



Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education

SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR 2019

March, 2020.

Summary – developing a quality culture in higher education in Montenegro

Having regard to Montenegro striving to rest its development path upon knowledge, skills and competences, higher education is the essential part of social-economic development of our country. The purpose of higher education is to prepare a student for civil society and future career, to contribute to employment, personal development, by creating the base of knowledge and stimulating scientific work and innovations. Therefore, the quality must take into account the different aspects of higher education from a perspective of all of its participants. The quality mainly results from interaction of teachers, students and institutional setting for learning and the quality assurance must ensure such setting where contents of the programme, learning and resources all comply with their purpose.

Quality is not an act, it is a habit (Aristotle). Quality of anything, even the higher education system does not come by chance, but is a result of work, capacities and readiness of all of the system participants to give their own contribution in making the system more credible. Quality measurement is the issue of standard used as a benchmark to assess if something bears quality or not. The quality assurance system of higher education in Montenegro is carried out in compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines - ESG (Law on Higher Education, Article 13a, paragraph 1), adopted at the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in 2015. Committing to measure the quality of higher education with regard to European Standards and Guidelines, we have accepted to enforce them comprehensively and consistently.

Although established by the Law on Higher Education in November 2017 (hereinafter referred to as: Law)¹, the Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as Agency or ACQAHE) became operational and functional in September 2018. Year 2019 was a year full of great challenges for the Management and employees of the Agency. Large number of existing study programmes that had to be reaccredited due to the amendments to the Law of 2017, large number of new study programmes awaiting the accreditation since 2017, as well as reaccreditation of all seven higher education institutions, can be considered as test for work of the Agency that did not have a single employee with previous experience in quality assurance.

HOW MANY INSTITUTIONS AND STUDY PROGRAMMES ARE THERE IN MONTENEGRO?

282 study programmes

4 Universities:

University of Montenegro,
Mediterranean University,
University of Donja Gorica
University Adriatic

3 independent faculties:

Faculty of Business Management Bar
Faculty of state and european studies
Faculty of Montenegrin language and literature

In 2019, 51 external evaluation procedures were carried out, accreditation of study programmes, 49 of which were accredited, and two were rejected. Ten higher education institutions filed the reaccreditation request¹ (one filed in 2019), three of which were reaccredited, and evaluation procedures for the remaining seven started in 2019 and will be finished in 2020. In addition to the accreditation of study programmes and reaccreditation of institutions, beginning of 2019 the Law was supplemented by the provision that accreditation of higher education programme for lifelong learning also falls under the competence of the Agency. Considering that study programmes and institutions were evaluated by external experts, the Agency opened a call for experts throughout a year and updating the lists quarterly. The call to students was published in September 2019 and gathered mainly the students from within the country and smaller number from abroad. In 2019, the Agency had the list of 163 experts and 10 students and its disposal.

RESULTS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN 2019.

65 EXTERNAL EVALUATION PROCEDURES:

- 49 ACCREDITED STUDY PROGRAMMES
- 3 REACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES:

- ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP IN ENQA
- 2 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGREEMENTS
- 5 NEW ACTIVE PROJECTS
- 4 ORGANIZED TRAINING

International recognisability of the Agency is one of the priority objectives of its work. Cooperation with European higher education institutions, other national agencies and participation in the projects with local and international partners is the only way the Agency generates knowledge and experience in quality assurance and in cooperation with international colleagues and partners for the purposes of improving the quality of Montenegrin higher education system. In June 2019, ACQAHE became the associate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA), which opened the door for consultations and participation in the working meetings of its members. It also signed two Cooperation Agreements with the Agencies from Croatia and Serbia. Only in 2019, the Agency became the partner in five international projects, while the reply to three applied for in 2019 will be obtained in 2020. Representatives of the Agency are active members of the Government working bodies, giving their contribution to strategic solutions of the system of higher education, science and research.

The Agency has a research component in its work and thereby the intention to develop the analytic capacities to be used for making policies in the system of providing higher education quality assurance and wider.

In 2019, besides intense cooperation with the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions, the Agency set up cooperation with international institutions (Chapter 3), and also with local ones such as: Ministry of Science, Erasmus plus office in Montenegro, Office of the Council of Europe in Montenegro, Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro, Employers Federation, and students' associations. In the last year work was done on significant documents that promoted the work and results of the Agency or were written with the intention to promote that work in future:

- Strategy of higher education quality assurance 2020-2025.(Draft);
- Contribution to the Progress Report for 2019 in a part regarding quality assurance;
- Text for Eurydice² website on quality assurance of higher education in Montenegro;

WHAT IS THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN MONTENEGRO?

1. ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMMES
2. REACCREDITATION OF INSTITUTIONS
3. ACCREDITATION OF LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME

¹ One reaccreditation request refers to the University, one to an independent Faculty, while five requests refer to the reaccreditation of Faculty of Adriatic University, as well as independent institutions.

² Network of countries participating in Erasmus+ projects

- Contribution for reporting under the Action plan for Chapter 23;
- Action plan of the Agency as a compositional part of the Action plan in the level of all EHEA countries .

Year 2019 was intense and challenging, but, as for the acquisition of knowledge and experience, it opened the issues constituting challenges to the future work of the Agency and the system of higher education in Montenegro. They are:

1. **The issue of recognisability of the Agency within the state administration system.** The Agency is not recognized within the state administration system through legal acts, although its work, governing the competitive system of higher education, is of the public and strategic interest and significance.
2. **The issue of sequence in meeting the conditions for license and accreditation.** According to the Law, when being established, the institution is first granted the accreditation and only then meeting of minimum requirements for the license is checked. Initial accreditation should be a part of the licensing procedure and only after the institution meets the minimum requirements, its study programmes are evaluated. After meeting both of these requirements, the institution obtains the license and can start its operation.
3. **The issue of independence of the Agency.** ESG clearly define the standards of independence which, at its current set up, the Agency does not meet. These are: **operational independence and independence in the decision making.** Violation of the standard reflects in the fact that the Agency does not adopt the act on the evaluation procedures, but the Ministry, and Director of the Agency elects the members of the expert committee and makes decision on accreditations/reaccreditations, instead of independent expert body.
4. **The issue of complaints to the decision on accreditation/reaccreditation.** Legal framework is now not defining a possibility of setting up the appeals commission within the evaluation procedures, although the ESG clearly define that standard.
5. **The issue if the reaccreditation of institution includes the accreditation of study programmes, and if yes, does it include all of them or just a part** is the issue that is not defined by the Law, which is necessary to define in order to provide the continuity in quality assessment of study programmes.
6. **The issue of participation of students and business in expert commissions.** According to the ESG the student must be an equal member of the expert commission for the study programme evaluation, which is not provided for in the Law right now.
7. **The issue of information system of higher education.** There is no unique database of the higher education institutions and information system to support it. Existence of such database would make the quality assurance system more efficient, productive and would constitute the basis for the decision making on the higher education policies and assuring its quality.
8. **The issue of electronic platform for the evaluation of study programmes and institutions.** Quality assurance is done in „hard copy“, instead digitally and assisted by electronic platform that would enable more quality assurance process in all respects.
9. **The issue of IT and research capacities.** Agency does not have the IT and research staff.

Why is it important to enforce the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)?

First of all, because the Law refers to them (Article 13a, paragraph 1) and because at Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in 2015 Montenegro adopted the ESG with other members of the EHEA.

By meeting the ESG, Montenegrin higher education system obtains the verification of its quality, i.e. that it is trustworthy for the rest of Europe and the world. That verification fosters mobility and internationalization, recognition of qualifications, study programmes and other operating results of higher education institutions. The verification is obtained by membership of the Agency in ENQA and by registration into the European Register of Agencies for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (EQAR).

QUALITY = TRUST

WHO IS PERFORMING THE QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION?

INSTITUTION PERFORMS INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IS PERFORMED BY:

- **ACQAHE** : REACCREDITATION OF INSTITUTIONS, ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMMES AND LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMMES
- **ENQA** PERFORMS ACCREDITATION OF ACQAHE

Purpose of enforcing ESG is dual: responsibility and improvement. When the system achieves both, it will create the trust in operation of higher education institutions. Therefore the successful quality assurance, through enforcement of ESG, provides the verification of the quality of work to the institution and the public, and also provides recommendations for improving the work. That is how the trust in the system is built and reached and how the quality culture is developed and accepted by all: by students, scientific-teaching staff, to the University Management.

These are the principles the enforcement of ESG is based on:

- Higher education institutions are responsible for quality assurance of their work.
- Quality assurance is sensible to diversity of higher education systems, institutions, study programmes and students.
- Quality assurance fosters the development of quality culture.
- Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students and all other participants and the society.

