



Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Banja Luka, 2024



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.”

Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the deliverables of the project ‘Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG II’, reference number 101061461 - SEQA-ESG2-ERASMUS-EDU-2021-EHEA-IBA

© Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2024, Banjaluka

Quotation allowed only with source reference.

Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HEA)

Authors: HEA

Banjaluka, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2024

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. The system of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina	5
3. Quality assurance of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina.....	7
4. Current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina	9
4.1. Legal framework – independence of the Agency's work	9
4.2. Quality assurance activities, methodologies and processes	13
4.3. Criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions/study programs.....	17
4.4. Experts in accreditation procedures	19
4.5. Stakeholder involvement.....	21
5. Priority activities	24
5.1. Establishing a legal framework for agency independence	24
5.2. Stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance	25
5.3. Experts in the accreditation process	25
5.4. Adaptation to the purpose of criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions, i.e. study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina	26
6. Table of priority activities.....	32
7. Conclusions.....	40

1. INTRODUCTION

Since March 2023, the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (hereinafter: the Agency) has been involved in the project Supporting European Quality Assurance Agencies in meeting the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Area of Higher Education („Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG“- SEQA ESG II) coordinated by ENQA.

The action plan for improving quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a document that was finalized after the “State Peer Counselling Meeting” of experts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was held on December 4, 2023 in Banja Luka, as the first activity of the Agency within the project. This event, organized by the Agency and ENQA, brought together relevant representatives of EQAR, European experts, competent institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, competent ministries of education, academic community and other interested parties from the higher education sector. The goal of the counselling meeting of experts was to create systemic awareness and common understanding of all participants in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to identify areas in which it is necessary to react and solve certain issues and challenges, all in the direction of harmonizing with the requirements of Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina aims to fulfil the necessary assumptions for submitting an application for membership in ENQA, and based on the recommendations the Agency received during the last external evaluation by ENQA in 2017 and conclusions from the Counselling meeting of experts in Bosnia and Herzegovina "State Peer Counselling Meeting", held on December 4, 2023 in Banja Luka, began the development of the Action Plan for the improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the process of preparing for full membership in ENQA.

In this document, along with an analysis of the current state of quality assurance of higher education, the most important activities of the Agency, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH, competent educational authorities and other competent and interested entities, in the period 2024 - 2025, are listed (see point 6 of the Action Plan), which, together with the activities within the project Supporting European Quality Assurance Agencies in meeting the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Area of Higher Education („Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG“- SEQA ESG II) coordinated by ENQA, will have to be implemented in the specified period, as a prerequisite for submitting an application for full ENQA membership.

2. The system of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The institutional organization of the higher education sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina is determined by the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the constitutions of entities and cantons, and the Statute of the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the basis of which competences in the field of education are legally defined.

The Republic of Srpska, ten cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina have jurisdiction over education. Each of the twelve listed administrative units has its own ministry of education, laws for the field of education, budgets for education, determines educational policy and has all other rights and obligations arising from the mandate of the competent educational authority, responsible for the organization and functioning of education in its area of responsibility. The Framework Law on Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina ("Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina", No. 59/07, 59/09 - hereinafter: Framework Law) was adopted with the aim of coordinating, harmonizing and implementing European reforms in the field of higher education in accordance with the principles of the Bologna Process. All other issues related to higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina that are not determined by the Framework Law are regulated in the Federation of BiH - cantonal laws on higher education, in the Republic of Srpska - by the Law on Higher Education, in Brčko District of BiH - by the Law on Higher Education in Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Framework law stipulates that Bosnia and Herzegovina accepts the strategic goals in the field of higher education expressed in the Declaration of European Ministers of Higher Education from Bologna (1999) as well as the subsequent development of the Bologna concept. In this regards, the Framework Law defined the organization of higher education in BiH, the integrated university model, the three-cycle study model, introduced the European credits transfer system (ECTS points), clearly defined academic titles and the minimum conditions for their acquisition, defined bodies of higher education institutions, the rights and obligations of academic staff, the rights and obligations of students, the responsibility of the competent educational authorities, as well as the way to ensure quality in the field of higher education. It was emphasized that with the aim of reforming higher education, the Framework Law establishes the basic principles and standards for the acquisition of higher education in BiH, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its protocols, the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on recognition and assessment the quality of private higher education institutions, the Recommendation on access to higher education and the Recommendation on the research task of universities as well as other relevant principles of internationally recognized legal instruments to which BiH is a contracting state, and in accordance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the recognition of qualifications in higher education in European region.

In accordance with the Framework Law, higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina are universities and colleges.

Universities are higher education institutions that engage in both teaching and research work, offer academic degrees in all three cycles and implement at least five different study programs in at least three scientific fields - natural sciences, technical sciences, biomedicine and health, biotechnical sciences, social sciences and humanities. The university may have organizational units, such as: faculties, academies, colleges or scientific institutes, which carry out teaching, scientific research and artistic work in one or more educational and scientific fields. *Colleges* are higher education institutions that can provide education only within the first cycle, implementing at least one study program in one scientific field.

All those who have graduated a four-year high school have access to higher education. In accordance with the Bologna principles, higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is organized in three cycles. The first cycle leads to the academic title of completed undergraduate studies (the degree of Bachelor) or equivalent, obtained after at least three and at most four years of full-time study after obtaining a high school certificate, which is evaluated with at least 180 or 240 ECTS points.

The second cycle leads to the academic title of master or equivalent, obtained after the completion of undergraduate studies, lasts one or two years, and is evaluated with 60 or 120 ECTS points, so that in total with the first cycle it carries 300 ECTS points, while the third cycle leads to the academic title of doctor or equivalent, lasts three years and is evaluated with 180 ECTS points. One semester of study carries 30 ECTS points in each cycle. The study of the medical group of sciences in the first cycle is excluded from this, which is valued at up to 360 ECTS points.

After completing the study program, students are awarded a diploma and academic title in accordance with the previously approved study program. With the decision on the adoption of the Fundamentals of the qualification framework for BiH ("Official Gazette of BiH" number 31/11) the Council of Ministers of BiH adopted the Fundamentals of the qualification framework in BiH as an initial document for defining and developing the qualification framework in BiH. The basics of the qualifications framework include key concepts for a better understanding of qualifications and their classifications, which support their relevance and quality. Those key concepts are: qualifications and their learning outcomes, levels and level descriptors, credit systems and types of qualifications. The Structure of the basis of the qualification framework, which consists of eight levels, is the basis for the classification of quality-assured qualifications according to level descriptors, as well as for connection with the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

Responsibility for the implementation of the Framework Law was assigned to the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which includes responsibility for the coordination and development of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the promotion of the integration of teaching and research work, the promotion of cooperation between higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina with institutions in Europe and the world, the promotion of equal access to higher education, promotion of mobility and lifelong learning, strengthening the connection between higher education and the economy, and more.

The framework law established the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance as well as the Centre for Information and Recognition of Documents in the Field of Higher Education (CIP), and the legal basis for the activities of the Rector's Conference of BiH, which until the adoption of the Framework Law operated on the basis of the University Agreement (2005). The Rectors' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina determines and represents the common interests of universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and achieves cooperation with institutions in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Full members can be the rectors of all licensed and accredited universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but in the current practice the members of the Rectors' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina were only the rectors of eight public universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the current academic year (2023/2024), 42 higher education institutions have a license to carry out higher education activities, that is, a license to work. Of these, eight are public universities and two public colleges. Also, 32 private higher education institutions have a license to carry out higher education activities, of which 20 have the status of universities, and 12 of them are colleges. The framework law does not differentiate between private and public higher education institutions in terms of the awarding of academic degrees and titles and the awarding of academic titles.

Statistical data on the student population in BiH in the last five academic years, according to the data of the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina¹, are given in the table below.

