higher education of Republika Srpska. In 2011 Republic of Srpska Government provided one-off funding for the start of RS HEAA work. According to the Republic of Srpska Law on Higher Education, RS HEAA employees' wages are funded by the Republic of Srpska budget. Funds for material business expenses, subcontracting for required administrative

activities and financing expert fees and expenses come from the process of external evaluation and accreditation based on previously signed contract on accreditation with Higher Education Institution.

Services of external evaluation and accreditation are charged per Rulebook on determining the cost of services provided by RS HEAA. The cost of external evaluation comprises the direct costs (costs of travel, stay and expert fees of panel members) and the cost of accreditation. HEIs are charged between 17.000 BAM and 35.000 BAM depending on the size of the institution, number of study programs reviewed as a sample for the evaluation of the institution, number of working days, and number of experts in the panel.

Equipment, goods and services for the needs of RS HEAA are procured either through the direct agreement or through the tendering procedure according to the Law on public procurement.

Yearly financial reports are submitted to the Government through the relevant ministry whereas monthly financial reports are submitted to the Ministry of Education and Culture of RS. RS HEAA budget was 150.000 BAM from 2011 to 2013, and from 2014 onwards the budget is 250.000 BAM. Increased budget was required because 2016 shall be the year of external evaluation of the RS HEAA.

4.4 RS HEAA internal organization

4.4.1. RS HEAA employees

RS HEAA has a status of legal person with rights and liabilities set in the Law on higher education of Republika Srpska, standards and quality assurance instructions. RS HEAA is independent and non-profit organization. RS HEAA is headed by a director and his deputy. Director and the deputy are appointed by the Government after the conducted public call procedure. Director's mandate is 5 years and after the first mandate the same person may be appointed for another five years mandate. RS HEAA is managed by its Steering Board that consists of five members. Members of the Steering Board are elected through the public call by the Government on a four-year mandate with the possibility to be re-elected for another mandate. RS HEAA Statute defines the scope of activities managerial structure and other issues significant for RS HEAA activities. Report on RS HEAA activities and Plan of activities for the year to come are submitted to the RS Government through the Ministry of Education and Culture of RS once a year.

RS HEAA is organized in three organizational units:

- a) Department for accreditation in higher education,
- b) Department for quality assurance and international cooperation
- c) Department for general affairs, human resources and finance.

Department for accreditation in higher education organises and conducts the accreditation process of higher education institutions and study programs in accordance with standards, instructions and valid legal acts and bylaws in the area of quality assurance in higher education. There are two employees currently employed in this department.

Department for quality assurance and international cooperation establishes, upkeeps and constantly improves the RS HEAA quality assurance system and suggests infrastructure improvements in terms of quality of higher education thus providing international recognition of the RS HEAA and higher education institutions of Republika Srpska.

Department for general affairs, human resources and finance is in charge for the following tasks: monitoring and implementation of laws and bylaws, other regulations and general acts; legal representation and legal documentation; preparation of working materials for meetings with representatives of state and entities' institutions, higher education institutions and other RS HEAA clients; preparation of materials for Steering Board meetings, meetings of Accreditation

forum, expert panels and other RS HEAA bodies, recording meetings' minutes and creation of follow-up acts after the meetings; preparation of working materials for conferences and seminars; preparation of general acts, texts of agreements and contracts; RS HEAA policies and procedures; organization of meetings with beneficiaries and representatives of international organisations; planning and execution of the budget, financial evidences and cash floats; accountancy; purchase, distribution and maintenance of equipment and consumables; developing a price list for services; translation and proof-reading; copying of materials; internal and external communications, such as phone calls, post, registering and archiving documentation; managing human resources, advertising and tendering, training of new staff; development of work plans and programs and financial affairs, work reports and financial reports; maintaining the RS HEAA premises; provision of transport services by RS HEAA vehicle, maintenance and servicing of vehicle, planning the car parts purchase, purchase of oils, lubricants and fuel, keeping car usage records.

Within departments and on RS HEAA level there are specific positions set up according to the job position title, specific conditions required for the job performance and description.

RS HEAA employees conduct trainings of experts who sit in external evaluation panels according to its Training plan. Since experts are selected on expert lists as a result of open call procedure of the Agency for development of higher education and quality assurance of BiH, experts used to undergo some initial trainings immediately after being selected on the expert lists. Since those trainings turned out to be insufficient, RS HEAA has established its own training plan and started implementation this year. Each expert panel appointed to evaluate certain institution meets several times in the preparation process and once more immediately prior to the on-site visit. Preparatory meetings have the purpose of getting experts familiarized with RS HEAA acts and procedures.

Meetings of Accreditation forum are held twice a year and they represent a starting point for introducing all new things and changes in the process.

RS HEAA has regular staff meetings twice a week where heads of departments discuss current activities along with the director and where plans are made for short term activities. Long term activities follow the RS HEAA strategy and action plan that arose from it.

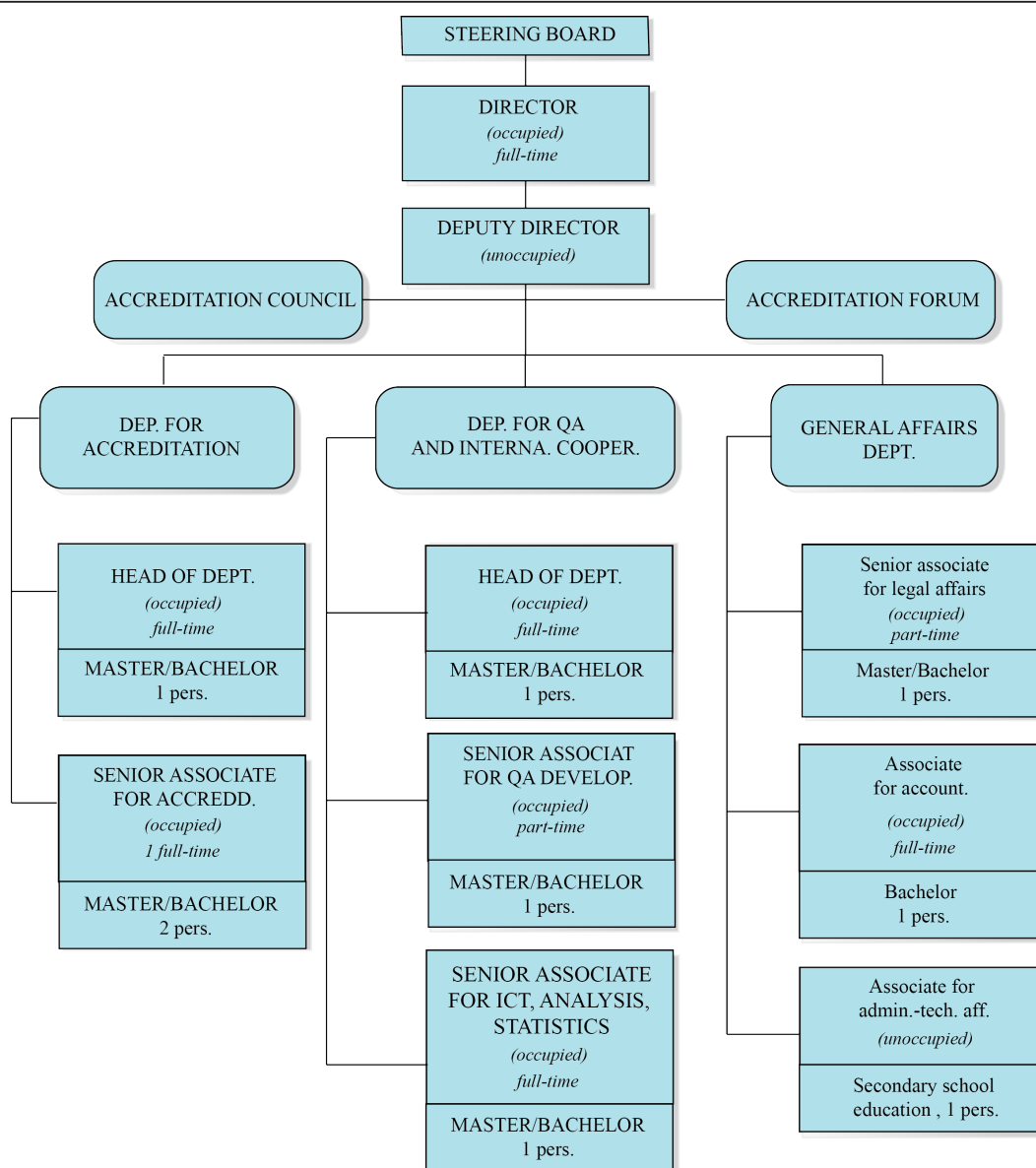


Figure 6 RS HEAA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.5 Other RS HEAA activities

RS HEAA has an educational mission as well and it is reflected through the trainings conducted for higher education institutions, for experts, quality coordinators in HEIs, HEIs' management etc. Meetings and seminars organized also refer to assistance in the process of preparing the application for accreditation and HEIs use the opportunity to get consulting services in the process. Experts that sit in external evaluation panels receive trainings on the RS HEAA procedures and RS educational system, especially for international experts. Students and representatives of labour market receive trainings on the significance of accreditation and on the importance of interlinking labour market and higher education especially when it comes to creating study programs. In that respect RS HEAA has established cooperation with RS Chamber of Commerce and has offered one seminar pointing out on the changes of ISO 9001 and ESG in 2015. In the course of its activities RS HEAA is already part of European higher education area since the best European practices are implemented in the trainings and RS HEAA daily practice.

5. Higher education quality assurance activities of the agency

Accreditation of higher education institutions is part of the overall higher education reform conducted in accordance with the Bologna principles with the final goal of achieving recognition of the higher education of Republic of Srpska within the European higher education area. The subject of the accreditation are higher education institutions and study programs taught, including higher education management procedures, study programs realisation processes, internal quality assurance system in higher education institution, capacities, resources and potentials of the higher education institution as well as capacities for changes.

Accreditation is conducted with the basic purpose of verifying and improving the quality of processes in higher education institutions, looking up to positive practice of European countries and quality assurance agencies associated in the European association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

Bearing in mind that the accreditation process is voluntary, it has an objective of encouraging higher education institutions in Republika Srpska to develop the internal quality assurance systems in order to improve the processes and activities performed by these institutions.

The first round of institutional accreditation has started in 2012 when the first decisions were issued and the process is still ongoing and accreditation of study programs is planned to start at the first months of 2017. Plan for the accreditation of institutions envisages that all institutions apply for accreditation at the moment when all pre-conditions are met (*legal requirements are met, self-evaluation reports produced and labour market already swallowed one generation of alumni*), as set in Instruction on Accreditation Entry Requirements.

At the beginning of its work and after passing documentation on accreditation process, RS HEAA has firstly held series of informative meetings with higher education institutions, individually and the first meeting of Accreditation forum. Those meeting were the first opportunity for all stakeholders to get familiarised with the accreditation plan and to be explained the application procedure. First applications for accreditation have been submitted by private higher education institutions what was expected since those are institutions with less students, less employees and less complex organisational structure. Both public universities have also managed to apply for accreditation in the middle of 2012 when the process actually started being implemented. In 2013 RS HEAA has received new applications for accreditation and has conducted and coordinated external evaluation processes for higher education institutions that have applied in 2012. That was also a year when first decisions on accreditation have been issued.

After initial steps in the phase of applying for accreditation, RS HEAA has held meetings with those higher education institutions that have applied and on those meetings higher education institutions could have clarified some direct issues with reference to the process. In those first accreditation processes those meetings were also a good opportunity to present plan and program for the on-site visit and provide more details on the course of the on-site visit.

5.1 Accreditation of higher education institution

Prior to submitting the applications for accreditation, higher education institutions have to check their eligibility to apply for accreditation. Eligibility criteria are contained in the Instruction for accessing accreditation. It comprises for main requirements: regular self-evaluation reports, established internal quality assurance system, legal preconditions met and study programs from the application have to be taught year longer than their duration (*so the alumni are already at least for a year on the labour market*). The last precondition provides panel of experts to interview representatives of labour market who have employees with the degree of the institution in the process.

Higher education institutions that have submitted applications for accreditation in 2012 are:

- University for business engineering and management, Banja Luka
- Banja Luka College
- University of Business Studies, Banja Luka
- Independent university Banja Luka
- University of East Sarajevo
- University of Banja Luka
- College of Business Service, Sokolac-East Sarajevo
- University Sinergija, Bijeljina

RS HEAA has held a number of meetings with expert panels in order to brief them on legal regulations, standards and the criteria, RS HEAA documentation (*especially the Rulebook on the work of expert panels and the Rulebook on accreditation of higher education institution*), assessment methodology, individual check lists of panel members and other issues significant for the work of expert panels.