Montenegrin system of higher education is formally a part of EHEA, but in order to essentially be it, it is necessary that ENQA verifies the enforcement of European Standards and Guidelines and the Agency to become a member of this association and registers with EQAR.

ESG is a collection of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. Based on these standards every country develops its own national standards and criteria. Internal quality assurance is done by the institutions. External quality evaluation of institutions and study programmes is done by the Agency, and external evaluation of Agency is done by ENQA by encompassing the entire system of internal and external quality assurance.

ACQAHE evaluates meeting of standards in operation of higher education institutions, and ENQA evaluates meeting of standards in operation of the Agency. Enforcement of ESG is evaluated by a team of experts selected by ENQA from different European countries whose agencies are registered with EQAR. Experts perform the evaluation of quality of work of the national agency under the ESG. The process is long and demanding. It starts with the

application, at least two years following the operating functionality of the Agency. For many West-European countries with centuries long university tradition, that process has lasted five to six years³.

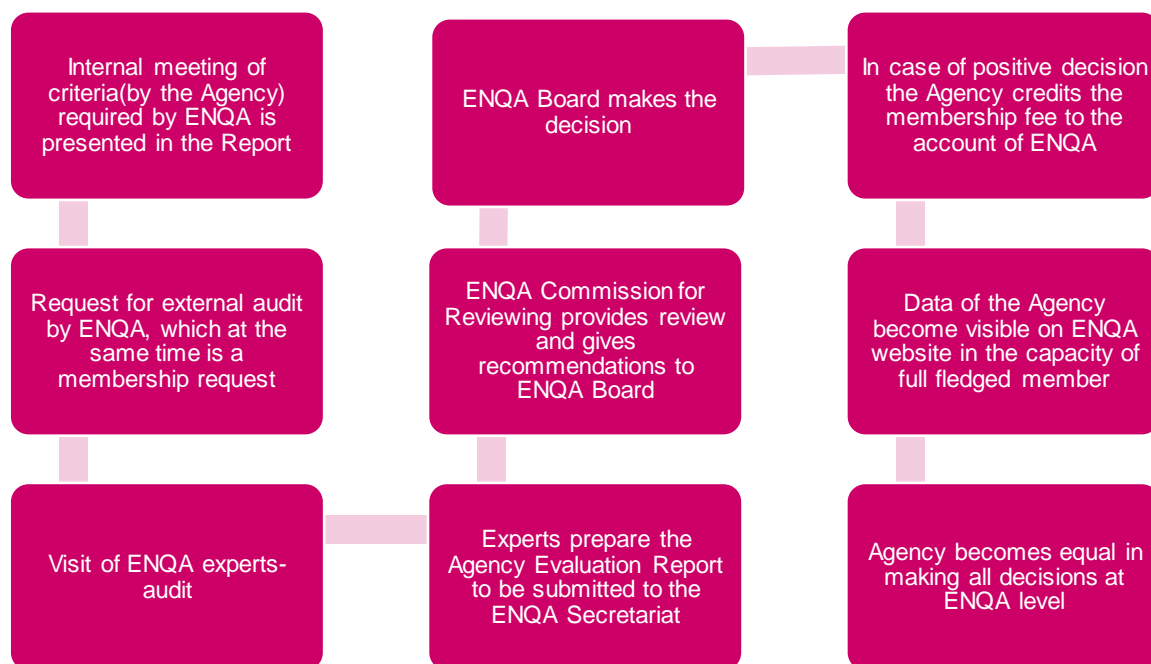


Figure 1. Diagram of the quality evaluation procedure of ACQAHE by ENQA

ESG comprise of three parts which together make the total of 24 standards (standards are named in Attachment, Table 1.1), which are essentially mutually connected, complement each other and together, as a whole, make the basis of the European Framework of Quality Assurance:

- I part – Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance
- II part – Standards and guidelines for external quality assurance of higher education institutions
- III part – Standards and guidelines for Agencies for Quality Assurance

³ Countries whose Agencies for Quality Assurance are not registered with EQAR are: Slovakia, Luxembourg, Malta, Czech Republic, Liechtenstein, Turkey, Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. Agencies of Serbia and Kosovo were in the EQAR list, but lost it by not observing the ESG, while some countries like Malta are currently undergoing the evaluation procedure by ENQA.