Enrolled students and candidates for graduation by sex and year of study in the academic year:	Total	Enrolled students at all years of study			Candidates for graduation		
		All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female
2023/2024	71185	61335	24318	37017	9850	3826	6024
2022/2023	73250	64064	25545	38519	9186	3534	5652
2021/2022	76028	65561	26384	39177	10467	4226	6241
2020/2021	78343	68344	27975	40975	9999	4174	5852
2019/2020	81228	69438	28734	40704	11790	4887	6903

3. Quality assurance of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, external quality assurance is carried out in two separate processes: the licensing process and the accreditation process.

Licensing is the process of verifying the fulfilment of the minimum standards for starting work and performing higher education activities, which are fully implemented by the competent educational authorities. A license is a work permit issued to higher education institutions by the competent educational authorities after independent commissions of licensing experts, appointed by the competent educational authorities, have verified the fulfilment of minimum standards. Minimum standards and the process of compliance verification are prescribed by the competent educational authorities in their acts on licensing, for which the Agency issued

¹ <https://bhas.gov.ba/Calendar/Category/15?lang=en>

Recommendations on criteria for licensing higher education institutions and study programs ("Official Gazette of BiH", number: 13/12) and Recommendations on criteria and standards to the Ministry of the Republic of Srpska, Cantonal Ministries and Brčko District for the establishment and closure of higher education institutions and the restructuring of study programs ("Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina", number: 13/12). The minimum standards are usually quantitatively standardized and refer to the spatial, material-technical and human resources of the higher education institution, such as the necessary area in square meters per student, the number of library units, the number of computers per student, the number of full-time academic staff, etc.

Accreditation is a process by which, on the basis of an external audit and quality assessment, it is checked whether the higher education institution, i.e. the study program, in its work has fulfilled the prescribed standards and criteria for accreditation, and in the case of a positive outcome, it results in the entry into the State Register of Accredited Higher Education Institutions in BiH (hereinafter: State Register). The criteria for accreditation were adopted by the Agency and they are unique and mandatory for all higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to these criteria, higher education institutions conduct a self-evaluation, prepare a self-evaluation report, and the verification of the fulfilment of the criteria is carried out by an independent panel of accreditation experts appointed by the Agency based on the proposal of the competent educational authorities.

Therefore, the difference between licensing and accreditation lies in the fact that licensing is a permit for starting work and carrying out activities of higher education and is the responsibility of the educational authorities on whose territory higher education institutions are located. Accreditation is a process that determines the quality of work of a higher education institution, which is carried out by the Agency and the competent educational authorities in accordance with their competences.

The roles and responsibilities of all participants in the field of accreditation are regulated by the provisions of the Framework Law, as well as laws and regulations on the accreditation procedure of higher education institutions and study programs adopted by the competent educational authorities.

Documents the Decision on norms establishing minimum standards in the field of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina ("Official Gazette of BiH", number: 100/11 and 26/19 - hereinafter: Decision on norms) and the Recommendations for regulating the accreditation procedure of higher education institutions and study programs of the 1st and 2nd cycle of studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina ("Official Gazette of BiH", number: 34/23 - hereinafter: Recommendations for the regulation of the accreditation procedure), additionally specified and more clearly determined the roles and responsibilities of all participants in the aforementioned process, which results in the harmonization of processes and procedures for the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This particularly applies to the regulation of the following issues:

- rights and obligations of all participants in the process of accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs;

- submitting a request for the implementation of the accreditation procedure of higher education institutions and study programs;
- implementation of the accreditation procedure;
- proposing and appointing members of the panel of experts;
- report of the panel of experts;
- outcomes of accreditation, and other issues.

The decision on norms defined the implementation of external quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a process structured in 4 steps:

- the report prepared by the higher education institution through self-evaluation (Self-evaluation report),
- visit of a panel of experts to a higher education institution,
- external evaluation report published by the competent educational authorities, and
- follow-up activities carried out by the higher education institution according to the recommendations from the external evaluation report. The mentioned steps are described in more detail in chapter 4.2. Quality assurance activities, methodologies and processes.

The process of accreditation of higher education institutions, i.e. study programs, is carried out continuously, in accordance with the deadlines prescribed by the competent educational authorities and the recommendations of the Agency. Institutional accreditation (accreditation of universities and colleges) began in 2012 and most higher education institutions are going through the third round of accreditation, while accreditation of study programs began in 2020. The recommendations for regulating the accreditation procedure will certainly create a basis for the harmonization of the accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programs of the 1st and 2nd cycle of studies for all competent educational authorities as well as other participants in the accreditation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which were not elaborated in the Decision on Norms. In the coming period, the adoption of the Criteria for Accreditation of the 3rd cycle of studies is expected, which will cover all cycles conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4. Current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

4.1. Legal framework – independence of the Agency's work

In 2007, the Framework Law adopted by the BiH Parliamentary Assembly established the Agency as an independent administrative organization. Its competences in the areas of higher education development and quality assurance were determined by the same law, and were additionally elaborated in various regulations of the Agency.

Among other things, in the field of accreditation, the Agency is responsible for:

Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

- determination of clear, transparent and accessible criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions and adoption of norms that determine minimum standards in the field of higher education;
- determination of criteria for the selection of domestic and international experts who evaluate and conduct quality audits and make recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions;
- appointment of a panel of experts on the proposal of the competent educational authority;
- giving the competent educational authorities a recommendation on the accreditation of a higher education institution or study program, based on the opinion of a panel of domestic and international experts;
- assessment of compliance of the accreditation decision with criteria and norms;
- registration and management of the State Register of accredited higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- permanent availability of the list of accredited higher education institutions at www.heg.gov.ba and publication in the Official Gazette of Bosnia and Herzegovina, once a year.

In carrying out activities within its jurisdiction, the Agency respects by-laws and other acts that regulate the work of the administrative bodies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the following principles: legality, transparency, publicity, responsibility, efficiency, effectiveness and professional impartiality. The work of the Agency is independent and public. The publication of the work is carried out in accordance with the Law on Freedom of Access to Information in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The publicity of the work is achieved by submitting reports on the work to the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH and the Council of Ministers of BiH, as well as through means of public information. The Agency is financed from the budget of the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the area of competence in external quality assurance from its own revenues. The agency is managed by the director, who has two deputies, while its work is managed by the Steering Board.

The procedure for appointing the Agency's management, for a term of four years, is carried out on the basis of a public competition according to the Law on Ministerial Appointments, Appointments of the Council of Ministers of BiH and other appointments in BiH, which establishes that no person holding office in a political party can be appointed. Candidates for appointment must not have a conflict of interest that may affect the legal, objective and impartial performance of the office. The existence of a conflict of interest is checked by the Selection Committee in accordance with the Law.

The members of the Steering Board of the Agency are elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina for a term of three years, with the possibility of re-election, with the fact that the initial appointment was carried out in stages, so that every year one third of the members would be re-elected or re-appointed. The Steering Board consists of ten members, three members from each of all three constituent nations and one member from among others, of which at least 50% must be full professors.

The Steering Board decides by a majority of votes from the total number of members, provided that such a majority is at least two-thirds of the votes of the representatives of each constituent nation.

The independence of the Agency and the accreditation process are also determined by the Agency's documents, prepared in consultation with interested parties and international experts in the field of quality assurance, which regulate the Agency's actions in external quality assurance/accreditation activities, according to which, for example:

- "in external quality assurance activities, the Agency acts independently within its competences" (Article 2, paragraph (4) of the Statute of the Agency);
- "external quality assurance should be organized so that quality decisions are made independently of competent educational authorities, political structures and higher education institutions that are the subject of external quality assurance, avoiding any conflict of interest" (Decision on Norms).

Higher education institutions are not under the competence of the Agency, but rather of the educational authorities in the territory where they are located, so the Agency has no authority regarding the establishment, closure or financing of higher education institutions, which confirms the independence of the Agency from the possible influence of higher education institutions.