In 2013 positive decisions on accreditation were issued for the following higher education institutions: Banja Luka College, University of Business Studies, Banja Luka, Independent University Banja Luka, University of East Sarajevo and University of Banja Luka. Since the start of 2014 decisions on accreditation have been issued for the Sinergija University, Banja Luka College of Communications Kappa Phi and College of Business Service Sokolac-East Sarajevo. In 2014, RS HEAA has received an application for accreditation from the College of legal and applied science "*Prometej*" Banja Luka, Slobomir P University, Bijeljina and College "*PRIMUS*", Gradiska. Slobomir P University obtain an accreditation due to panel's recommendation in the report while both colleges, "*Primus*" and "*Prometej*" received a letter of expectations. In the following year these two colleges had to go through particular trainings prepared in a according of the specific recommendations for improvement from experts report based on the criteria assessed with the lowest level. In 2016 these colleges obtained an accreditation due to positive evaluation by the panel of the criteria previously insufficiently assessed. During the 2015 the Agency received two applications for accreditation, from PIM University and Business college from Doboje. Both of the processes end in 2016 with the letters of expectation and are in a process of preparing the plans of activities for improving lowest assessed criteria requirements. The tailor-made trainings will be prepared for both of these institutions.

According to the Rulebook on accreditation of higher education institutions, accredited higher education institutions have the obligation to produce the follow up plan according to which the quality improvements shall be conducted. The supervision over the implementation of the plan is conducted by the RS HEAA along with the higher education institution. At the moment, RS HEAA is conducting the follow up procedure for five higher education institutions that have been accredited first. They have been requested to submit the plan of follow up activities and subsequently the reports on the realization of those activities. In addition to the process of institutional accreditation that is ongoing, the RS HEAA is also in the final phase of developing the Rulebook for the accreditation of study programs.

Communication with higher education institutions enables public participation in the development of procedures as well as providing information on RS HEAA activities. The most significant RS HEAA information tools are: RS HEAA web site (www.heaa.rs.com), meetings of Accreditation forum and individual meetings with higher education institutions which are very regular and very frequent. Besides, RS HEAA provides information to HEIs, students and other stakeholders in writing, via emails and by phone. This service is provided by all available RS HEAA staff.

Recently, RS HEAA started conducting trainings of HEIs' quality coordinators, management, experts working in panels etc. thus raising awareness on the RS HEAA services and importance of quality aspect according to Bologna principles. Trainings conducted are summoned in five modules with various target groups:

- Module 1 – “Concept of higher education according to Bologna principles” is a general module for all participating in the system;
- Module 2 – “Internal quality assurance system” on two levels, first level being general and aiming at complete leadership of higher education institution, whereas other level is professional and aiming at direct participants in the process.
- Module 3 – “Creation, development and review of study programs” is based on case studies and is meant for all who participate in the process of creating study programs, especially heads of study programs;
- Module 4 – “Methodology for assessment and quality review of higher education institution's work” which is aiming at potential members of accreditation panels.
- Module 5 – “External quality assurance in the European higher education area” is meant for a broader group of participants, i.e. representatives of various institutions included in the development of higher education, leadership of higher education institutions, students' representatives etc.

5.1.1 Outcomes of the institutional accreditation

Table 2. Accredited higher education institutions in Republika Srpska (by September 2016)

Public universities	Number of faculties	Private universities	Number of faculties	Colleges
University of Banja Luka	16	University of Business Studies	7	Banja Luka College
University of East Sarajevo	17	Independent University of Banja Luka	7	Banja Luka College of Communications Kappa Phi
		University Sinergija, Bijeljina	5	College of Business Service Sokolac-East Sarajevo
		Slobomir P Univeristy Bijeljina	6	College Primus Gradiska
		Pan European Univeristy Apeiron Banja Luka	7	College for Applied and Law Sciences Prometej Banja Luka
Total: 2		Total: 5		Total: 5

5.2 Accreditation of study programs

In terms of study programs' accreditation, RS HEAA has review the Rulebook for the accreditation as well as Instruction on Requirements for entering the study programs' accreditation process. The Rulebook describes both the procedure for institutional and study programs' external evaluation and accreditation. The Rulebook was developed in consultations with the overall academic community through Accreditation forum discussions and shall be subject to further discussions too. The RS HEAA plan is to years 2016 and 2017 shall be devoted to this process.

6. Processes and their methodologies

Prior to submitting the application for accreditation, higher education institutions are welcome to contact RS HEAA and get answers to some question with reference to the preparation of application. Assistance in the process is provided firstly through various meetings and briefings organized by RS HEAA and secondly on individual basis, meaning that each HEI is invited to schedule a meeting with RS HEAA staff in order to clarify all issues they may have. The accreditation process has its phases: preliminary activities (*public and individual consultations on the course of accreditation, consent on the structure of the HEI's quality system, effectiveness of the self-evaluation process and preconditions for accreditation*), application process (*defining the formal application process which is in accordance with international practice, legitimacy check and defining the cost of accreditation process*), external evaluation (*selection, preparation and the work of the panel that conducts the external evaluation, instructive training, reporting and subsequent Panel's opinion on accreditation*), decision on accreditation (*issuing the decision on accreditation, listing the HEI in registers and the follow-up plan*) and re-accreditation.

Documentation basis for accreditation of HEI in RS

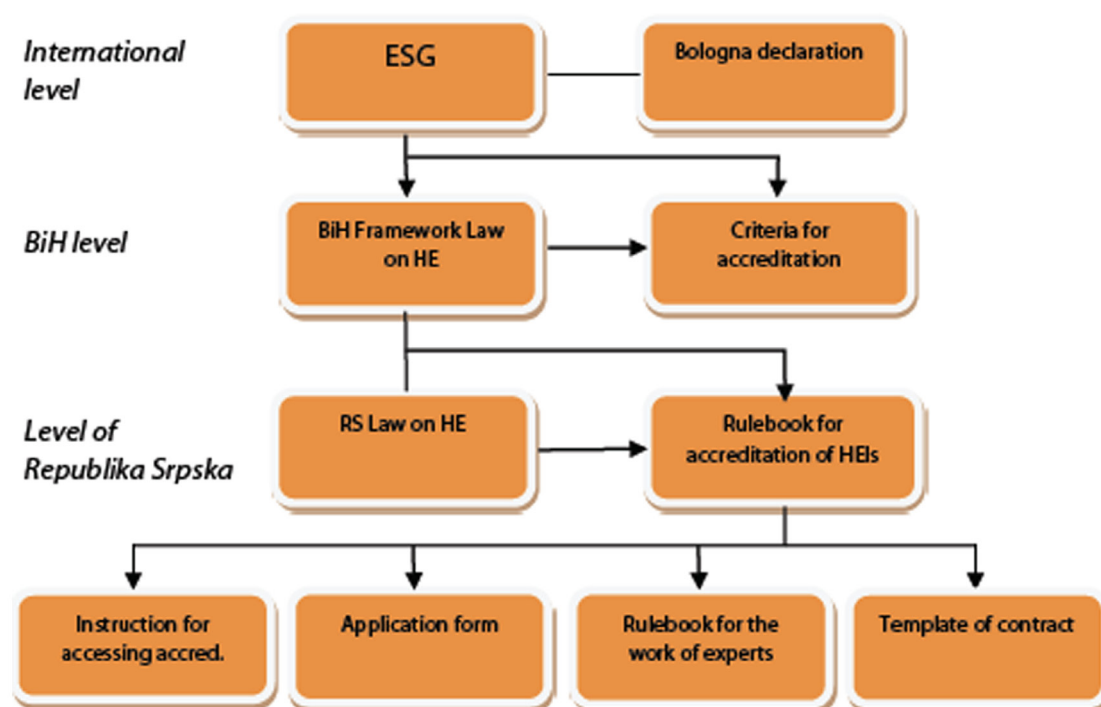
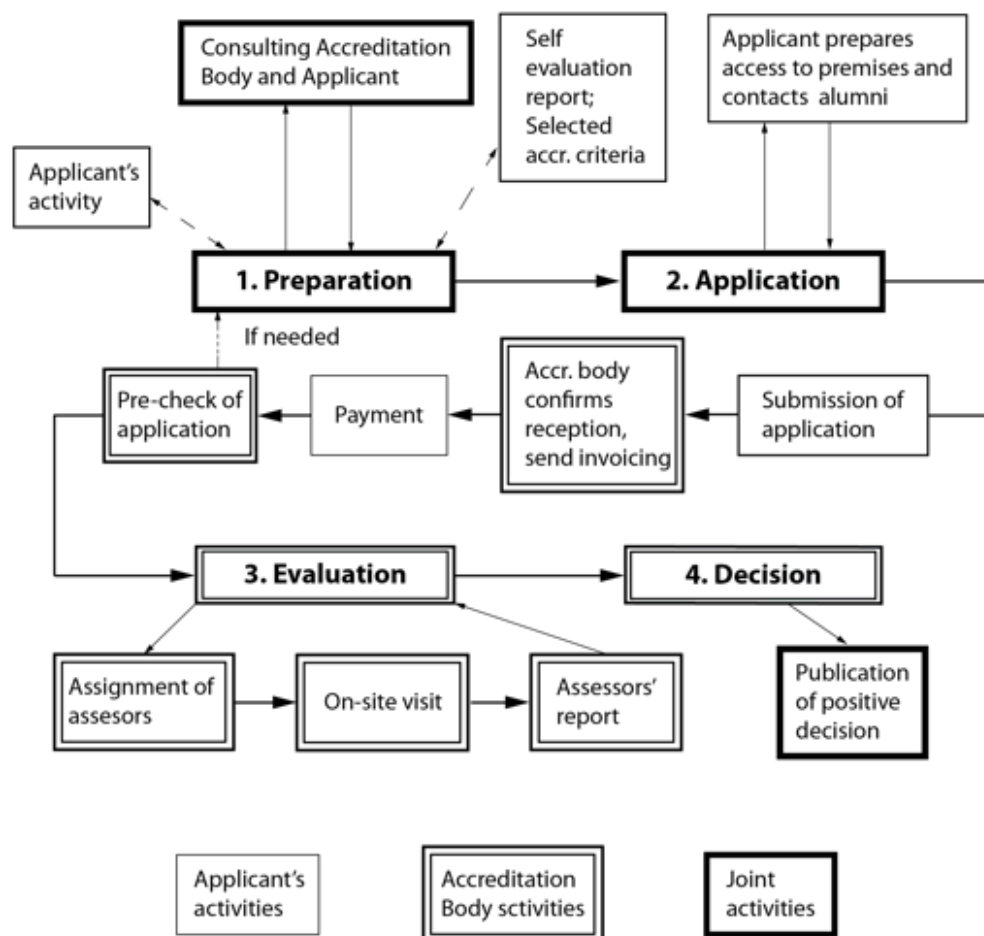


Figure 7

6.1 Institutional accreditation

Accreditation process is described in the Rulebook on accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs. Referential documents for the institutional and study programs' accreditation are Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area and BiH Criteria for institutional and accreditation of study programs.

Major steps in a process of accreditation in figure 8:



STEP 1. Application

After ensuring that all pre-conditions are fulfilled, the higher education institution determines what organisational units and study programs shall be subject to accreditation and completes the application (on an Application form predefined by the RS HEAA) for each of them, as well as the statement thus confirming that all conditions for applying to accreditation are met.

Minimum of study programs submitted by the university should be five (5) from three (3) scientific areas, i.e., one (1) study program from one scientific area for colleges. In the case of less study programs submitted, the Panel for external evaluation shall recommend accreditation for the shorter period of time.

In order to provide the better data visibility and effectiveness of external evaluation, the higher education institution may complete the application form separately for every organizational unit responsible for executing candidate study program.

RS HEAA director appoints the coordinator of the external evaluation process by a decision. The coordinator may be one of the RS HEAA employees or outsourced, but in any case, capable of coordinating the external evaluation process.

RS HEAA analyses the scope of required activities for conducting the accreditation process and on the basis of those activities the RS HEAA estimates the time lines and the scope of external evaluation activities. Based on the alleged estimation, the RS HEAA establishes the cost of the accreditation and makes the proposal of the Contract. The confidentiality statement is a part of the Contract.

Based on the information contained in the application form, the RS HEAA checks the completeness of the application as well as HEIs' legitimacy through obtaining information from the competent bodies. If those requirements are not met, the higher education institution is given a deadline for making corrections. After checking the elements of the contract by the higher education institution, the RS HEAA organises the official contract signing.

STEP 2. External evaluation

2.1. Appointing Panel of experts

The coordinator analyses scientific and educational areas submitted for accreditation by higher education institution and compares it to the profiles of experts from the expert lists. The proposal is then sent to the Accreditation Council proposing the Panel of Experts (*hereinafter: Panel*) that should include at least one student and one international expert.