Operational independence and independence of formal outcomes/decisions is reflected in the Agency's activities as follows:

The Agency **determines the criteria for the selection of domestic and international experts** who evaluate and conduct quality audits and make recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions, and announces a competition for their selection. Only candidates for whom the Committee for the Selection of Experts, appointed by the Director of the Agency, determines that they meet the predetermined criteria in the category for which they applied (academic community, international community, economy and practice and students) can be on the List of Experts. This List is adopted by the competent educational authorities, after reviewing it, and when proposing members for the panel of experts, they must choose experts from the mentioned list. This List is constantly available on the Agency's website and is regularly updated, and the documents regulating the selection procedure and selection criteria are revised periodically and as necessary.

The Agency **appoints a panel of experts** based on the proposal of the competent educational authority regarding the selection of experts from the established List of Experts. Each panel of experts has at least one representative from all four categories in its composition, which is determined by the Decision on norms, and elaborated in more detail by the regulations of the competent educational authorities. The agency recommended to all competent educational authorities that when proposing a panel of experts, they should propose three times the number of experts than the minimum prescribed. In this way, the Agency was enabled to make a decision on the final composition of the expert panel, taking into account the specific criteria

from the Instruction on the appointment of the committee of experts for the accreditation of higher education institutions.

In order to ensure that the experts, who are proposed for appointment to the panel, do not have a conflict of interest with the higher education institution, before the appointment of the commission of experts, the conflict of interest and availability are checked. Experts are also provided with the Code of Ethics, which clearly stipulates what is expected of them, and what their rights and obligations are. In the Decision on the appointment of the panel of experts, it is stated that the commission is obliged to work in accordance with the Framework Law, acts of the Agency, as well as acts of the competent educational authority that are harmonized with the acts of the Agency.

The Agency **issues a recommendation on accreditation** based on the opinion from the Report of the Panel of Experts. The committee for making recommendations, which consists of three civil servants from the Agency, submits a recommendation proposal to the Director of the Agency for consideration and confirmation. This Commission works in accordance with the Instruction on how to make recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs. The Commission has the right, if it deems it necessary, to ask the experts for additional clarifications and additions to the report, with the aim of better consistency in the interpretation and evaluation of the criteria, i.e. the overall quality of the report. The purpose of the recommendation on accreditation is to ensure the coherence and consistency of the interpretation of standards and criteria, given that evaluations are carried out by different groups of experts. As determined by the aforementioned Instruction, the Commission should interpret the standards and criteria in terms of the principles of the European Higher Education Area and generally good practices in the field of quality assurance. After receiving the report of the panel of experts, and based on its review, the Commission for making recommendations should evaluate whether the report is written in accordance with the Decision on norms and criteria for accreditation, and evaluate whether the judgments made by the panel of experts are consistent, coherent and in accordance with good practice in the field of quality assurance and the principles governing the European area of higher education.

Assessment of compliance of accreditation decisions issued by the competent educational authorities based on the Agency's recommendation is carried out in accordance with the **Instruction for reviewing the compliance of decision on accreditation with the minimal standards in higher education and criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions in bosnia and herzegovina**. The assessment of compliance is carried out by the internal committee for the assessment of compliance of accreditation decision appointed by the Director of the Agency, which is made up of civil servants of the Agency. The instruction regulates the process of reviewing the compliance of the accreditation decision and the procedure in case of established non-compliance. The Steering Board of the Agency can, as a last resort, after assessing that the decision is not harmonized, annul the decision on accreditation. And this step in external quality assurance, the Agency works independently and independently.

Entry in the State Register of Accredited Higher Education Institutions is done in accordance with the Rulebook on the Management of the State Register of Accredited Higher

Education Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In order to increase efficiency in work and better visibility, especially of accredited study programs, it is planned to keep this Register in electronic form as well.

For the independence of external quality assurance, it is necessary to provide the participants of the procedure, primarily higher education institutions, with the possibility of objections and appeals, in case they are not satisfied with the way the accreditation process was carried out, that is, the participants in the procedure. In the Recommendations for the regulation of the accreditation procedure, it was established that the Agency and the competent educational authority prescribe provisions that ensure that all active participants in the accreditation procedure have the right to object and appeal the actions of other participants in the accreditation procedure in accordance with the relevant legal regulations. Objections or appeals must primarily be sent to the actor in whose jurisdiction is the activity being carried out and to which the appeal refers. Handling complaints and appeals must include information and timely familiarization of the Agency and the competent educational authority with the aim of harmonizing the handling with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

In order to ensure a greater degree of independence and consistency in decision-making within the competence of the Agency, the composition of the body that makes recommendations on accreditation should be expanded, so that it is not only made up of civil servants of the Agency, and the relevant procedures should be updated accordingly.

The Agency presented changes to the Instruction on how to give a recommendation. In the proposal of the amendment document, the new body for giving recommendations would consist of members from the ranks of civil servants, member of the Agency's deputy director, and a member of the Agency's Steering Board. It is necessary to additionally regulate the issues of objections and appeals, in all activities related to accreditation processes. The regulation of objections and appeals should also respect the General provisions of the General administrative procedure Act. In accordance with this Act, all public documents must include the statement on the possibility of complaints and procedures.

Support for the work of the competent educational authorities in accreditation activities should be continuous and in accordance with the identified needs. This support shall be given through the new Instruction on the accreditation procedure of higher education institutions and study programs. This Instruction regulates in detail the procedures and individual stages of the accreditation procedure, the participants in the accreditation procedure, their competences and obligations, and especially the deadlines and appeal procedures in the accreditation procedure of higher education institutions and study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4.2. Quality assurance activities, methodologies and processes

As mentioned earlier, the Agency performs the following QA activities:

1. The Agency determines the criteria for the selection of domestic and international experts who evaluate and conduct quality audits and make recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions, and announces a competition for their selection;
2. The Agency selecting of proposed experts and appoints a panel of experts;
3. The Agency conducts training of experts (theoretical and practical training as well as preparatory meeting prior to the site- visit);
4. The Agency issues a recommendation on accreditation, after the analysis of external reports;
5. The Agency conducts the assessment of compliance of accreditation decisions;
6. The Agency is competent for Entry in the State Register of Accredited Higher Education Institutions.

Furthermore, as defined the implementation of external quality assurance in BiH as a process structured in 4 steps:

1. report prepared by the higher education institution through self-evaluation (Self-evaluation report),
2. visit of a panel of experts to a higher education institution,
3. external evaluation report published by the competent educational authorities, and
4. follow-up activities carried out by the higher education institution according to the recommendations from the external evaluation report.

- **Self-evaluation**

According to the Decision on Norms, the self-evaluation report must be written in one of the official languages in BiH and in English and must also follow the structure prescribed in the Decision on Norms. The higher education institution submits the request for accreditation and the self-evaluation report to the competent educational authority.

- **Visit of a panel of experts to a higher education institution**

The composition of the Panel of Experts is prescribed by the Decision on Norms, and it consists of a minimum of one representative of each of the four categories of experts, who are trained by the Agency, namely:

1. representative of the academic community in BiH,
2. representative of the economy and practice in BiH,
3. student,
4. international expert.

The Agency appoints panels of experts based on the proposal of the competent educational authority and appoints a coordinator from the Agency for each appointed commission. In accordance with the regulations of the competent educational authorities, since this issue is not regulated by the Framework Law, nor by the Decision on Norms, for higher education institutions located in the territory of the Republic of Srpska, the duties of the secretary/coordinator of the panel of experts are performed by a person from the staff of the Agency for Higher Education of the Republic of Srpska (AVORS) which also appoints it. For higher education institutions from cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a civil servant from the Agency is appointed as the

coordinator of the panel of experts. The role of the coordinator, which is formalized through the Instruction on the appointment of the panel of experts for accreditation of higher education institutions, is to provide the members of the panel of experts with all the necessary information and documents for the implementation of accreditation, as well as to support them in understanding their role and the purpose of the process. The role of secretary in the accreditation procedures of higher education institutions in the Republic of Srpska is performed by a representative of AVORS, while in the accreditation process of higher education institutions in the cantons of the Federation of BiH and Brčko District of BiH, the role of secretary is played by one of the members of the panel of experts.