When forming the Panel of Experts, RS HEAA checks the possible conflict of interests with reference to the higher education institution or study program that gets accredited.

RS HEAA composes the Decision on establishing the panel of experts for which is then sent to the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina for further appointment which should be realized within the legally defined time frame.

After receiving the Decision on appointing the expert panel, RS HEAA signs contracts on engagement with Panel members.

2.2. Preparation of the External Evaluation Process

Panel members conduct the thorough analyses of the higher education institution's documentation comparing it with requirements of the standards and criteria and each member individually makes the internal check list, as well as other auxiliary notes that shall be used during the visit to the higher education institution.

During the documentation analysis, electronically, with the assistance of coordinator, Panel members exchange their remarks and findings, after what the Panel chairman creates the detailed program for the visit to the higher education institution.

During the documentation analysis, Panel members may demand additional documentation through the coordinator.

2.3. Documentation analysis

Panel members conduct the thorough analyses of the higher education institution's documentation comparing it with requirements of the standards and criteria and each member individually makes the internal check list, as well as other auxiliary notes that shall be used during the visit to the higher education institution.

During the documentation analysis, electronically, with the assistance of coordinator, Panel members exchange their remarks and findings, after what the Panel chairman creates the detailed program for the visit to the higher education institution.

During the documentation analysis, Panel members may demand additional documentation through the coordinator.

2.4. On site visit

Based on the created on-site visit program, the coordinator informs the higher education institution on the program details and, with the responsible party from HEI, arranges the detailed working schedule of the individual Panel members.

The higher education institution is obliged to provide an escort for each Panel member, person who will be authorized to provide all required information and evidence on fulfilling the standards and the criteria.

The higher education institution is obliged to present to the Panel the self-evaluation report, information on the status of initiated projects for quality improvement as well as other documents that the Panel requests, including the contacts with students, alumni and other stakeholders.

During their course of work, in a closed session, Panel members communicate between themselves on the findings and non-conformities with regards to standards and criteria. As a rule, Panel makes decisions by consensus. Panel member, who disagrees with the decision, may ask for the exception in writing, enclosing the explanation.

On a final meeting with official representatives of the higher education institution, the Panel members present their findings pointing out on the discovered non-conformities, stating recommendations for improvements. Minutes are taken during the meeting what makes part of the Panel report.

STEP 3 Reporting

Panel of Experts creates the draft report on a template described in Instructions, which is then forwarded by the coordinator to the higher education institution for the perusal and presents it on the RS HEAA web page for the public consultations. Should the higher education institution find certain factual omissions in the work of the Panel, ones that may influence the opinion on accreditation, they are to inform the RS HEAA within 15 days' time. RS HEAA then familiarizes the Panel with the objection submitted, and after considering its justifiability it creates the final external evaluation report within 15 days, including the opinion on issuing the decision on accreditation which may be as follows:

- a) opinion on issuing the decision on accreditation of higher education institution for the period of 5 years
- b) opinion on issuing a letter of expectation where all discovered non-conformities are listed, including deadlines for correcting them, not longer than 12 months, as a condition for accreditation;
- c) negative opinion, i.e. opinion stipulating non-issuing of accreditation, in case the Panel estimates the inability of correcting non-conformities within 12 months.

In the opinion stating the outcome of the external evaluation, Panel shall list candidate study programs for accreditation process that comply with standards and the criteria of external evaluation and through which the work of the institution has been evaluated.

STEP 4 Decision on accreditation

RS HEAA analyses the report of the external evaluation Panel and given opinion on accreditation, which is then sent to the Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH with the purpose of issuing a recommendation on accreditation of higher education institution, i.e. study program.

Within 15 days, the Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH shall issue a decision on accreditation. In case it is not issued within the given timeframe, it shall be deemed that the recommendation is provided in accordance with the Panel opinion.

RS HEAA director can:

- a) issue a decision on accreditation,
- b) issue an expectation letter or
- c) issue a decision on rejecting an accreditation.

After issuing a decision on accreditation, RS HEAA addresses the request for registration of accredited higher education institution in the register of accredited higher education institutions to the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska and the Agency for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH. The decision also includes study programs taught in accordance with standards and the criteria of external evaluation through which the work of the institution is evaluated and the period of accreditation.

Based on the recommendations for improvement provided by the Panel of experts, higher education institution creates Plan of projects and activities on quality improvement which is then sent to the RS HEAA with the purpose of monitoring its realization.

Letter of expectation is an act that points out the shortages with reference to the fulfilment of quality standards of study programs, i.e. higher education institutions, expressing the expectation that noted deficiencies shall be rectified within the given timeframe.

RS HEAA director shall issue a decision on rejecting accreditation for all or part of study programs taught at the higher education institution, on the basis of the expert Panel assessment that the higher education institution does not fulfil the quality assurance standards in higher education or if the higher education institution does not rectify the noted deficiencies within the given time frame.

Higher education institution that has been rejected application for accreditation may submit another application for accreditation a year after the date of the decision on rejection of accreditation.

STEP 5 Appeals procedure

There are various types of appeals in the process. The expert panel composes a report on the prescribed form and it is forwarded to the HEI for their perusal. Should the HEI establish that there were some material omissions in the work of the expert panel that may influence the opinion on accreditation, HEI informs the RS HEAA on it within 15 days. RS HEAA then familiarizes the panel with HEI objections and the panel drafts the final version of the report, including the opinion and recommendation on accreditation. HEI is supposed to provide consent in writing which is part of the whole HEI documentation. RS HEAA thus ensures there shall be no legal appeals taken against the panel decision. At the same time various stakeholders have 15 days to have an insight and object on the published report. After that deadline, RS HEAA issues the decision on accreditation.

As a final legal remedy, RS Law on Higher education (*Article 31*) states that the decision on accreditation is final and there is no appeal allowed against the decision, but there may be an administrative procedure initiated before competent court within 30 days from the date of the decision receipt.

STEP 6 Follow -up activities

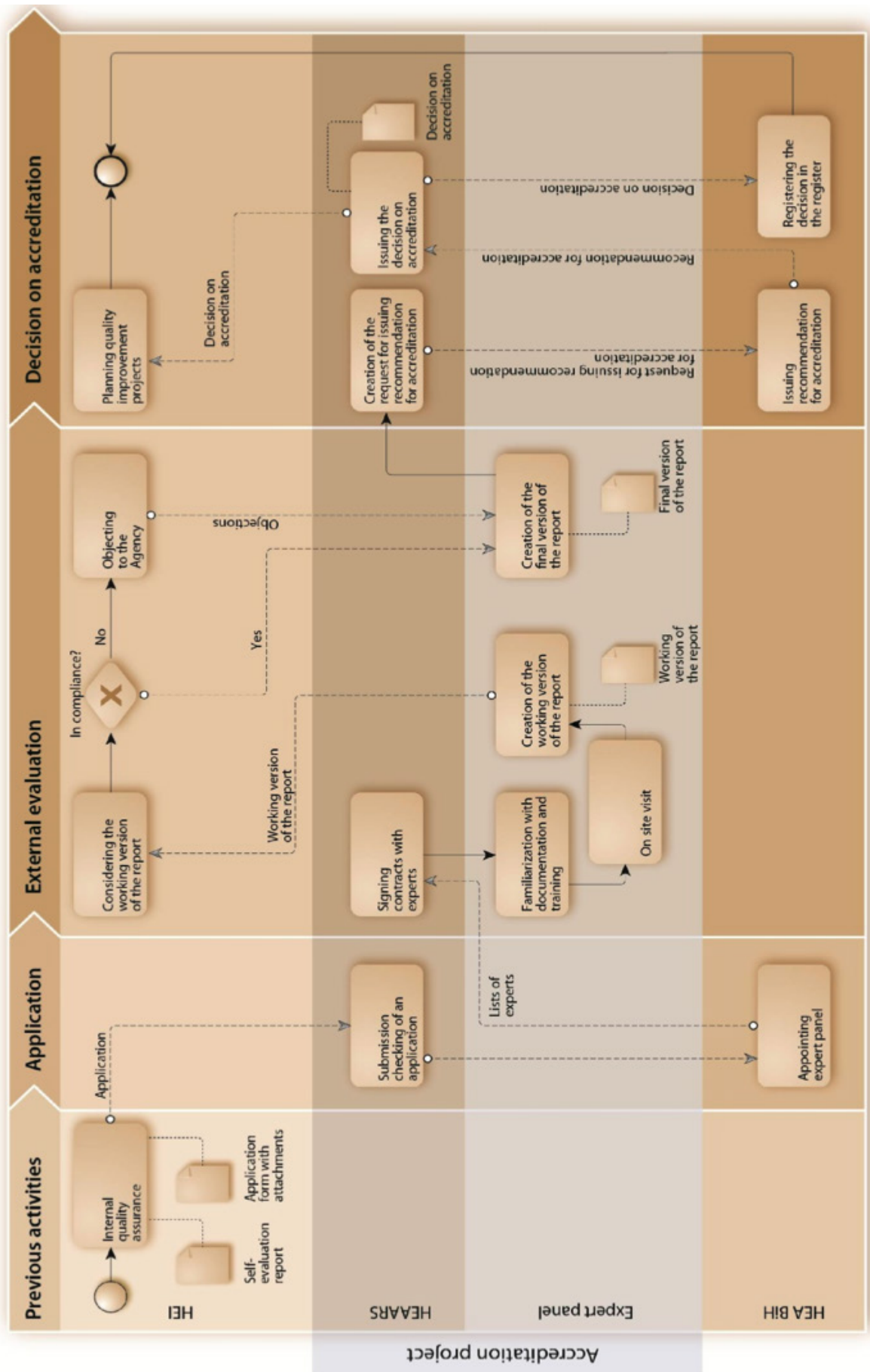
RS HEAA submits the Panel report to the higher education institution with the request to provide consent to the contents of the report and proposed improvement measures. After considering the report, higher education institution provides objections and suggestions, if any.

At the same time, RS HEAA informs all potential stakeholders on the possibility of having an insight in the contents of the report.

Based on the final report and taking into considerations objections and suggestions of higher education institution and stakeholders, RS HEAA and the higher education institutions agree on specific improvement tasks and projects and define deadlines for its realisation.

Agreed projects are noted in the Form for monitoring follow-up activities (*RS HEAA OB 06*) which is then signed by the RS HEAA director and authorized person on behalf of the higher education institution.

The process is described in details in the following *scheme 9*



6.2 Accreditation of study programs

Since there are many doubts and challenges with reference to the classical approach towards the accreditation of study programs, being it individual or cluster accreditation, Agency has come up with a model that shall overcome all issues and shall cut the cost of study programs' accreditation.

The procedure for accreditation of study programs starts with institutional accreditation, because every HEI is supposed to submit certain number of study programs (*depending on the size and type of institution*) for an external evaluation of HEI since the work of HEI is evaluated through the delivery of these study programs. After the completion of the institutional external evaluation and after the Agency issues the Decision on accreditation, during the duration of the accreditation period, HEIs are expected to submit certain number of study programs for review (*preferably those that have been externally evaluated, although not thoroughly*). Study programs are then subject to anonymous review by an independent professional reviewer (*significant academic experience*), expert in the scientific area of the study program being reviewed. Experts thoroughly evaluate the structure and contents of the study program and write the review report. Review reports are part of the input documentation for the re-accreditation process. During re-accreditation process, on-site visit, Panel of experts shall take into account review reports, evaluate whether recommendations for improvement have been fulfilled and take into account the study program evaluation results in their report. Study programs that have passed successfully shall appear in the Decision on accreditation (*re-accreditation*), stressing the status of being accredited alongside with the extended accreditation of the institution.

When it comes to procedures, the precondition for applying for study program accreditation is that study program has sufficient number of self-evaluations based on monitoring and measuring performance indicators in accordance with ESG and study programs accreditation criteria.

Review of the study program is done within the process of accreditation or re-accreditation of HEI as a distinctive instrument of quality assurance with aim of evaluating those areas of HEI's activity which cannot be efficiently and analytically assessed with other instruments. The review is therefore done as an antecedent phase of external evaluation within the accreditation.

The review is done by applying different methods with reference to analysis of the study program structure, comparative analysis with examples of good practice, evaluation of scope and aims of study program and especially evaluation of the curriculum and competences of teachers according to requirements of the criteria and standards, necessary for reaching quality of study program.

The goals of the review are:

- Standardization of study programs' evaluation processes
- Assurance of relevant analysis of scope of study programs and reference to work field requirements,
- Coherence of the accreditation and re-accreditation process,
- Standardization of the system of performance indicators measurement.

STEP 1 Application for review

Accredited HEI determines study programs for review and completes the application form for every study program and signs the statement of fulfilment of preconditions for applying for review.

The minimum number of study programs for HEIs is ten, from three different scientific fields for universities and three programs for colleges.