- **External evaluation report**

The Decision on Norms prescribes the structure of the Report of the Panel of Experts, as well as the fact that it must be written in one of the official languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in English.

The Agency issues recommendations to the competent educational authorities on the accreditation of higher education institutions or study programs, based on the opinion of the Panel of Experts in accordance with the Instruction on how to give recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs.

Based on the recommendation, the competent educational authority issues a decision on the accreditation of a higher education institution i.e. study program, which undergoes the conformity assessment procedure according to the Instruction on the method of conformity assessment. The purpose of the conformity assessment is to ensure compliance with the procedures of all participants in the accreditation process. Compliance assessment is done by a three-member compliance assessment committee from among civil servants, appointed by the Agency's director. If the outcome of the compliance assessment is positive, the director issues a decision on registration in the State Register, based on the minutes of the Compliance Assessment Commission. If the outcome of the compliance assessment is negative, the Agency requests the competent educational authority to harmonize the decision on accreditation. After receiving a new decision from the competent educational authority, the Agency will re-assess compliance, and if the decision is positive, a decision on registration in the State Register will be issued. If the rating is again negative, then the Steering Board of the Agency decides.

Entry in the State Register is regulated by the *Rulebook on the Management of the State Register*. A civil servant was appointed who is in charge of entering data on accredited higher education institutions or study programs. Within three days from the date of entry, the Agency notifies the relevant educational authority, which has issued a decision on accreditation.

- **Follow-up activities**

Regarding follow-up activities, the Agency prescribed in the Decision on norms that: *"Upon receipt of the decision on accreditation, the higher education institution draws up an action plan for follow-up activities with a time frame and concrete carriers for the implementation of recommendations for improving internal quality from the Panel's report, and publishes it on its website. Once a year, the higher education institution prepares a report on the activities undertaken to implement the action plan, which should contain the activities undertaken, the degree of implementation, as well as an indication of possible deviations from the action plan, and the circumstances that caused the deviation. The report on the activities undertaken by the higher education institution should be published on its website"*.

This refers to the implementation of follow-up activities in case of a positive outcome of accreditation and registration in the State Register. Then the higher education institution, in the period between two accreditation cycles, works on implementing the recommendations listed in the report of the panel of experts. In addition to the fact that the educational authority is responsible for monitoring the implementation of follow-up activities for higher education institutions under its jurisdiction, expert panels and the Agency itself also play a significant role. Thus, the Panel of Experts appointed in the upcoming accreditation process will pay special attention to the implementation of the recommendations given by the previous panel, and based on that, evaluate the progress of the higher education institution.

Article 48, paragraph 8) of the Framework Law, which reads: "*determining quality standards, analysing quality, making recommendations to eliminate quality deficiencies of studies and higher education institutions*", gives the Agency a significant role in monitoring follow-up activities, which is implemented through:

- monitoring the publication and implementation of action plans and annual reports on the progress of accredited *higher education institutions* that they publish on their websites;
- analysing the quality of expert panel reports, action plans and annual progress reports of accredited *higher education institutions*;
- making recommendations for the elimination of deficiencies in the quality of studies and higher education institutions based on quality analysis;
- organizing workshops on selected topics with the aim of providing support to higher education institutions to eliminate deficiencies identified in the reports of the Panel of Experts.

Competent educational authorities monitor the implementation of recommendations, and in cases where a higher education institution does not fulfil its obligations regarding the implementation of follow-up activities, it will act in accordance with its regulations. This issue is regulated differently by the competent educational authorities, so in some cases there is a possibility to annul the decision on accreditation, which results in deletion from the State Register.

In case where the competent educational authority issues *a letter of expectation* to a higher education institution for a period of one to two years at most, a repeat visit of all members of the Panel of Experts or its representatives is organized, and they will assess the fulfilment of the disputed criteria and give their opinion on the outcome of the accreditation, which may be issuance of a decision on accreditation or refusal of accreditation.

Although the Agency, in accordance with the Instruction on the appointment of a committee of experts for accreditation, appoints panels of experts and coordinators from the Agency for each appointed panel, in practice the coordination of accreditation procedures takes place unevenly. For higher education institutions located in the territory of the Republic of Srpska, the duties of secretary and coordinator of the panel of experts are performed by a person from the staff of the Agency for Higher Education of the Republic of Srpska (AVORS), who appoints them. For higher education institutions from cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a civil servant from the Agency is appointed as the coordinator of the panel

of experts, and one of the members of the panel of experts is appointed for the role of secretary. Space for improvement was recognized in such a way that the above-mentioned Instruction defines the role of the coordinator more precisely and strengthens the coordination role of the Agency.

The agency recognized the need for the competent educational authority, after receiving the request for accreditation, to check the legitimacy of the request, which includes evidence of the fulfilment of the conditions for starting work and performing higher education activities. In this regard, in the coming period, the Agency will monitor the implementation of the Recommendations for the regulation of accreditation procedures by the competent educational authorities.

The reports of certain panels of experts do not have an English version, they are formally and essentially incomplete, and some of these panels are reluctant or do not submit the requested additions and clarifications to the reports required by the Agency.

In order to improve the implementation of follow-up activities, the Agency will intensify communication with interested parties regarding follow-up activities as a shared activity.

4.3. Criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions/study programs

The Agency has adopted documents for effective external quality assurance that recognize and support the activities of higher education institutions as carriers of internal quality assurance, namely:

- *Decision on criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- *Decision on criteria for accreditation of study programs of the first and second cycle of studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- *Decision on norms that determine minimum standards in the field of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

The above-mentioned documents are the result of the implementation of activities arising from the prescribed competences from Article 48, paragraph 1) of the Framework Law, and the quality of which was contributed by the activities of various European projects (ADA, IPA Twinning, ESA BiH, etc.), and in their preparation, higher education institutions were consulted and competent educational authorities in BiH as well as colleagues (experts) from international quality assurance agencies.

The Agency also prepared the Criteria for Accreditation of Study Programs of the 3rd Cycle of Studies in BiH aligned with ESG and Salzburg Principles, as a result of the Tempus project EQADE (Embedding QA in Doctoral Education). The criteria were developed through the project and applied in pilot accreditations for one program of the 3rd cycle of studies at eight public universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The criteria were additionally improved through public consultations with interested parties, and in 2024 they will be discussed at one of the sessions of the Agency's Steering Board. Compliance of criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs of the first and second cycle of studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina with ESG I group (2015) is presented in the table below.

ESG I group (2015)		Criteria for accreditation of HEI in BiH	Criteria for accreditation of SP of 1 st and 2 nd cycle of studies in BiH
1	Quality assurance policy	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.6	1.1; 1.2; 1.3
2	Creation and approval of the program	1.1; 1.2	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.6
3	Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	1.1; 1.2	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.6; 1.7
4	Enrolment and advancement of students, recognition and certification	1.1; 1.2; 1.3	1.1; 1.2; 1.3
5	Teaching staff	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4
6	Learning resources and student support	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5
7	Information management	1.1; 1.2; 1.3	1.1; 1.2
8	Informing the public	1.1; 1.2; 1.3	1.1
9	Continuous monitoring and periodic revision of the program	1.1; 1.2; 1.3	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4
10	Periodic external quality assurance	1.1	The decision on norms stipulates that external quality assurance should take place at a certain time interval
			10. Mobility of academic staff and students ² 10.1; 10.2; 10.3

The criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs of the 1st and 2nd cycle of studies in BiH stipulate that the higher education institution should have certain internal documents for internal quality assurance that refer to ESG I, such as quality policy, quality assurance of study programs, students, human and physical resources, informing the public, etc.