For the purpose of providing efficient study program accreditation, the Agency composes a plan for accreditation of study programs based on number of applied programs.

Agency Director appoints the coordinator of the process for every study program from Agency's employees or from external associates qualified for the coordination of external evaluation process.

The Agency scrutinizes and checks completeness of the application based on information given in application form.

STEP 2 Criteria for appointment and appointment of reviewers

Agency appoints the reviewers from the pool of experts of the quality assurance agencies with which there is established cooperation and from the scientific and higher education community. Some of the criteria for appointment are: experience in higher education area reviews, scientific and professional references etc.

Coordinator of the process analyzes and selects the possible reviewers guided by their scientific and educational fields, contacts them for assuring they are available and forwards the list of potential reviewers to the Accreditation Council for approval. During this process the coordinator assures that there is no conflict of interests of the potential reviewers.

After approval of the Accreditation Council, director signs the decision on appointment of the reviewers and contracts with the reviewers. There are two reviewers for each study program and each of them signs Conflict of interest statement thus confirming that there is no conflict of interest with reference to the higher education institution and study program that get evaluated and accredited.

The coordinator of the process organizes the first meeting, usually via SKYPE or other possible virtual communication, in order to explain the purpose and goals of the review of the study program, documentation necessary for the process, especially standards and criteria, scope of the requirements for the reviewer and reporting on the review.

The coordinator also provides introductory information about study program with emphasis on the results and expectations from the previous external evaluation (if it exists) and gives the overview of the all documentation delivered by the HEI.

Application form with all supporting documentation including the documentation from the HEI, standards and criteria, law regulations are delivered to the reviewer electronically.

Deadline for finishing the report is one month from the delivery of the application to the reviewer.

STEP 3 Reporting

The report on the review is delivered on the specific form designed for that purpose and contains the detailed analysis of study program and compliance with the standards and criteria.

The report on the review is based on all relevant documents and should:

- Deliver the opinion on fulfilment of respective criteria in accreditation frame in accordance with ESG,
- Deliver the recommendations for improvement of study program.

The report contains the introductory, expositive part and part with recommendations for improvement and assessment of compliance with standards and criteria.

The review is delivered to the HEI for comments and after the response from HEI the report is considered by the Accreditation Council in order to assure that all procedures are followed.

If the review of study program is positive, the report is being taken into consideration during the accreditation or re-accreditation of institution thus reducing the scope of work of panel of experts.

If the review of study program is negative, with reference to the considerable discrepancy with the standards and criteria, the scope and goals of the study programs, the teachers' competences, curriculum and international adjustment of study program, the Agency delivers the expectation letter to the HEI with recommendations for adjustment of the study programs with the review report. In this case, HEI could decide to withdraw that study program from the accreditation process in order to improve it or it can decide to apply the recommendation of the review thus improving the study program and making it ready for accreditation panel.

7. Agency's internal quality assurance

Internal quality assurance mechanisms are developed with the purpose of providing constant improvements in terms of work methodology thus keeping credibility within the Higher Education System of Republika Srpska.

Work methodology of the Agency comprises the system of business processes organized according to PDCA cycle structure (*Figure 10*), which ensures sustainable development and represents the base framework base framework for developing Quality management system of the Agency. Structure, processes and associated QMS documentation have been described in the Quality Manual – Q MANUAL, and hereinafter are described key processes and adequate QA mechanisms applied in their realisation.

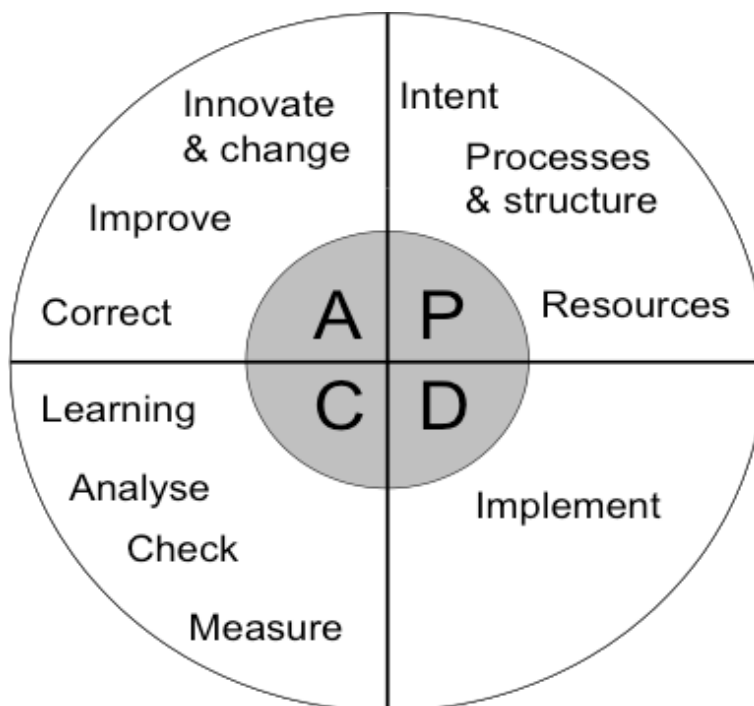


Figure 10

Scope of processes	QA Methodologies
P 1 - Intent	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing the vision, strategic objectives and strategies through the active communication with stakeholders including their elaboration in strategic documents; - Development of products and services whose realisation enables the realisation of set objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation forum discussions; - Public insight and discussion on the Agency documents; - SWOT analysis; - QFD technics in the development of products and services;
P 2 - Processes & structure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of processes and procedures for the realisation of products and services, their evaluation and change over the life cycle. At the moment of producing this SAR there are accreditation processes and processes for education and training developed /Rulebook on accreditation/. - Development of adequate organisational structure suitable for the organisation of processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developed methodology for propositions, professional discussion panels and adoptions of procedures and normative acts defined by the Statute and jurisdictions of management bodies (<i>Steering Board, Accreditation Council, Director</i>).
P 3 - Resources	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acquisition and development of resources required for the realisation of objectives and realisation of products and services. In addition to that, the focus is on the development of knowledge and competences of employees, members of Panels of experts and members of Accreditation forum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation at professional events, workshops and conferences, organised by the Agency as well as partnering institutions (<i>ENQA, CEENQA, EQA, RS Chamber of Commerce</i>). Agency employees have spent 36 (average 9 days per employee, administration staff excluded) days participating in various professional events in 2016. - Individual educational and skills improving programs.
D - Implement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Realisation of products and services according to the methodology regulated by valid procedures and documents (for accreditation). 	<p>Control processes planned in procedures and realised by authorised Agency bodies;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HEI legitimacy check, - Checking of an application, - Checking and selection of experts from the list of experts, - Check lists from experts, - Decisions of Accreditation Council in the control points of the process, <p>Control processes planned in HEA BiH procedures in accordance with jurisdictions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forming the list of experts, - Appointing Panel of experts, - Issuing recommendation for accreditation.
C 1 - Measure	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measuring performances related to the assessment of the realisation of set objectives; - Measuring effectiveness and efficacy of the accreditation process; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviews and evaluations (by means of survey) by HEIs; - Evaluations (by means of survey) by members of Panels of experts.

C 2 – Check	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Checking documentation that follows the realisation of the accreditation process; - Checking the realisation of follow-up activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Check done by the secretary to the Panels of experts; - Check done by the Accreditation Council; - Software tool for monitoring follow up plans and their realization thus enabling the insight in the status of those activities at each moment.
C 3 - Analyse	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of performances related to the assessment of the realisation of set objectives; - Analysis of effectiveness and efficacy of the accreditation process; - Analysis of financial performances. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual report on the realisation of objectives; - Annual financial report; - Annual operational and financial plan; - Consideration and adoption of reports and plans by the Agency Steering Board; - Decision of the Republika Srpska Government on the adoption of the Agency annual report and plan; - self-evaluation report.
C 4 – Learning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification on non-conformities and problems in the realisation of the process; - Identification of opportunities for improvement; - Knowledge generation & management techniques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problem solving methodology through conciliation with relevant authorities and bodies; - Knowledge maps for Panels of experts; - Knowledge cafe, ...
A 1 - Correct	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corrections of working procedures and processes based on the identified non-conformities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corrections of existing procedures and documents according to their passing procedure.
A 2 - Improve	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designing new or improved processes and working procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Passing new and withdrawing earlier versions of procedures and documents; - Using document management system – Software (<i>Alfresco</i>)
A 3 – Innovate & change	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Radical improvement of existing products & services; - Development of new products and services; - Development of new techniques and methodologies with software support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Future challenges and authorities of the Agency; - Participation and providing inputs in legislation amending processes; - Development plan;

Listed QA mechanisms are in various development and implementation phases with reference to the short time period of Agency existence and functioning. The most significant ones are those that ensure the effective implementation of the accreditation process:

- analyses of process evaluation questionnaires completed by panel members and representatives of higher education institutions,
- meetings with various stakeholders within the Higher Education System of Republika Srpska,
- SWOT analyses and
- preparation of the self-evaluation report.
- occasional meetings with HEA BiH on subject of harmonization of individual accreditation and joint procedures

One part of the RS HEAA internal quality assurance system is a software tool for monitoring follow up plans and their realization thus enabling the insight in the status of those activities at each moment. This is a very important segment for re-accreditation process since these reports shall be part of the re-accreditation documentation submitted to Panel of experts. Document management system software for managing Agency documentation (*Alfresco*) provides up to date documentation for the realization of the accreditation process including the records of earlier versions.

8. RS HEAA International activities

Since 2013 RS HEAA has been a full member of CEENQA (*Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*) and a full member of International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – INQAAHE.

RS HEAA devotes special attention to the area of international cooperation and affirmation of the RS HEAA in the international scene. In this area, special place amongst the strategic goals of the RS HEAA belongs to the RS HEAA membership in international associations and networks in the area of quality assurance in higher education.

Since 2013, RS HEAA is a co-organiser of the International Conference that is held yearly in Ukraine, in Polytechnic National University in Lvov. Conference covers topics of Quality Management in Education and Industry, thus strengthening cooperation between higher education and labour market. RS HEAA is especially devoted to development of this segment and this conference provides transfer of valuable experiences to the RS HEAA area of activities.

During three and a half years (*from 2012 to 2016*), RS HEAA has actively participated in the TEMPUS project “Benchmarking as a tool for improvement of higher education performance – BIHTEK).

Another TEMPUS project that RS HEAA has participated in is Embedding Quality Assurance in Doctoral Education-EQADE whose final year is 2014 and that was when the pilot accreditations of doctoral studies on public universities have been completed. The same was with ESA BiH (*European Union Standards for Accreditation of Study Programmes at BiH Universities*) project where pilot accreditation of study programs were conducted.

From 2015 RS HEAA is one of the partners in Erasmus+ Capacity building in Higher Education project, titled: Strengthening of Internationalisation in B&H Higher Education (*STINT*). The Agency has an active role in this project and is leader of Work package 1.

RS HEAA actively participates in the joint project of Council of Europe and European Union “Strategic Development of Higher Education and Qualification Standards in BiH” that has two basic goals:

- Analysis that provides the foundation for mid-term strategic planning after 2015,
- Improvement in the implementation of Qualification standards in BiH higher education.

For three years RS HEAA participated in twinning project “Strengthening Institutional Capacities for Quality Assurance”. There was a number of meetings and workshops held during 2014 within the first two project components and as a result of this project RS HEAA proposed the agreement on cooperation to Agency for development of higher education and quality assurance of BiH but it unfortunately it wasn’t realized.

At the end of December 2013 the agreement on cooperation in the area of quality assurance was signed with the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assessment of Serbia (CAQA Serbia) leaning on the Agreement on Special and Parallel Relations between Republika Srpska and Republic

of Serbia. One of the most significant aims is defined to contribute to the upkeep and improvement of the quality of higher education in Serbia and Republika Srpska as well as harmonisation with internationally recognised quality standards, to create a team of trained reviewers for the processes of accreditation and external evaluation and to overtake the driver role for the development of quality assurance measures in higher education in Western Balkans' countries through the stimulation of cooperation between the agencies in the region.

9. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 3)

3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

As described before, RS HEAA undertakes regular external evaluation of HEIs and study programs, as regulated by the Law on higher education of Republika Srpska. External evaluation and accreditation of HEIs is done every five years with the purpose of continuous quality improvement. Besides the external evaluation and accreditation, RS HEAA conducts trainings for HEIs, whether accredited or not, and briefings for panel members. Trainings for HEIs comprise general modules as well as modules on development of internal quality assurance systems and implementation of various instruments for quality assurance such as benchmarking, for example.

RS HEAA external evaluation procedures, criteria and standards are publicly available on the RS HEAA web site. As previously described the external evaluation comprises internal quality assurance and self-evaluation on the side of HEI and then external evaluation by an independent panel of experts having representatives of international community, local academic community, BiH labour market and a student.

RS HEAA performs institutional and accreditation of study programs. First round of accreditation was institutional one and applied criteria for accreditation were institutional, but institutions were obliged to apply the sufficient number of study programs (depending of the status and size of the institution) as an example of how standards and criteria demands are really implemented. One of the models which could be cost efficient to perform in future is system accreditation.

External evaluation means documentation review and an on-site visit, followed by writing a report. All the documentation, forms and templates, for the work of the panel are created in a way to follow the structure of the criteria and ESG. Report contains the course of the preparation, on-site visit, level of meeting criteria and standards and evaluation, strengths, weaknesses and recommendations including the recommendation for accreditation. The appeals procedure is defined in Law and Rulebook on accreditation.

Reports and decisions on accreditation are published on the RS HEAA web site. After the formal decision there are follow up procedures to be conducted and RS HEAA monitors its implementation since those reports shall be an input in re-accreditation.

Mission of Higher Education Accreditation Agency is continuous build-up and improvement of quality assurance in Republika Srpska higher education system through the implementation of European standards and best practices in the area of quality assurance.

Hence, the Agency had prepared the Strategy for 2016-2020 period devoted to accomplishment of the above mentioned mission. The Strategy was adopted by the Managing board and it includes action plan with precise projects, objectives, deadlines and indicators.

The selection of experts to the list and public call for applications is conducted by Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH. After closing the public call and conducting procedure for selection of experts, list is submitted to RS HEAA for adoption and use in accreditation process.

The challenge we face in this area is that the call for applications is not conducted every year (*sometimes more than three years pass between two calls*) and complete procedure lasts for too long (*the procedure after the last call lasted for more than a year and a half*). Of course this leads to the problem that for some scientific fields there are not enough experts on the list, the list is not up to date and the biggest issue is with student experts due to the fact that students finish the studies and no longer have the status of student.

Unfortunately, this issue remains unsolved due to various factors among which are the complicated procedure prescribed by the Framework Law on Higher Education on BiH level and some political obstructions. Bearing in mind that this part of the process is in jurisdiction of the BiH Agency, we do not have much of an influence in resolving this issues.

Process of appointing the panel of experts is obviously much more complicated because two bodies have jurisdictions in it, RS HEAA and BiH Agency. There had been processes where RS HEAA waited for several months for the response from the BiH Agency, or correspondence between two agencies lasted much longer than it should which overall slowed down processes. Due to this issues, two agencies have had numerous meetings but with not much of a success because of the different interpretation of jurisdictions and roles of two subjects.

The other issue has to do with consequences for HEIs' is the registration in accredited institutions register kept by the BiH Agency. In several cases more than a year passed between issuing the accreditation decision by RS HEAA and registration in the Register which is to be done by BiH Agency. In this case, there is again misunderstanding on the issue of when the accreditation process is actually finished; BiH Agency claims that the process finishes with listing the accredited HEI in the Register, while RS HEAA considers that the register is an administrative work and process finishes with issuing the decision on accreditation, especially when we remember that some institutions were listed in the register a few months after the formal decision on accreditation while others waited for year or even more. The issue here is keeping objective and equal approach to all HEIs which is something that RS HEAA strongly promotes.

The administrative and political misunderstandings and lack of cooperation between two agencies should not cause the consequences for the higher education institutions and their students.

3.2 Official status

Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognized as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

RS HEAA was founded and established in accordance with the Law on Public Service System (RS Official Gazette, number 68/07), Law on Republic of Srpska Government (RS Official Gazette, number 118/08) and Law on Higher Education (RS Official Gazette, number 73/10).

Article 27 of the Law on Higher Education states the following:

- (1) Accreditation procedure defined in Article 26, paragraph 3, item b) of this Law is conducted by the RS HEAA in cooperation with BiH Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance.
- (2) RS HEAA has a status of legal person with rights and liabilities established by this Law, standards and guidelines for quality assurance.
- (3) RS HEAA is independent and non-profit organization.

RS HEAA is an independent legal entity with rights and liabilities established by Law on Higher Education, RS HEAA Statute and standards and guidelines for quality assurance.

During the process of establishing the Agency there have been some dilemmas on the issue of the authority which is to appoint the director, deputy director and managing board of the RS HEAA, so at the beginning the Law stipulated that those appointments are done by National Assembly of Republika Srpska but it turned out that this solution wasn't operative and have had a lot of administrative and technical barriers. There were some other solutions proposed and one was that the RS Rectors' Conference could do this but at that time it didn't have necessary resources. Hence, the Law changed and RS HEAA management appointments are done by Government as most operative body in this area but this issue could be solved differently in future.

The proposal of the new Law on Higher Education of Republika Srpska has strengthen the status of the RS HEAA since accreditation is defined as an obligatory process for all HEIs with clear deadlines and by positioning the RS HEAA better in the RS budget.

3.3 Independence

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

RS HEAA was established by the Government of Republic of Srpska, in accordance with the Law on Higher Education as a public institution and is entirely independent legal entity with rights and liabilities established by Law on Higher Education, RS HEAA Statute and standards and guidelines for quality assurance what ensures organisational independence.

Since education is non-profit branch, quality assurance in the education is also non-profit and RS HEAA employees' wages are paid from the Republika Srpska budget. In the course of its activities, regulated by the Law on higher education of RS, all processes are free of any influence by third parties. Expert to expert panels are selected by RS HEAA body, Accreditation Council, based on the proposal comprised by RS HEAA staff. There may be no conflict of interest on any issue and it is thoroughly checked after what every panel member signs the statement on non-existence of conflict of interest. The independence of formal outcomes is ensured by RS HEAA Accreditation council which approves every panel of experts report in order to assure that the external evaluation process is conducted in accordance with ESG and BiH criteria for accreditation.

It can be said that organisational independence and independence of formal outcomes are fully obtained, but when it comes to operational independence, although it can't be observed as dependence, the above mentioned lack of cooperation with BiH Agency, which has some jurisdictions in the process, sometimes causes delays in the processes. There are some difficulties in interpretation and exercising of jurisdictions and roles. For example, the Framework Law on Higher Education at BiH level is considered the frame for passing entities' laws on higher education, so Republika Srpska has passed and has its own Law on Higher Education, whereas BiH Agency wishes to apply Framework Law directly on activities in quality assurance process.

Nevertheless, abiding RS Law on Higher Education, RS HEAA has established procedures for entire process starting with the HEIs application for accreditation to issuing decision on accreditation which ensures that every HEI has the same path to follow and same requirements to meet as well as the procedures for nomination and appointment of the external experts which are completely independent from the third party influence (the potential conflict of interest is thoroughly checked as well as the professional references of the experts and there have not been any case that the procedure of appointment wasn't followed completely).

3.4 Thematic analysis

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

RS HEAA issues periodical reports, apart from regular annual reports, in which we provide various analyses. Some of them are: common issues for all HEIs, problems related to the creation of study programs, various issues discovered during the processes of external evaluations, participation of labour market in creating study programs, number of students studying at accredited HEIs and comparison to previous years, number of students studying at accredited HEIs in comparison to the total number of students, etc. All these topics are analysed from the quality assurance point of view using the results of quality assurance activities of the RS HEAA as well as the other sources of information such as our stakeholders' experiences and practices. The analysis could be more profound and more detailed but one of the challenges in this field is the lack of human resources of RS HEAA as well as the lack of databases on different levels at different institutions.

Considering our limited budget, RS HEAA has proposed the idea of joint project for establishing knowledge bases in higher education at regional level. This project idea should be developed according to the project proposal criteria for some of the international programs such as ERASMUS + etc.

Results of these analyses are presented at various events that RS HEAA takes part in. Since its establishment in 2011, one may surely say that many changes have taken place and the academic community has recognized necessity of accreditation with the purpose of recognition of HEIs within the European higher education area.

Within a framework of our publishing activity RS HEAA is about to start the yearly publication with professional articles, analyses etc. with a future intention of starting specialized journal. This publication should be seen as an opportunity to professionals from the higher education field to publish their work and analyses as well as learn from each others' experience.

3.5 Resources

Standard:

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

Speaking of human resources RS HEAA has sufficient number of employees in terms of the size of higher education area of Republika Srpska. There are six staff members fully employed and three part-time employee.

The total annual budget is around 130.000,00 euros and the budget distribution is as follows:

Financial report

Number	Income in 2015	Planned	Realized
1.	Income from accreditation	34.614,46 EUR	21.816,31 EUR
2.	Income from the RS Budget	127.822,97 EUR	107.104,40 EUR
	TOTAL	162.437,43 EUR	128.920,71 EUR
Number	Expenditure		
1.	Gross wages and other employees' expenses	102.769,67 EUR	106.873,81 EUR
2.	Travelling and accommodation	5.112,92 EUR	3.674,65 EUR
3.	Gross Steering Board payments	10.225,84 EUR	7.632,57 EUR
4.	Gross expenditure on Piece work contracts	20.451,67 EUR	2.062,04 EUR
5.	Expenditure for utilities and energy	5.112,92 EUR	5.891,62 EUR
6.	Expenditure for expert services	5.112,92 EUR	2.802,90 EUR
7.	Purchase of equipment and other means	12.782,30 EUR	3.189,44 EUR
8.	Other expenditure	869,19 EUR	8.107,55 EUR
	TOTAL EXPENDITURES	162.437,43 EUR	140.234,58 EUR

Analyzing the financial resources of the Agency, it is obvious that they are very modest and, as such, are one of the biggest challenges RS HEAA is facing.

Due to limited financial means, Agency had to be very economical in its activities. Examples of such economical and efficient approach are: multitasking of the employees (RS HEAA has no drivers, secretaries, translators etc.), office premises are free of charge, etc. For RS HEAA activities such as forum meetings, round tables, trainings etc. we use facilities of the Academy of Science and Arts of Republika Srpska as well as the Government of Republika Srpska free of charge.

Many of our activities, usually subject of outsourcing in other organizations, were completed by means of our own workforce and therefore free of charge such as creating Development Strategy. At the same time, many of the representatives of the academic community with significant experience in quality assurance participated in many of our projects, seminars and trainings pro bono.

One of the activities that have been a priority since RS HEAA was established is building competences of the employees because the strategic aim of the Agency is to develop through knowledge management and smart human resource strategies.

Bearing in mind our obligation of having the external review, in 2016 we were supported by the RS Ministry of Finance that ensured the funds for this activity, besides the regular budget of the Agency.

The most important forthcoming improvement for RS HEAA in next two years period is that the new proposal of RS Law on Higher Education has provisions stating that, besides employees' wages, the following expenses shall also be financed from the RS budget: utilities, equipment and some other costs, so it is expected that the RS HEAA budget should be higher after new Law comes into force. The new Law is estimated to be passed by the RS National assembly at its session in the late January 2017.

RS HEAA has its premises and equipment required for its daily work as well as internal information system with internal quality assurance documentation.

In accordance with the RS HEAA Statute there are following bodies established:

- Managing Board, comprised of representatives of academic community and students organization. Managing board members are elected by public invitation for applications and the final decision on elected Managing Board members is made by Republic of Srpska Government. Managing Board has jurisdiction over administrative and financial functioning of the RS HEAA.
- RS HEAA Director (member of academic community) is elected in the process of public invitation for applications and the final decision on election is made by the Republic of Srpska Government.
- RS HEAA is organized in three departments:
 - Higher education accreditation department
 - Quality assurance and international cooperation department
 - General affairs department

Accreditation Council as expert body of the Agency was established in 2015 with the jurisdiction of: recommendation of the experts in panels, expert supervision of the panels work, ensure that decision on accreditation is coherent with standards and criteria for accreditation, consideration of the reports and in case of anticoncidence with the standards returns the report to the panel. One of the important tasks of the Council is to give a support in functioning of the internal quality assurance system of the Agency such as recommending internal quality assurance documents to the Managing board.

Accreditation council is composed of the two representatives of the Council for development of higher education and quality assurance of Republika Srpska, one of Students Union, one of Accreditation Forum, one of Ministry of education and culture and three of expert staff of the Agency.

In terms of discussing expert issues, external evaluation and accreditation process, RS HEAA internal acts, directions of strategic development and other issues relevant for quality of higher education there is Accreditation Forum established. Accreditation Forum is informal body comprised of experts working in the area of quality assurance, other stakeholders (*academic community, representatives of labour market and student organization*). Membership in the Accreditation Forum is voluntary.

Agency is dedicated to the cooperation with students' population what is evident through students' participation in the work of external evaluation panels, Accreditation council, Forum and consultations in the process of passing Agency documents.