In order to strengthen the system of internal quality assurance of higher education institutions, the Agency organizes and continuously participates in various forms of consultation in the procedures for issuing documents.

The connection between internal and external quality assurance in BiH is regulated by the Decision on Norms. This document in the second chapter **2. Minimum standards for external**

² Note: The Agency developed the criterion Mobility of academic staff and students in order to improve and increase the internationalization of Bosnia and Herzegovina's higher education, which is in line with its vision.

quality assurance of higher education institutions and study programs prescribes 9 standards that are aligned with ESG II (2015) as presented in the table below.

ESG II (2015)	Standards from the Decision on Norms
2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance	- Self-evaluation and use of internal quality assurance results
2.2 Developing fit-for-purpose methodologies	- Purpose and participants of external quality assurance
2.3 Implementation measures	- Methods and areas of external quality assurance checks - Organization of the external quality assurance process - Recommendation on follow-up activities
2.4 Experts in the evaluation process	- Panel of experts
2.5 Criteria for outcomes	- Mode of operation of the Panel
2.6 Reporting	- Report of the Panel
2.7 Objections and appeals	- -----
	- Periodicity of external quality assurance

The Agency determined that the requirements from ESG 2.7 Objections and appeals are currently not prescribed in the Decision on Norms, but also that other standards from the Decision on Norms can be better reflected in the requirements of the corresponding ESG standards.

Further, the Agency, through the analysis of the report by the Panel of Experts, determined that, despite the clear guidelines from the Methodology for writing the report, some of them do not give a clear enough answer to the fulfilment of the criteria for accreditation, that is, they do not have an adequate, consistent interpretation of the evaluation of the fulfilment of the criteria.

4.4. Experts in accreditation procedures

Among other things, in accordance with Article 48, paragraph 2), and Article 49, paragraph 1), 2) and 3) of the Framework Law, the Agency is responsible for:

- determination of criteria for the selection of domestic and international experts who evaluate and conduct quality audits and make recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions;
- announcing a public competition for the selection of domestic and international experts for quality assessment and auditing and giving recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions, i.e. their study programs;
- establishment of a commission to determine the list of experts who meet the criteria from Article 48, paragraph 2) of this law. The commission has five members, and it is made up of one representative of the Rector's Conference, one cantonal ministry, the ministry of the Republic of Srpska, the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a representative of the Agency;

- submission of the established list of experts for adoption to all ministries of education in BiH and the competent department of Brčko District of BiH.

Respecting the aforementioned prescribed competences, since the beginning of work, the Agency has adopted relevant documents on the basis of which the above prescribed competences from the Framework Law are described and elaborated in detail, namely:

- Decision on the criteria for the selection of domestic and international experts who evaluate and conduct quality audits and make recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions;
- Rulebook on the manner of conducting a public competition for the selection of domestic and international experts for quality assessment and auditing and giving recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions, that is, their study programs;
- Decision on the method of forming a commission for the selection of domestic and international experts for quality assessment and audit and giving recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions, that is, their study programs;
- Manual for expert training.

In addition to the above, the Agency, in accordance with Article 49, paragraph 4) of the Framework Law, is responsible for appointing a panel of experts, based on the proposal of the competent educational authorities regarding the selection of experts from the established list of experts. In this regard, all appointed panels of experts in the accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programs have a minimum representation of each of the four categories of experts: representatives of the academic community, representatives of business and practice, international experts and students, and they act as independent bodies applying the relevant documents of the Agency as well as the documents of the competent educational authorities, harmonized with the documents of the Agency.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned, above all relying on the experience from the conducted accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the above-mentioned documents of the Agency have been updated and improved several times.

In order to implement study program accreditation procedures, the Recommendations for regulating accreditation procedures prescribe the adoption of a study program accreditation plan adopted by the competent educational authority and higher education institution, which will result in the engagement of a large number of experts.

In accordance with the identified possibilities for improving the selection, nomination and appointment of experts in the process of accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and using the experiences of good practices of other quality assurance agencies from the environment, in accordance with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Agency plans to carry out certain activities in the coming period, with the aim of further improving the mentioned area and the process of external evaluation.

4.5. Stakeholder involvement

Since the beginning of its existence, the agency has been developing a partnership relationship and a relationship of trust with stakeholders. In this relationship, the Agency applies adopted values and continuously builds a relationship of mutual respect with open and constant contact. Not only the Agency, but also the stakeholders of the Agency showed willingness and interest in cooperation. Stakeholders of the Agency are involved in the work of the Agency and external quality assurance processes at different levels.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Article 3 of the Rules for consultations in the drafting of legal regulations ("Official Gazette of BiH", number 5/17 and 87/23) prescribes the obligation of all institutions of BiH to maintain, update and publish a list of organizations and individuals interested in legislative activities of these institutions. A list of legal and natural persons interested in the normative activities of the Agency is available on the Agency's website. In the process of adopting various documents that are adopted or approved by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, consultations are carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Office for Legislation of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Finance and Treasury of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees/Agency for Gender Equality from the aspect of the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality, and, if necessary, the Directorate for European Integration of the Council of Ministers. In this way, consultations are carried out for work plans and reports on the work of the Agency, the Medium-term Plan of the Agency, the budget and other documents of the Agency.

According to the areas regulated by individual acts adopted by the Agency, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH and 12 competent educational authorities in BiH are included in the consultations, and if necessary, the Conference of Ministers of Education in BiH, the Rector's Conference of BiH, the Centre for information and recognition of documents from the field of higher education, higher education institutions, chambers of commerce and industry in BiH, student representative bodies of higher education institutions in BiH, institutions in the field of employment, organizations and individuals who are experts in the field regulated by legal regulations, experts from the academic and research community and other institutions that can make a useful contribution to the development of the Agency's legal regulations.

The Agency regularly conducts consultations through the E-consultation platform established for the purpose of cooperation between government institutions, civil society organizations and citizens. In this way, the Agency fully and timely informs citizens and representatives of civil society organizations via the Internet about the adoption of legal acts, and enables them to participate in the creation and implementation of public policies that are within the competence of the Agency. In this way, we achieved openness and accessibility to the public and established two-way communication. Also, in cooperation with the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Agency informs the public about its activities and positions through press conferences.

Stakeholders are included in the work of the Committee for the Selection of Experts on the List. The Committee for the Selection of the List of Experts has five members, four of whom are representatives of interested parties – one representative of the Rector's Conference of BiH, one cantonal Ministry of Education from the Federation of BiH, the competent Ministry from the Republic of Srpska, the Department of Education in the Government of the Brčko District of BiH, and the fifth member is from the Agency.

The Agency is responsible for managing the State Register. In regular communication, the competent educational authorities, in accordance with the Rulebook on maintaining the State Register, deliver to the Agency decisions on the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs and accompanying evidence, based on which data is entered into the State Register.

At the request of higher education institutions, state bodies, public institutions, employers, citizens and other interested parties, the Agency issues certificates of registration in the State Register based on inspection of the State Register.

Also, the Agency has a large number of signed agreements and memoranda with agencies in the country and worldwide, and communication is also realized through regional meetings.

The relationship between the administrative bodies of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the executive bodies and administrative bodies of the entities, the Brčko District of BiH and the cantons is regulated by Article 32 of the Law on the Administration of BiH ("Official Gazette of BiH", number 32/02 and 102/09 - hereinafter: Law on administration), and is based on the powers established by the Constitution and the Law, as well as on cooperation, mutual information and agreement. Article 33 of the Law on Administration stipulates that the administrative bodies have the right to request data, reports and other documentation from the executive bodies, administrative bodies and other bodies of the entity and the Brčko District of BiH necessary for the exercise of their competences established by the constitution and law, but also the obligation of the authorities of the BiH administration to provide the executive bodies, administrative bodies and other bodies of the entities and Brčko District of BiH with the necessary data for the functioning of those bodies. The Agency has established good cooperation with administrative bodies, especially with the competent educational authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a result of the aforementioned cooperation with the competent educational authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Agency prepared the accreditation plan for higher education institutions for the period 2023-2027, while the preparation of the accreditation plan for study programs is underway.