3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Standard:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

In terms of RS HEAA activities, as defined in RS HEAA documents, each step is defined so it provides full effectiveness and accountability towards stakeholders. Elements of the RS HEAA internal quality assurance system refer to various processes. One of the starting processes is familiarization of HEIs with all RS HEAA activities as well as assistance and guidance throughout the external evaluation and accreditation process. Each step has a time frame within which it should be totally completed and it is RS HEAA obligation to inform the HEI in process on the course of realization. RS HEAA Rulebook on accreditation is publicly available on RS HEAA website. This document contains pre-conditions for accessing the accreditation process, something that each HEI needs to provide prior to submitting the application.

When it comes to professional conduct RS HEAA staff acting as coordinators in the accreditation process, they have either vast experience in higher education or background of trained evaluators for other groups of standards including experience in higher education gained through trainings and work in RS HEAA, thus ensuring that the processes are coordinated and conducted in a professional manner. Panel coordinators brief Panel members, prior to each external evaluation process, on HEI documentation, specifics of the higher education system (especially significant for international Panel member), steps that preceded submission of documentation etc., and remain a constant point of contact between them and HEI throughout the process, including the follow up.

Analyses of feedback from HEIs and panel members provides basis for projects for improvement of policies and procedures that get implemented in the shortest possible time frame. This is proven in a number of amendments of the Rulebook on accreditation thus improving certain steps in the process.

RS HEAA has a strong respect for jurisdictions of various participants in the accreditation process, but also strongly preserves its own jurisdiction in the same process. All activities falling under external evaluation and accreditation process are either conducted or monitored by RS HEAA since we are responsible for the overall process and having signed the contract on accreditation with the HEI we overtake that responsibility and are held accountable for the process.

This involves the follow up activities and trainings that follow the decision on accreditation. One part of the RS HEAA internal quality assurance system is a software tool for monitoring follow up plans and their realization thus enabling the insight in the status of those activities at each moment. This is a very important segment for re-accreditation process since these reports shall be part of the re-accreditation documentation submitted to Panel of experts.

These tools and elements of the RS HEAA internal quality assurance system have been introduced and formalized so they are reflected in the RS HEAA activities. It has been well recognized and commended by all stakeholders.

RS HEAA procedures ensure equal opportunities to all, be it HEIs, experts, students, community in total, etc. in terms of getting information on the status of certain HEI in process, public availability of reports and decisions, communication channels, etc.

Despite all efforts we put in briefing and training the panel members (every panel has obligatory briefings before on-site visit), trainings of the experts remain one of the most important challenges for the future due to the fact that some of the experts had difficulties during the assessment process, counting on their previous experience more than an assessment procedure. After noticing this issue during the first processes of accreditation, RS HEAA proposed establishing the Accreditation Council as an expert body with the jurisdiction to additionally assure that all the assessment and overall processes are in accordance with the ESG, RS HEAA procedures and criteria.

3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies

Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

In order to assure that Agencies procedures and processes are in accordance with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area at beginning of 2016 RS HEAA had sent an official request for external review provided by ENQA.

Taking into account that RS HEAA was established in 2011 and that new ESG was adopted in 2015, there was a period of transition for both, agencies and ENQA, this is the first external review of the RS HEAA.

10. Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 2)

2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

Besides the legitimacy check that takes place immediately after HEI applies for accreditation and comprises check of legal preconditions for the start of work and delivery of study programs with the MPiK and Republika Srpska Inspectorate for Education, one of the preconditions for HEIs to approach the external quality assurance process is to have established the internal quality assurance system and to do self-evaluations and produce self-evaluation reports. This also means that the internal quality system functions in certain way and that the HEI can prove to the panel that the internal system has been internally evaluated. This is prescribed in the Instructions for accessing the accreditation process. HEIs in Republika Srpska have their own internal quality systems that comprise multiple documents, such as internal quality assurance procedures. Those procedures prescribe and recognize instruments that are used for collection of data and analyses of those data serve as input in the quality improvement projects or serve as a tool for controlling internal quality assurance system. All this is taken into account while conducting external quality assurance per requirements of the BiH criteria and ESG.

The application forms for both institutions and study programs are based on BiH criteria and ESG and every question in forms are related at least to one of the criteria and standards. The important thing is that BH criteria are also harmonized with ESG.

In first years of institutional accreditation (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015) the application form was based on ESG 2005.

The application forms for both institutions and study programs are based on BiH criteria and ESG and every question in forms are related at least to one of the criteria and standards. The important thing is that BH criteria are also harmonized with ESG.

In first years of institutional accreditation (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015) the application form was based on ESG 2005.

ESG 1.1

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

- *Institutional accreditation*

This standard is a first question for institutional accreditation in application form and institution is required to present the policy and strategic documents with aims, objectives as well as concrete plans, programs and projects for implementing strategic goals and policy. It is expected to describe the system and list the documents (Rule Book, Procedure, ...) that regulate the processes of planning and monitoring the realization of plans and aims as well as describing the structure, processes, procedures and resources of the HEI Quality Assurance System, the responsibilities of the organizational units and responsible persons in quality assurance. Provide the document(s) describing the establishing, responsibilities and the authority of the formal HEI quality assurance body(ies) and describing the role of students in quality assurance and HEI management, the process of internal and external monitoring and revision of the Quality Assurance System (relevant internal audit reports or reports from the previously conducted external audits, as well as to earlier improvement).

- *Study programs accreditation*

The application form for study programs is also based on ESG and follows its structure, so the first question is asking for quality assurance policy to be made public, to have a proof of stakeholders' involvement in developing policy, to be implemented in practice and how is this achieved. The special requirement for study programs is that policy reflects the relation between research and learning and teaching.

ESG 1.2

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

- *Institutional accreditation*

From the HEI is expected to describe the process of study programs development, its syllabus, qualifications, its relations with policies, aims and HEI strategies and to provide the documents that regulate the process of study program development. They also should describe the process of adopting, monitoring and periodical review of study programs and qualifications, providing hyperlinks to documents that regulate it and description and documents should match the referenced requirements. To assure that this standard requirement, but also some other standards regarding students and teaching and learning, are met, the Agency demanded that HEI has to provide some study programs as an example for panel of experts to be able to see that policies, strategies and procedures are really implemented at study program level.

- *Study programs accreditation*

In the application form the study program should provide documents describing the procedure for establishing and developing study programs, its content, qualification and learning outcomes and their relation with policies, strategies and European Qualification Framework EQF with special requirements for stakeholders and students involvement in these processes as well as the comparability of the program with similar programs in Europe and region. The generic and specific competences should be described as well as learning outcomes and criteria for assessment of achieving learning outcomes. The curriculum development procedure should be described with details about the specific curriculum. The ECTS procedure should be provided, final paper procedures, obtained competences of students etc.

ESG 1.3

Institutions should ensure that the programs are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

- *Institutional accreditation*

During the process of accreditation HEIs' are obligated to provide the information on procedures regulating the process of assessing students, present conducted pass rate analyses and overtaken activities on improving the students' achievement. HEIs also describe the appealing procedures and the model of informing students on assessment procedure and assessment methods as well as assessment criteria etc.

- *Study programs accreditation*

The study program accreditation implies that there has to be an explanation of how students are involved in the creating of the teaching process, how are classes organized, does that organization takes into account student's differences, to describe teaching and learning process, assessment of students etc.

ESG 1.4

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

- *Institutional accreditation*

The institution is supposed to provide information on procedures and processes of admission, progression, recognition and certification of the students as well as data analysis on this subjects.

HEI is also obliged to provide the information on recognition of previous qualifications and study periods.

- *Study programs accreditation*

Study program should provide information on recognition of qualification obtained at other institutions, promotion of students' mobility and procedures on subject of mobility, monitoring and analysis of students' advancement, procedures for enrolment of students, the proceedings of student's practice etc.

ESG 1.5

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

- *Institutional accreditation*

The HEI's is obliged to provide information on the documents that regulate the policy of teaching staff improvement as well as data on realized programs. One of the requirements is to provide the document that regulates the procedure of publishing books and course books as well as the document presenting the teaching staff publications. Besides that, HEI should have the procedure for appointment and career advancement of teaching staff and to prove all above mentioned procedures are implemented.

- *Study programs accreditation*

Required information about this standard is concerned the teaching staff policy, criteria and procedures for employment and advancement, teachers competences, scientific papers, evaluation of staff work, monitoring of the data regarding teaching staff, plan of staff development etc.

ESG 1.6

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

- *Institutional accreditation*

It is expected that HEI should provide documents, records and analysis of physical resources (spatial, IT, laboratories etc.) specified by study programmes. Provide an overview of investments in the development of these resources. Describe the capacity of library resources and the way of utilization for every study programme offered.

- *Study programs accreditation*

The study program should provide evidence and analysis of the resources for learning and support for different students (spatial, informatics, laboratories etc) for organizing study program. It is obligated to provide overview of the investment for resource development and evidence how students are informed about their possibilities in this area as well as what are the ways for non-teaching staff to develop their competences.

ESG 1.7

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

- *Institutional accreditation*

The HEI is supposed to describe the structure and information system resources (hardware, software, data analysis methods, knowledge database, etc.) as well as the results of the numerous analyses (structure of student population, students' achievement, alumni employment rate, students' satisfaction with study programmes and the way of studying, quality of teaching staff etc.). The panel also assess data and analysis on own key performance indicators and analyses of comparisons between their indicators and those of other HEIs from RS-BiH or from the European higher education area, as well as potentially started projects for improving their own performances.

- *Study programs accreditation*

The study program should describe structure and resources of the information systems (hardware, software, data bases etc.) and to show how are these analysis used to managing study program and other activities. They should also provide the same type of analysis as above mentioned for HEI's as well as the key performance indicators.

ESG 1.8

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

- *Institutional accreditation*

The HEI should describe the way of publishing information on programmes and titles provided by the HEI (website, newsletters, media etc.) but also the communication strategies and public communication policies as well as the way of realizing impartiality, objectivity and availability of information. The latest version of future students' guide should be available to panel of experts.

- *Study programs accreditation*

The study program is supposed to describe the way they make important information public available (website, brochures, media, etc.), are these information available in foreign languages, is there communication strategies and policies in place and to provide evidence of analysis of the objectivity and accessibility of the information and data. The latest version of future students' guide is also expected.

ESG 1.9

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

- *Institutional accreditation*

The HEIs should provide information on monitoring, review and revision of study programs in order to achieve expected goals and improving quality of the performance. The HEI is supposed to involve all the stakeholders into this process especially students and also to analyse collected data and use it for continuous improvement.

- *Study programs accreditation*

Study program is expected to describe the way of periodic monitoring, review and revision of study programs and its results with all stakeholders included. The panel of experts should be ascertain that study programs is following the demands of the work market, that surveys are

done on the subject of students satisfaction, needs and expectations. The evidence should be provide on improvement realized so far based on the recommendations from the previous reviews, evaluations etc.

ESG 1.10

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

- **Institutional accreditation**

The institutional accreditation is soon coming to its first cycle of re-accreditation therefore the Agency is working actively with accredited HEIs on their follow-up activities realization which are going to be the input data for upcoming re-accreditation process.

The HEIs are obliged to provide the evidence on realized recommendations from previous external evaluation as well as overall progress in improvement of the internal quality assurance system.

- **Study programs accreditation**

The study program should provide information on previous external evaluation if any (it should be kept in mind that we are at the beginning of the study program accreditation so most of the programs are going under external evaluation for the first time). The study program should describe the improvements of internal quality assurance system and overall activities at study program level based on the previous external evaluations.

RSHEAA uses all of the ESG standards for both activities, institutional and study program accreditation.

2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

RS HEAA has developed Rulebook on procedures for external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programs that have undergone public discussion and have been subsequently adopted. List of experts used are created in cooperation with Agency for development of higher education and quality assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina and it comprises four categories of experts: international, local academic community, labour market and students.

All processes that RS HEAA has developed have a specific purpose of improving the overall higher education in the country. Besides the external evaluation, RS HEAA uses also other instruments when it comes to external quality assurance of HEIs, such as: benchmarking and quality audits. There are different forms of benchmarking used by HEIs and results of those processes are one of inputs in the external evaluation. Quality improvement audit is an instrument used by RS HEAA that follows realization of follow-up plans and is also used to review the self-evaluation report that HEIs compose after getting a letter of expectation. It is evident that quality assurance mechanisms and instruments are designed and fit different purposes.

RS HEAA had involved all stakeholders (academic community, management of higher education institutions, representatives of the economy and practice field, Chamber of Commerce, students and all relevant institutions in higher education field) into the processes of establishing methodologies, developing procedures and documentation through direct contacts, meetings, accreditation forums, round tables, sessions of Rectors conference, sessions of Council for development, meetings with students representatives as well through the public insight into documents drafts.

- *Institutional accreditation*

At the beginning of the accreditation process in 2011, RSHEAA had discussed with our stakeholders about their expectations and possibilities but also have analyzed experiences of the other countries, especially from former Yugoslavia because of the similarities of the higher education systems and resources. Therefore, we tried to make the process as simple as possible respecting laws and complexity of the BiH system. Since this process was new in our system, RS HEAA provided all the necessary support for the institutions in order to help them to prepare for the first accreditation.

After consulting the stakeholders and analyzing the results, RS HEAA changed and accommodated procedures in order to improve the process.

In next period, we expect that focus should be at the development of minimal standards emphasizing the appreciable indicators. Therefore the join team of RS HEAA and BiH Agency is currently working on this matter.

- *Study programs accreditation*

As mentioned before, study program accreditation was discussed within the academic community for a few years and since the overall conclusion was that accrediting programs individually could not be feasible for most of the institutions, the RS HEAA offered a model of joining the institutional and program accreditation while the main difference when it comes to study program accreditation will be the obligatory review of study programs before accreditation process. At the same time, it will be possible to accredit a single study program by same procedure as for institutions. Here we will distress the activities which are different by comparison with institutional accreditation.

The important fact is that results of the review will not be used directly for issuing the accreditation decision but will be used as an input for the panel of experts in process of accreditation or re-accreditation of the institution. The on-site visit will be an opportunity for the panel of experts to ensure that review results matches the real life at the HEI which will affect the recommendation for accreditation of both HEI and study program.

2.3 Implementing processes

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit; -- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

Processes of external quality assurance are based on HEIs' internal quality assurance systems. Since the establishing and promoting quality culture is one of the most important objectives of the RS HEAA, it provides training and consulting to HEIs on the development of internal quality assurance systems.

- *Institutional accreditation*

Every higher education institution is obliged to conduct the procedure of self-evaluation and quality assessment of its study programs, teaching process and working conditions yearly, maximum in three year intervals. Higher education institution, i.e. its organizational unit,

conducts the mentioned process in accordance with higher education institutions' quality assurance procedures and self-evaluation criteria. Self-evaluation and quality assessment report is published so it is available to the academic staff and students at the higher education institution. As mentioned in standard 2.1, self-assessment is one of the preconditions for applying for accreditation.

RS HEAA provides two rounds of briefings for selected panels. First briefing takes place in the RS HEAA premises after the experts had reasonable time period to go through the HEI documentation. Briefing has the purpose of familiarizing experts with RS HEAA procedure for accreditation, make use of individual checklists, and make an on-site plan and program, as well as signing contracts of engagement and statements on conflict of interest.

Second briefing is held a day before the on-site visit. On that briefing experts have the opportunity to agree on the details referring to the check lists, rounds of questioning etc. In between, panel members have the opportunity to communicate between themselves and with HEI through the secretary of the Panel, thus ensuring that all aspects of the future on-site visit are covered. There is also a possibility for experts to seek additional documentation through the Panel secretary, should they conclude that something is missing.

A few days before the on-site visit, panel secretary asks the HEI contact person to deliver the list of interviewees in accordance with on-site visit plan and program. During the on-site visit the panel secretary takes minutes and it is used for making a preliminary report and the subsequent report. After the on-site visit panel members comprise a preliminary report which is read to the representatives of HEI management without the possibility to comment on findings except correcting some facts.

Panel has a sufficient period of time to prepare the report on defined form, the report is send to HEI for final comments and then to Accreditation Council for check of coherence with standards and criteria. The report is than available for public insight for 15 days and open for public comments and discussion. After that, if there are no any comments and questions from public discussion, the report is permanently available at RS HEAA web site.

In the higher education system of Republika Srpska there were no accredited HEIs and since the first round of accreditation is now finished, having various outcomes, one may surely say that HEIs have now become part of quality assurance cycle. This means that after the issued decision on the accreditation for a period of five years, HEIs have the obligation to produce a follow-up plan a year and a half after the decision and subsequently the report on its realization, based on the recommendations from the report on external evaluation. All HEIs are part of the training program in the meantime and a year before the expiration of decision on accreditation, HEIs are obliged to start the re-accreditation process. Hereby, five year period is covered with activities on quality improvement.

Recommendations are listed in the panel report and in case of positive decision on accreditation, the panel recommendations serve as a tool for quality improvement.

HEIs are supposed to submit the follow-up plan and subsequently create report on the fulfilment of recommendations. In the meantime RS HEAA conducts trainings of HEIs' staff and training module are developed on topics that have been noticed to be the greatest issues for accredited HEIs. RS HEAA also organizes meetings and workshops within the Accreditation forum sessions in order to keep HEIs in the quality assurance loop.

Should a specific HEI get a letter of expectation with 1 year deadline to correct established deficiencies and improve assessment marks, it is their obligation to also produce plan of activities for improvement and subsequently a self-evaluation report reflecting actions conducted on correcting those specific deficiencies. Then a team comprised of panel chairman

and two RS HEAA staff conducts the audit. Prior to audit, panel members electronically agree whether the self-evaluation report reflects the improved state or not. If the consent is reached between the panel members, RS HEAA organizes the audit, as mentioned before.

Very useful tool in this process is software which allows the Agency to continuously monitor the fulfilment of the follow-up activities plan for each institution.

- *Study programs accreditation*

The process is at the very beginning, RS HEAA had prepared the study program accreditation plan based at the information from the HEI's. Several meetings were held at the universities in order to prepare for this process and study programs are now preparing for the application.

The process of review starts with application as well and implies fulfilled preconditions such as self-evaluation of the program, licence etc. The coordinator of the review process is appointed and is responsible for organising the entire process as well as for contact with study program and all necessary support. The reviewers are appointed by the similar procedure as panel members but beside of the list of experts, the reviewers may be appointed from the pool of experts of other QA agency (with the agreement in place between the agencies). The briefing is provided for reviewers in similar manner as for the experts from the panel.

The report on review is expected to deliver the opinion on fulfilment of respective criteria and the recommendations for the improvement of study program.

As mentioned before, the report on review is an input for the panel of experts appointed for the HEI.

2.4 Peer-review experts

Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

- *Institutional accreditation*

Selection of experts or panels is done using various criteria. First and foremost is the composition of the panel so the panel compulsory involves experts from four categories: international academic community, national academic community, labour market and students. Where possible, besides the scientific area they are engaged in, experts are selected to have references in quality assurance as well, whether it is quality assurance in higher education or industry. The main reason for this is understanding the quality assurance systems and procedures.

Forming and work of panel of experts is regulated by Rulebook on accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs and Instruction on checking conflict of interest.

The selection of experts to the list and public call for applications is conducted by Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH. After closing the public call and conducting procedure for selection of experts, list is submitted to RS HEAA for adoption and use in accreditation process.

After RS HEAA receives the application for accreditation, the Panel of experts is getting selected. The proposal of the preliminary list of experts to the Panel is done by coordinator of specific accreditation process who is appointed by the RS HEAA director. During the selection of experts' process, coordinator analyses lists of experts on the basis of scientific areas that refer to study programs contained in application. Potential experts are then being contacted by the coordinator and the preliminary list of panel members is being created. After completing the final proposal the coordinator submits the list to the Accreditation Council

which makes the final selection and proposes to the director the exact names and number of experts in the panel. Each panel member signs the Conflict of interest statement thus confirming that there is no conflict of interest with reference to the higher education institution and study program that get evaluated and accredited. Panel of experts is comprised of national experts (representatives of academic community in BiH and representatives of labour market), international experts and students. List of experts is organized in four groups: representatives of national academic community, representatives of labour market, international experts and students.

Experts from the list have had one set of training provided by Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH at the beginning of the forming list, but keeping in mind that between been chosen to list and been appointed to the panel can pass even several years and that there is no training after every round of application for list of experts, RS HEAA provided training for each panel of experts before on-site visit.

RS HEAA provides two rounds of briefings for selected panels. First briefing takes place in the RS HEAA premises after the experts had reasonable time period to go through the HEI documentation. Briefing has the purpose of familiarizing experts with RS HEAA procedure for accreditation, make use of individual checklists, and make an on-site plan and program, as well as signing contracts of engagement and statements on conflict of interest.

Second briefing is held a day before the on-site visit. On that briefing experts have the opportunity to agree on the details referring to the check lists, rounds of questioning etc. Keeping in mind that the panel of experts is responsible for accreditation of both, institution and study programs (with previous reviews of study programs provided), all the above mentioned for HEIs is also applicable for the study programs accreditation.

- *Study programs accreditation*

Work and appointment of reviewers for study program review is regulated by Instruction on study program review. Agency appoints the reviewers from the list of experts for accreditation, but keeping in mind that some scientific areas are not covered with sufficient number of experts, the intention is to sometimes use pool of experts of the quality assurance agencies with whom there is established cooperation and/or from the scientific and higher education community (mainly from EHEA). Some of the criteria for appointment are experience in the reviewing in the higher education field, scientific and professional references etc.

Coordinator of the process analyzes the possible reviewers guided by their scientific and educational fields, contacts them for assuring they are available and forwards the list of potential reviewers to the Accreditation Council for approval.

After approval of the Accreditation Council, director signs the decision on appointment of the reviewers and contracts with the reviewers. There are two reviewers for each study program and conflict of interest is checked same way as for the panel members.

2.5 Criteria for outcomes

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

RS HEAA COMPLIANCE

- *Institutional accreditation*

Criteria for decisions are contained in the Rulebook on accreditation. As mentioned in previous standard compliance, every panel has a two briefing days and significant time during the both

briefing days is devoted to criteria for decisions and assessment methodology. Criteria for decisions is based on estimated level of processes' maturity distributed as per Deming cycle (0-5). Assessment marks are then transferred to the levels and based on those levels the decision is made.

- 0 – no proof or there are some partly present, unreliable proof of requirement fulfilment (completely new to the organisation).
 - 1 – The requirement is planned – exists on paper only – P (plan)
 - 2 – The requirement is planned and partly conducted – on paper and applied – D (do)
 - 3 – The requirement is planned, conducted and the effects are followed – C (check)
 - 4 – The requirement is planned, conducted, the effects are followed and compared with others – A (act)
 - 5 – The requirement is planned, conducted, the effects are followed and there are permanent adjustments and improvements performed based on the comparison with the best ones.
- Level of criteria fulfilment is established as per the following 4 levels:

I	HEI does not fulfil the requirement	0
II	HEI partly fulfils the requirement	1
III	HEI predominantly fulfils the requirement	2 and 3
IV	HEI completely fulfils the requirement	4 and 5

Panel states their opinion on accreditation based on fulfilment of the following criteria:

- Accreditation for 5 years: all criteria on levels III and IV.
- Letter of expectation: more than a half of criteria on levels IV or III and all others on level II.
- No grounds for accreditation: at least one criteria on level I or more than half of the criteria on level II.

When it comes to criteria for decision, RS HEAA have had some minor complaints about the assessment methodology but those complaints didn't affect final outcome anyway.

- *Study programs accreditation*

As mentioned before, the review of study program will not affect the accreditation decision directly but it will be the part of the entire process of accreditation of HEI and its study programs. Therefore, above mentioned criteria for outcomes are applicable for study programs as well. The review is supposed to deliver the opinion on fulfilment of respective criteria and the recommendations for the improvement of study program. Every standard and criteria has the set of measurable indicators ensuring that all the study programs have the same procedure of review outcomes.

2.6 Reporting

Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

- *Institutional accreditation*

At the beginning of external evaluation processes, when developing documentation and forms, RS HEAA has developed a form of the report. Report is intended for all stakeholders in the higher education system of Republika Srpska. Full reports are published on the RS HEAA web site. The structure of the report is such that readers can get the general information on HEI, information on the course of the process, and lastly the essence of the report which is criteria and the level of fulfilment, containing strengths, weaknesses and recommendations. Average length of the report is 22 pages. The structure of the report follows the BiH criteria on accreditation and the panel recommendation is at the end of the report which is originally signed by all panel members. Decisions on accreditation of institutions are also published together with report. RS HEAA web site contains all information accredited higher education institutions and it is very easily readable and comprehensive for all stakeholders and interested parties. Besides the HEI name, web site, report and the decision on accreditation, the information contains the date of the re-accreditation.

- *Study programs accreditation*

The accreditation of study programs is supposed to be part of the overall report described in the institutional accreditation so all above mentioned refers to study programs as well.

2.7 Complaints and appeals

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

- *Institutional accreditation*

There are various types of appeals in the process. The expert panel composes a report on the prescribed form and it is forwarded to the HEI for their perusal. Should the HEI establish that there were some material omissions in the work of the expert panel that may influence the opinion on accreditation, HEI informs the RS HEAA on it within 15 days. RS HEAA then familiarizes the panel with HEI objections and the panel drafts the final version of the report, including the opinion and recommendation on accreditation. HEI is supposed to provide consent in writing which is part of the whole HEI documentation. RS HEAA thus ensures there shall be no legal appeals taken against the panel decision. Accreditation Council then considers the report in order to approve that the report is fully coherent with the standards and criteria demands. At the same time various stakeholders have 15 days to have an insight and object on the published report. After that deadline, RS HEAA issues the decision on accreditation.