In cooperation with all competent educational authorities in BiH, higher education institutions, and from this academic year with student representative bodies of higher education institutions in BiH, the Agency regularly collects data and information from the higher education system in BiH and updates its internal databases/records. The data are collected for the purpose of planning the work processes of the Agency, as well as their implementation, and serve as inputs for other researches of the Agency. For these purposes, the Agency collects information on the

status of licensed higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, closed and newly established higher education institutions, as well as data on changes in the status of institutions, or other data (changes in the name of institutions, headquarters of institutions, etc.).

For regular correspondence with higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Agency uses an internal contact data base, and the correspondence mostly takes place through the established network of persons in charge of quality assurance (all higher education institutions have one or more persons in charge of quality assurance - QA coordinators).

The agency regularly organizes joint events with stakeholders – thematic meetings, workshops, conferences, etc. in order to exchange opinions on improving practices in quality assurance. A list and information about some of these events can be found on the Agency's website. During the corona virus pandemic, this practice was adapted to the conditions at that time. Then, in order to solve numerous challenges, the Agency intensified cooperation with stakeholders through individual visits and meetings with competent educational authorities and higher education institutions.

The Agency participates in the work of the Rectors' Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Association of Rectors of Private Universities.

The Agency also receives daily oral and written inquiries from stakeholders and responds to them as far as they relate to the Agency's competences, or refers them to relevant sources.

Following the implementation and analysing the results of work processes, the Agency has identified areas that need to be improved in the coming period.

Thus, the analysis of the previous cooperation with stakeholders showed insufficient involvement and motivation of certain categories of stakeholders, especially students and representatives of business and practice, in the work of the Agency - the management of the Agency and external quality assurance processes.

There is only one student in the Steering Board of the Agency. There are no representatives of business and practice. Out of a total of 390 experts on the List of Experts, 79 are representatives of business and practice, and only 18 are students. Therefore, from the 2023/2024 academic year, the Agency, in cooperation with all higher education institutions, formed a network of contact persons of student representative bodies of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The goal of forming this network is to improve student information policies for involvement in the work of the Agency and to raise awareness of the importance of student participation in external quality assurance. Activities were also created with the chambers of commerce and industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to increase motivation for the participation of representatives of business and practice in the work of the Agency in the coming period.

5. Priority activities

5.1. Establishing a legal framework for agency independence

Relying on the provisions of the Framework Law by which it was established, the Agency, from the beginning of its work until today, has adopted a series of documents on the basis of which the competences stipulated in the above-mentioned articles of the Framework Law have been additionally elaborated. The aforementioned adopted documents are regularly revised and updated in accordance with the acquired experiences, trends and good practices of similar agencies, as well as through the implementation of various activities of numerous projects in which the Agency participated or still participates, which results in the operational independence of all jobs and activities of the Agency.

With the aim of continuous development and additional improvement of the system and procedures for quality assurance in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, relying on prescribed competences, the Agency in the following period (January 2024 - November 2025) plans to, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders carry out additional improvements of procedures through activities based on which the following will be additionally done:

- a) Strengthen the independence of the Agency's Steering Board by including representatives who are not only representatives of higher education institutions, by changing the Agency's documents in the part related to the structure and composition of the Steering Board;
- b) Provide a greater degree of consistency in the interpretation of the requirements of the prescribed criteria and opinions on the outcome of the accreditation of various panels of experts, as well as a better coordinating role of the Agency in the accreditation procedures;
- c) Improve the process of objections and appeals in the accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programs, then the process of issuing recommendations based on the opinion of the Panel of Experts, and the system of implementation and monitoring of subsequent activities;
- d) Through planned activities, provide appropriate funds in the budget for the preparation and implementation of all planned activities required for submitting a credible request for full membership in ENQA and EQAR;
- e) Continuously monitor the implementation of defined activities and analyse the implementation of set goals, and accordingly propose and implement activities aimed at improving the system of higher education and quality assurance with the aim of achieving a greater degree of compliance with the requirements of Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European area of higher education (ESG).

Regardless of the fact that the Agency has acted completely independently in its work since its establishment in all procedures in which it participated, and the aforementioned planned activities with the aim of additional improvement in the field of higher education development and quality assurance system, the Agency will continue to monitor trends in the aforementioned areas in the European area of higher education and undertake appropriate activities in this regard.

5.2. Stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance

Carrying out various activities in accordance with the competences from the Framework Law, the Agency uses the opinions of various stakeholders (competent educational authorities, higher education institutions, students, other public institutions and the wider community) in its work when adopting documents and procedures through public consultations and organizing various events.

Bearing in mind the importance and purpose of quality assurance, which implies continuous activities aimed at improvements in which various stakeholders are involved, the Agency plans the following for the purpose of additional improvements of the quality assurance system:

- a) Continuously monitor and implement various activities in accordance with the current situation and trends, for the purpose of improving the system of higher education and quality assurance, especially in the field of self-evaluation and external evaluation;
- b) By adopting, amending or supplementing the relevant acts, ensure consistency in terms of understanding and interpretation of the content of the request for accreditation, interpretation of the fulfilment of prescribed criteria, as well as the availability of data on accredited higher education institutions and study programs;
- c) By organizing and participating in various activities, conferences, meetings, projects and other activities in cooperation with stakeholders, continuously analyse the situation in the field of higher education and quality assurance, and propose changes or amendments to appropriate legal or bylaws with the aim of additional improvements and harmonization with European standards and guidelines.

Using the experiences gained in the previous work with stakeholders, as well as the experiences and good practices of agencies from the surrounding area, the Agency will continue with the established practice of intensified constant communication with all stakeholders in the coming period, in accordance with the needs of continuous improvement of activities in the field of higher education and quality assurance.

5.3. Experts in the accreditation process

Since its establishment, relying on the prescribed competences from the Framework Law, the Agency has adopted relevant documents on the basis of which the procedures for the selection of experts are described and elaborated in detail. The mentioned procedures mean the documents on the basis of which the members of the committee for the selection of experts are selected, the criteria for the selection of experts, as well as the manner of conducting the competition procedure for selection to the List of Experts of the Agency.

Bearing in mind aforementioned, above all relying on the experience of the accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the above documents of the Agency have been repeatedly updated and improved in accordance with the needs and current trends in the field of higher education and quality assurance. In this

regard, please note that the last revision and update of the above-mentioned documents was carried out at the end of 2022.

Taking into account the identified opportunities for improving the selection, nomination and appointment of experts in the process of accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Agency plans to carry out certain activities in the coming period, with the aim of further improving the mentioned area and the process of external evaluation, of which we highlight the following:

- a) Make a decision on announcing a public competition for the selection of experts with defined time periods (February-March, June-July, October-November) in which it is possible to submit applications from potential candidates, all with the aim of more frequent submission of applications from potential candidates and increasing the number of experts from all scientific fields and all categories on the List of Experts;
- b) Enable the nomination and appointment of experts who are on the lists of agencies with which there are signed agreements and the lists of agencies that are full members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR).

Considering the conflict of interest as one of the key factors for organizing and implementing a high-quality and independent process of accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, given the facts and the context in which higher education is organized in the country, the Agency will approach the audit with planned changes to the relevant documents existing definitions of conflicts of interest, all in order to satisfactorily implement the principles and purposes of quality assurance.

In order to ensure consistency in the reports of different experts' panels, certain actions will be realized.