As a final legal remedy, RS Law on Higher education (Article 31) states that the decision on accreditation is final and there is no appeal allowed against the decision, but there may be an administrative procedure initiated before competent court within 30 days from the date of the decision receipt.

- *Study programs accreditation*

As already stressed, the study programs are supposed to be part of the joint process of accreditation so everything stated for the HEIs refers to study programs as well.

11. Information and opinions of the stakeholders

Most of the RS HEAA stakeholders were mentioned in the previous chapters and they are:

Higher Education Institutions

As already mentioned at chapter Short overview of the national higher education system, pursuant to the Law on Higher Education, higher education institutions in Republika Srpska are universities and colleges.

There are twenty two higher education institutions enlisted in the Register of higher education institutions of Republika Srpska-nine universities and 13 colleges, out of which two universities and two colleges are public whereas the other higher education institutions are private. Twelve institutions are accredited and one is in the process of accreditation but majority of the students (91%) are at accredited institutions.

Council for development of higher education and quality assurance of Republika Srpska

Council for the development of higher education and quality assurance of Republika Srpska has been established at the beginning of 2008. Council is comprised of 11 university professors from universities in Republika Srpska. Tasks and the role of the Council are defined by the Law on higher education of Republika Srpska.

Rectors' Conference of Republika Srpska

Rector's Conference of Republika Srpska sets and represents joint interests of universities in Republika Srpska and realizes cooperation with institutions in the area of higher education in Republika Srpska, BiH, Europe and the world.

Conference of Colleges

Conference of colleges sets and represents joint interests of colleges in Republika Srpska and realizes cooperation with institutions in the area of higher education in Republika Srpska, BiH, Europe and the world.

Commission for information and recognition of qualifications in higher education

Minister of education and culture appoints members to the Commission for information and recognitions of qualifications. Members are teaching staff with international experience from higher education institutions.

Commission for information is competent for: information and recognition of qualifications in higher education area, for coordination of inter-entity and international exchange of academic staff, students and programs in the area of higher education etc.

Students' Union of Republika Srpska

Students' Union of Republika Srpska is the roof students' organization of Republika Srpska that synchronises the work of students' representation bodies in higher education institutions in Republika Srpska in terms of joint work programs, discussion on issues that are of common students' interest and manages activities in international cooperation.

International associations, networks and registers in higher education (*ENQA, EQAR, CEENQA, INQAAHE, ECA, EURASHE, EUA etc*)

ENQA, EQAR, CEENQA, INQAAHE, ECA, EURASHE, EUA are international associations, networks, registers or organizations in field of higher education among which are some especially devoted to concept of quality assurance in higher education.

Experts who took part in panels of experts in last five years from different fields such as foreign and domestic academic community, economy and practice field and students.

12. SWOT analysis

Acronym SWOT originates from English words: S – Strengths, W – Weaknesses, O – Opportunities and T – Threats and represents integral analytical framework for the analysis of external influence and internal state of business and social system considered, with the final goal of identifying strategic directions of actions towards the better state of the system. It is defined as the strategic instrument through which the strengths and weaknesses of the system are dynamically faced with opportunities and threats of the environment with the purpose of identifying opportunities and risks for the system sustainability.

Usefulness of SWOT analysis is reflected in the identification of interdependency of its specific internal and external parameters with the purpose of creating a matrix of strategic system directions. In this respect, in the analytical procedure, SWOT matrix is developed into the so-called interaction matrix: SO, WO, ST and WT (*SO represents the interdependency of the systems strengths and external opportunities etc.*) hence identifying possible system development strategies:

- Maxi-maxi (SO) – strategies for utilization of opportunities by means of system strengths,
- Maxi-mini (ST) – strategies for opposing external threats,
- Mini-maxi (WO) – strategies of seeking ways to overcome weaknesses by means of external opportunities.
- Mini-mini (WT) – strategies for avoiding external threats.

Therefore, for each combination of SWOT parameters analysis, we can define appropriate strategies, so the *“overall system strategy can contain more than one, even all combinations”*.

Analysis of the service providing procedures with the purpose of reaching beneficiaries' and stakeholders' satisfaction has been done by means of enquiries and interviews and the results are processed by applying QFD methods.

As a conclusion of this analysis the following is identified:

- The most important interests of beneficiaries and stakeholders:
 - Better quality education
 - Recognition in the European higher education area
 - Knowledge and competences of graduated students
 - Developing the quality culture in the European higher education area
 - General and social development
 - Recognition of degrees and qualifications
 - Legitimacy of work in the higher education system
 - Fulfilment of Bologna principles
- The most significant product characteristics:
 - Objectivity of assessment
 - Panel references
 - Number of recommendations

-
- The most significant characteristics of the process:
 - On site visit
 - Application overview
 - Panel report
 - Appointing panels and experts
 - Follow up activities

Agency has conducted sufficient number of accreditation processes and after analysis of those reports and overall activities within the accreditation procedures we can talk about the specific deficiencies and problems of certain higher education institutions as well as about systemic inconsistencies and obstacles in the higher education system of Republika Srpska. It has been noted that certain problems are of systemic nature and common for all HEIs and whereas certain challenges are specific for public universities, others are specific for private institutions. For example, international cooperation is generally insufficiently developed and we can't talk about internationalization and this problem is especially present at private HEIs since public ones are included in a number of international projects. In this area too, panels had an opportunity to ensure that the international cooperation, at most private HEIs, is practically taking baby steps. Most forms of cooperation are realized on the regional level of former Yugoslav republics, and here are some higher education institutions standing out as examples of good practice in terms of cooperation with overseas countries (College of Communications Kappa Phi has a very active cooperation with higher education institutions from United States). In the situation with such internalization we can't talk about joint study programs with higher education institutions from abroad or delivering study programs in foreign languages what would significantly improve students' mobility. Students' mobility is on a very low level, both ways, especially in terms of having foreign students at our higher education institutions, but with our students too, there are very few of them who use the possibility for mobility through various programs offered.

Analysis has shown that the higher education institutions meet with the number of challenges in the area of their activities and the following stand out:

- Internal quality assurance systems haven't truly been implemented in practice, indicators followed are not used for the situation analysis and improvements at higher education institutions,
- Insufficient cooperation with the broader social community, not only at the level of institutions but also on lower levels, especially level of study programs amongst which many don't have significant link with specific society area,
- Insufficient cooperation with the social community is linked with the lack of practical work with students, selection of diploma and master thesis,
- Insufficient number of full time professors especially assistant professors,
- Mobility of teaching staff is a serious problem since analyses show that the great number of lecturers haven't participated in the exchange of teaching staff, joint research with colleagues from abroad and not even in international projects,
- Scientific-research work at all higher education institutions is insufficiently developed and poorly financially supported and with certain private higher education institutions it has been noticed that, besides all problems in this area, they don't have subscription to any scientific magazines in the area of study programs they deliver,
- insufficiently developed set of indicators followed, is present in various scope with all higher education institutions that have undergone the process of accreditation what is the consequence of undeveloped internal quality assurance systems,

- insufficiently developed and implemented procedures for the development and the review of study programs, so, amongst all other problems, we have situations that study programs with the same occupational profile greatly differ in structure (*this issue shall be tackled in the forthcoming accreditation of study programs*)
- insufficiently developed methodology for establishing ECTS credits,
- undeveloped and unclear methods for planning examination terms and assessment of students what is reflected in unrealistically high pass rate percentages and statistically almost impossibly high marks' rate percentages on certain courses,
- inadequately presented competences, learning outcomes and implementation of ECTS credits,
- problems in defining occupational profiles of study programs, etc.

Out of previous analyses and other relevant sources, there are strengths (S), weaknesses (W), Opportunities (O) and Threats (T) identified in the realization of mission, vision and Agency's strategic goals.

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - infrastructure in place (Council for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance, Agency, Students' Union, Rectors' Conference) - expert title in the area of quality assurance (significant number of experts within the national academic community, Accreditation forum) - knowledgeable Agency staff - homogenous education system - professionalisation of staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - instabile income from the Republika Srpska budget - insufficient human and technical resources (temporary offices, obsolete IT equipment, small number of employed staff) - Agency's internal quality assurance system is in its development phase - insufficiently used infrastructure - law incompleteness on the accreditation issues - insufficient level of quality assurance awareness of all parties in the higher education - insufficiently publicly recognized work of the Agency
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - flexible legal framework that enables Agency independence and autonomy of its work - experience in licensing higher education institutions and study programs - international cooperation and membership in quality assurance associations - introduction of new services in the Agency (audit, trainings, analyses, licensing as an initial accreditation) - informing the public on the Agency work and the significance of quality assurance - work with the academic community with the purpose of strengthening the role of various actors in the quality assurance through trainings, seminars, conferences - cooperation with CAQA (Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Serbia) on creating quality standards and study program reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - constant intentions on transfer of jurisdictions onto the state level - reluctance of Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of BiH to define the cooperation with RS HEAA through an agreement - legal insecurity of the system, - inability to apply to projects individually - re-licencing and accreditation, case of various outcomes - insufficient budget due to difficult economic situation for a few years back - small academic community (insufficient number of experts from various scientific areas) - incomplete and unreliable data on higher education

13. Current challenges and areas for future development

Current and major challenges for the Agency are clearly visible from everything already stated in the report and are obvious from the SWOT analysis.

The greatest professional challenge for the Agency, at this very moment, is accreditation of study programs. Namely, in terms of accreditation of study programs, there are various contemplations present at the sphere of quality assurance in higher education, not only in our country but in Europe as well as in the rest of the world. There are various approaches to the accreditation of study programs, starting from the accreditation of individual study programs, over cluster accreditation of study programs to so-called system accreditation.

Republika Srpska and Bosnia and Hercegovina face a number of challenges in that respect, since, as a developing country, we do not have sufficient financial resources available for such extensive projects. Financial means for the accreditation of study programs cannot be provided from the budget of competent authorities, nor can HEIs provide these funds.

Issue of insufficient human resources in this area is equally challenging. Here, we have proportionally small academic community with relatively modest experience in quality assurance and list of experts composed by the Agency for development of higher education and quality assurance of BiH (*they run the selection procedure and publish calls for experts*) is especially poor. The following issues are related to insufficiently developed criteria for accreditation of study programs at BiH level, with unclear indicators when it comes to qualification standards and occupational standards for specific educational areas. This is again related to the lack of Qualification framework (*due to many years of attempting to adopt NQF at BiH level, in its Strategy of Education Development Republika Srpska has defined adoption of its own NQF, as one of goals*).

In these circumstances, it is unrealistic to start with the procedure of individual accreditation of study programs, and cluster accreditation is also an open issue.

Taking into account all mentioned difficulties, our Agency has come up with the concept for which we expect to respond to all challenges encountered so far and it is a sort of system accreditation concept. Before the end of accreditation period, HEIs would have to apply sufficient number of study programs (*depending on the status and the size of the institution*) which would be subject to review by independent reviewers). Independent, professional review of a study program that would thoroughly touch the essence of professional and academic requirements, together with results of the previous institutional accreditation, would be an input factor for the Panel of Experts in charge of conducting the reaccreditation of the HEI. The decision on accreditation in the end, would comprise study programs that have been reviewed and subsequently externally evaluated by the Panel within the reaccreditation process.

In such way, the requirements' threshold would be constantly raising thus empowering HEIs' internal quality assurance system.

The possible development area of the Agency is the area of licencing HEIs and study programs, processes that are currently under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Republika Srpska, since this process started before the Agency has been established.

In the future, Agency should take over part of jurisdiction over founding new HEIs and study programs, part that refers to external evaluation, whereas the Ministry would keep jurisdictions in the part that refers to administrative activities and licences for the start of work.

Amongst the challenges that Agency faces is also an issue of jurisdictions of relevant BiH institutions in the area of higher education as well as continuous attempts of expanding jurisdictions at the BiH level at the expense of Republika Srpska entity jurisdictions, contrary to constitutional and legal provisions. The Agency is also developing audits as one of its quality assurance instruments

and it is planned to be conducted as a tool for assessing higher education institution's internal quality assurance systems and Agency's employees are certificated evaluators.

One of the challenges in the work of the Agency is relatively small share of funds that Agency realises from the budget of the Republic, which is hard to reimburse at the market since the price of accreditation has been formed in a way that it covers the cost of the process for the HEI, but not Agency costs. Therefore, the Agency is extremely cost-effective when it comes to distribution of financial resources.

Besides numerous challenges faced by the Agency, prevailing impression of stakeholders is that the the whole BiH has started with the founding of our Agency that was the first to define procedures in that area, establish all required documentation and conduct first accreditation processes. Now, our Agency is the first one to start the accreditation of study programs too.