HEA will introduce additional trainings on the topics related to writing reports, consistent interpretation of criteria based on the guidelines given in the Methodology for writing reports. In addition, we will continue to organize practical trainings for experts in order to support theoretical part of general trainings.

[5.4. Adaptation to the purpose of criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions, i.e. study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

Carrying out the activities arising from the mandated competences in the Framework Law, the Agency adopted the criteria for the accreditation of higher education institutions and the criteria for the accreditation of study programs in cooperation with stakeholders. The requirements of the mentioned criteria stipulate the establishment of a system of internal quality assurance of higher education institutions and study programs, which implies the establishment and implementation of strategic and operational documents and procedures on the basis of which higher education institutions continuously improve activities defined by their own vision and mission, which derive from the goals of higher education defined by the framework law. In addition, the requirements of the mentioned criteria prescribe the cyclicity of internal and external quality assurance, for the purpose of continuous improvement and development of the quality culture.

With the aim of achieving a common understanding of the criteria for accreditation, the Agency has created appropriate methodologies, on the basis of which the above-mentioned requirements of the criteria are additionally elaborated, and which are used in the accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programs by higher education institutions in self-evaluation procedures, as well as by independent panels of experts in external evaluation procedures.

Since its establishment, the Agency has been continuously revising the criteria for accreditation, in accordance with ESG changes in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and will continue with activities and harmonization of criteria with European standards and guidelines in the coming period.

5.1	Title	Establishing a legal framework for agency independence	
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the independence of the Steering Board of the Agency; • Provide a greater degree of consistency in the interpretation of the requirements of the prescribed criteria and opinions on the outcome of accreditation; • Improve complaints and appeals processes; • Improve the procedure for making recommendations; • Improve the coordinating role of the Agency and the system of implementation and monitoring of subsequent activities. 		
	Specific tasks	Responsible(s)	Timeline
1	Amendments to the Statute of the Agency	Agency Steering Board	Jun, 2024
2	Adopt an act improving the complaints and appeals procedure	Agency Steering Board	Jun, 2024
3	Adopt an act that improves the procedure for making a recommendation on accreditation	Agency Steering Board	December, 2024
4	With appropriate activities, improve the coordinating role of the Agency and provide support for the consistent implementation of subsequent activities	Agency, Competent educational authorities	December, 2024
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued practice of appointing representatives of students and representatives of business and practice to the Steering Board; • Appointed members of the Steering Board to the body for making recommendations on the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs; • Improved complaints and appeals procedures for all participants in the accreditation process; • A more significant coordinating role of the Agency in accreditation procedures; • Ensured support for consistent implementation of follow-up activities. 		
	Risks	Mitigation actions	
Weak interest in participating in the work of the Steering Board	By organizing and participating in various activities, encourage a more active role of stakeholders in the membership and work of the Steering Board		

Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Failure to pass appropriate acts or failure to act in accordance with the adopted documents of the Agency	Organize regular meetings with all stakeholders in order to highlight the importance of adopting and acting in accordance with the relevant acts of the Agency
Lack of understanding of the purpose and principles of ESG, as well as the importance of obtaining full membership status in ENQA and EQAR	Through appropriate activities, influence the development of awareness of the importance of highlighting the recognition of the domestic quality assurance system in EHEA, and membership in ENQA and EQAR

5.2		Title	Stakeholder involvement in external quality assurance	
Objectives		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the system of higher education and quality assurance, especially in the area of self-evaluation and external evaluation; Ensure greater involvement and competence of stakeholders in quality assurance Strengthen independence and consistency in various aspects of the accreditation process. 		
Specific tasks		Responsible(s)	Timeline	
1	Promote the importance of external quality assurance by motivating various representatives of stakeholders, at various events (organized gatherings at higher education institutions, business fairs, etc.)	- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance	Jun 2024/Continuously	
2	Hold regular meetings with representatives of competent educational authorities and the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina	- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance	December 2024/ Continuously	
Outcomes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different stakeholders are involved in various aspects of the quality assurance process, which contribute to the improvement of higher education in BiH 		
Risks		Mitigation actions		
Insufficient financial resources to promote the importance of the involvement of different stakeholders in quality assurance		Careful preparation of the budget in accordance with the identified needs.		
Insufficient commitment of certain stakeholders.		Intensive and continuous communication, as well as a customized approach		

5.3		Title	Experts in the accreditation process	
Objectives		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the appropriate number of experts from all scientific fields and categories; • Increase the number of international experts from the missing fields who can be engaged in accreditation procedures. 		
Specific tasks		Responsible(s)	Timeline	
1	Make a decision on more frequent announcements of public tenders for the selection of experts with defined time periods (February-March, June-July, October-November)	- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance	June 2024	
2	Make a decision (amendment of the document) on hiring experts who are not on the Agency's list of experts, but who are on the lists of agencies that are: full members of ENQA and EQAR, or with which the Agency has a cooperation agreement	- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency	June 2024	
Outcomes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhindered implementation of accreditation procedures in terms of ensuring a sufficient number of appropriate experts in expert panels. 		
Risks		Mitigation actions		
Insufficient information of candidates about published competitions		By organizing specific activities, strengthen awareness of the importance of the involvement of different categories of experts in the accreditation process; Dissemination of information adapted to different target groups.		
Non-adoption of acts that determine the possibility of choosing experts who are not on the Agency's List		Regular sessions of the Steering Board, where members are informed about the importance of making the necessary changes to existing documents, in order to ensure the smooth implementation of the accreditation process.		

5.4	Title		Adaptation to the purpose of criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions, i.e. study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the criteria for accreditation; • Implementation of adopted acts which additionally elaborate the requirements of the criteria; • Adopt quality standards 		
Specific tasks		Responsible(s)	Timeline
1	Analyse the application of existing criteria for accreditation and continuously monitor the development and adoption of new ESG	- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance	December 2024
2	Analysis of the application of Agency documents	- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency	December 2024
3	Analysis and revision of standards	- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency	December 2024
Outcomes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved criteria for accreditation • Full implementation of adopted acts • Adopted quality standards 	
Risks		Mitigation actions	
Failure to understand the requirements of the criteria, the purpose of adopted acts and the importance of quality standards		By organizing and participating in various activities with participants in the accreditation process, strengthen common understanding of the requirements of the prescribed criteria, the application of adopted acts and the importance of adopting quality standards	

6. Table of priority activities

Table overview of priority activities in the period 2024 - 2025 to meet the requirements for the Agency's application for admission to full ENQA membership

ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITIES CARRIERS/PARTICIPANTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION	GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITIES	IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE	LINK WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BICG³ ACTION PLAN
Adopt appropriate acts that more fully regulate objection and appeal procedures in all activities related to accreditation processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency - Competent educational authorities 	Improve complaints and appeals procedures in all steps of the accreditation process of higher education institutions and study programs	January - June 2024	YES, as part of identified ESG alignment needs
Adopt a decision on announcing a permanent public competition for the selection of experts from all scientific fields and all categories on the List of Experts, with defined time periods in which it is possible to submit applications of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency - Competent educational authorities 	Enable a continuous process of selection of experts on the List of Experts, which should contribute to a more intensive development of the accreditation process	January - June 2024	NO

³ The Action plan created within *Bologna Implementation Coordination Group (BICG)*, i.e. *Thematic Peer Group C on QA*, https://www.ehea.info/Upload/Action_plan_Peer_Group_C_on_QA_5_05_2023_1_.pdf

Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

potential candidates (February-March, June- July, October- November)				
---	--	--	--	--

ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITIES CARRIERS	GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITIES	IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE	LINK WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BICG ACTION PLAN
Adopt a decision on hiring experts who are not on the Agency's list of experts, but who are on the lists of agencies that are full members of ENQA and EQAR, or with which the Agency has a cooperation agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency 	Increase the number of international experts who can be engaged in accreditation procedures	January - June 2024	NO
Hold a regular meeting with representatives of the competent educational authorities and the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance 	Analyse and improve the functioning of the higher education system, and consider current issues of	January - June 2024	NO

Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competent educational authorities - Ministry of Civil Affairs 	accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs		
Adopt the Decision on Amendments to the Rulebook on Keeping the State Register of Accredited Higher Education Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance 	Make data from the State Register of accredited higher education institutions and study programs available to all subjects	January - June 2024	NO

ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITIES CARRIERS	GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITIES	IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE	LINK WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BICG ACTION PLAN
Adopt regulations on defining quality standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency 	Eliminate deficiencies in the quality of studies and higher education institutions	July - December 2024	YES, changes of the legal regulations regarding procedures, content and interpretation of criteria
Adopt or amend the Statute of the Agency and other acts in order to ensure a greater degree of independence, objectivity and consistency when making decisions within	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency 	By amending the Statute of the Agency and the Rules of Procedure of the Steering Board of the Agency, expand the competences of the Steering Board in terms of giving recommendations	January - June 2024	YES, as part of identified ESG alignment needs

Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

the competence of the Agency	- Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina	on accreditation based on the opinion of the expert panel.		
In the process of planning and adopting the Budget of the institutions of BiH for 2025, it is mandatory to plan the funds in the Budget of the Agency for 2025, which are needed for the preparation and submission of the application for full membership in ENQA	- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina - Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina	In the budget of the Agency for the year 2025, plan and provide the necessary funds for the implementation of activities on the preparation of the application for full membership in ENQA	July - December 2024	NO
ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITIES CARRIERS	GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITIES	IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE	LINK WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BICG ACTION PLAN
Participation in activities for the implementation of the project "Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG" (SEQA ESG II)	- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH - ENQA - Other Project participants	The aim of the mentioned project is to monitor the implementation of ENQA recommendation, i.e. determination of the challenges that are on the way to gaining full membership in this prestigious association, and all project activities are adapted to the needs of the agencies involved in its implementation	July - December 2024	YES, as a contribution to a clearer and more transparent external quality assurance process in accordance with ESG guidelines and with the aim of strengthening the level of international participation in external quality assurance

Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Make recommendations on the content and quality of self-evaluation reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Competent educational authorities - Higher Education Institutions 	The goal is a better understanding and interpretation of the content of the request for accreditation and a consistent and explicit interpretation of the fulfilment of the prescribed criteria	July - December 2024	NO
Make a recommendation on monitoring the implementation of follow-up activities of higher education institutions after the accreditation procedure has been carried out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency 	Improve the system for monitoring the implementation of follow-up activities, as part of the identified needs for alignment with ESG	July - December 2024	YES, as part of identified ESG alignment needs
ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITIES CARRIERS	GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITIES	IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE	LINK WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BICG ACTION PLAN
Amend and supplement the Agency's document <i>"Instructions on the appointment of a panel of experts"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency 	Ensure a better coordination role of the Agency, especially in terms of professional and technical support of the Agency during the procedure of the visit of the panel of experts to the higher education institution.	July - December 2024	YES, as part of identified ESG alignment needs

Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

<p>Organize a conference on higher education in BiH, with the participation of foreign and domestic experts and other interested parties on the topic: <i>"The state and perspectives of higher education in BiH in the European area of higher education"</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina - Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH - Competent educational authorities - Rector's Conference of BiH - Higher Education Institutions 	<p>The most important goals of the conference are: to confirm the high level of interest and responsibility of all stakeholders for the state of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina; point out the determination of BiH and all educational institutions for the processes of full integration into the European educational area and the absolute application of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) in the educational system of BiH.</p>	<p>July - December 2024</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>ACTIVITIES</p>	<p>ACTIVITIES CARRIERS</p>	<p>GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITIES</p>	<p>IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE</p>	<p>LINK WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BICG ACTION PLAN</p>
<p>Analyse the level of implementation of the Action Plan during 2024</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency 	<p>Evaluate the degree of fulfilment of all items and tasks from the Action Plan during 2024, as well as other operational activities</p>	<p>January - June 2025</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Activities on the implementation of the project "Supporting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of 	<p>Evaluate the results of the activities within the mentioned project in 2024</p>		<p>NO</p>

Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG" - SEQA ESG II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH - ENQA - Other Project participants 	and define priorities for 2025 in the process of fulfilling the prerequisites for full membership in ENQA	January - June 2025	
Hold a meeting of the Agency with representatives of the competent educational authorities and the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Competent educational authorities - Ministry of Civil Affairs 	Analyse the functioning of the higher education system in 2024, and consider the current issues of preparing the process of implementing assumptions for submitting an application for full membership of the Agency in ENQA	January - June 2025	NO

ACTIVITIES	ACTIVITIES CARRIERS	GOALS AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE ACTIVITIES	IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE	LINK WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BICG ACTION PLAN
Initiate the procedure for amendments to the Framework Law on Higher Education in BiH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Ministry of Civil Affairs 	Access the amendments to the Framework Law on Higher Education in BiH in accordance with ENQA recommendations from 2017	January - June 2025	NO
Appoint a work team and activity coordinator for the preparation of the self-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agency for Development of 	Ensure the preparation of a mandatory attachment to	July - December 2025	NO

Action plan for improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina

<p>evaluation report of the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina</p>	<p>Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency</p>	<p>the Agency's request for full membership in ENQA</p>		
<p>Appoint a work team to carry out activities on the preparation and submission of applications for full membership in ENQA</p>	<p>- Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance - Steering Board of the Agency</p>	<p>To fulfil all the prerequisites for a credible application and the acquirement of full membership in ENQA through the implementation of all the mentioned activities from the Action Plan, through the implementation of other regular activities of the Agency, and especially with the full participation of the Agency in the implementation of the project "Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG" (SEQA ESG II), which is managed by ENQA and whose completion is planned for the end of 2025</p>	<p>July - December 2025</p>	<p>NO</p>

7. Conclusions

By creating the Action Plan for the improvement of quality assurance in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the process of preparation for full membership in ENQA, the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance, as a reliable and experienced partner, continues to express its commitment to the implementation of the project and the achievement of the goals defined by the project, but also the undisputed aspirations and determination to fully harmonize the standards in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European area of higher education. It is important to note that all project activities are a great support in the preparation for applying for full membership in ENQA and EQAR and that the Agency will continue to actively participate in all planned activities of the SEQA ESG II project. It is expected that with the completion of this project in 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina will achieve the set strategic goal and fulfil all essential prerequisites for full membership in ENQA.

The Agency is an institution whose competences are prescribed by the Framework Law on Higher Education, and it will certainly act simultaneously within its competences, aware of the challenges and complexity of the system in which it operates, but also the dynamics of upcoming activities and expected accreditations of higher education institutions and study programs during 2024 and 2025. In this sense, the Agency strives to make constant improvements in its daily work, as well as to implement and improve all its activities in the spirit of the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The management of the Agency expresses its full commitment to implement, within the existing and available capacities and competences, all the activities listed in this document, according to the given plan.

Please note that according to ENQA's point of view, the evaluation of the fulfilment of the conditions for full membership in ENQA is based on the assessment of the entire quality system of higher education and the full application of ESG standards in higher education, and we hope for the support of all responsible entities.

Overall fulfilment of ESG standards, as confirmation of the quality of the higher education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, should be one of the priorities not only of the Agency, but also of all competent authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is why it is extremely important that all other actors recognize the importance of these processes, support for the SEQA ESG II project and activities, and undertake their obligations prescribed by their competences, and implement the Agency's recommendations. The involvement of state authorities is of essential importance for the successful implementation of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance at all levels in order to ensure the removal of all legal or other by-laws obstacles for the smooth development of the quality assurance process so that higher education institutions in those processes have all the necessary support and basis for smooth and equal participation in the European area of higher education.