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# ENQA AGENCY REVIEW: AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (HEA)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance BiH (HEA) has been an affiliate of ENQA since 2010. It has asked ENQA to be reviewed against the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (the ESG) in 2014 and waited with the external review until the revised ESG were adopted in 2015.

This review is for the purpose of determining whether HEA is substantially compliant with the ESG and thus meets the criteria for membership of ENQA, and the requirement for registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The review process involved a self-assessment done by HEA and a three-day site visit of the ENQA appointed panel in Banja Luka in May 2017.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) introduced substantial reforms in its higher education system as a consequence of joining the Bologna Process in 2003. One such aspect is the establishment of HEA in 2008 as one of only three bodies at the national level in the field of higher education.

HEA is performing several tasks. Most important is its part in the accreditation processes of higher education institutions and soon it is predicted to start with accreditation of study programmes. HEA shares responsibility of the accreditation processes with the 12 educational authorities in the country. HEA is also producing recommendations to the authorities on the criteria for establishment and closure of institutions and their licensing. Furthermore, it is one of the few organisations in the country with a capacity and access to information about the state of the higher education system and is a key provider of different analyses. And finally, it is heavily engaged in international projects and activities.

An important part of understanding HEA's context is BiH's state governance model, which has three levels of governance (state, entity and canton) and equal representation of the 'three constitutive peoples' (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) at the state level. The multi-level governance is reflected in HEA having only part responsibility in accreditation processes. And the 'three peoples' representation is reflected in the composition of the Steering Board, the Management, staff structure and expert committees.

HEA is funded from the state budget. Complementary to that were funds from numerous international aid and development projects with sources like the EU, Council of Europe, and UNESCO, among others. HEA has 22 employees, who are highly committed, motivated and professional.

In the light of the evidence provided by the documentation and the interviews at the site visit, the panel considers HEA a well-established quality assurance agency, recognized by all stakeholders. Given the short history of the BiH as an independent country marked by conflict, war and ethnic tensions, it should be mentioned that HEA has an important role for the improvement of higher education in BiH and the consolidation of disagreements in the complex political reality. HEA is seen as the connection between different levels of the government, universities, and employers.

The panel found HEA's performance against the ESG the following:

- Fully compliant: 2.4, 3.2, 3.4, and 3.7.
- Substantially compliant: 2.1, 2.5, 2.6, 3.1, 3.5, and 3.6.
- Partially compliant: 2.2, 2.3, 2.7, and 3.3.

The panel hopes that its analyses and recommendations will support HEA in its efforts to enhance the quality and raise the impact of its quality assurance activities.

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance BiH (Agencija za razvoj visokog obrazovanja i osiguranje kvaliteta, HEA) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted between February and August 2017.

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is HEA's first external review, the panel was expected to pay particular attention to the policies, procedures, and criteria in place, being aware that full evidence of concrete results in all areas may not be available at this stage.

The agency is also applying to be registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

### REVIEW PROCESS

The 2017 external review of HEA was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of HEA was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Tibor Szántó (Chair), former Secretary General, Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC), Hungary; ENQA nominee
- Janja Komljenović (Secretary), Senior Research Associate, Lancaster University, UK; ENQA nominee
- Dejan Blagojević, Professor, Director of The College of applied Technical Sciences Niš, Serbia; EURASHE nominee
- Rebecca Maxwell Stuart, PhD student (Business Management/Higher Education) at Heriot-Watt University, UK; ESU nominee

Agnė Grajauskienė, Reviews Manager at ENQA, acted as coordinator of the entire process. The panel would like to thank for her valuable help and contribution both in logistics and content matters.

The review process comprised of the nomination of the panel members, production of the agency's self-assessment report (SAR), site-visit of the panel, and production of the external review report by the panel, which was sent to HEA for factual error checking.

The panel has carefully studied the SAR and other available documents and information before the site-visit. At the visit the panel has verified the information provided before and collected a substantial amount of additional information. It has reached consensus in judgment on compliance for each of the ESG by the end of the site visit.

Finally, this external report is the result of the review process and was drafted by the review secretary in cooperation with the chair and panel members. It is submitted to the ENQA board for further consideration.

### **Self-assessment report**

The panel has received a 64-page (excluding annexes) SAR two months before the site-visit. SAR has clearly listed relevant legal and other HEA documents, most of which the panel could retrieve from the internet. After studying the available material, the panel asked HEA for further clarification and additional documents. HEA has promptly answered and sent the requested files and information.

SAR was finalised by HEA's Committee for quality assurance, which became a permanent body of the agency in April 2016. It consists of four members, who represent four organisational units of the agency. However, the process of preparing SAR lasted longer, namely from April 2014 when the agency formed a nine-member team for self-assessment who started working on SAR and prepared its first draft in August 2015. In addition, the process of preparing SAR benefitted from the input by the IPA Twinning Project 'Strengthening the institutional capacity for quality assurance' (September 2013-September 2015). SAR was subject to stakeholder consultation, which was organised through several events held between March 2016 and February 2017.

The panel found the SAR to be detailed, open and honest in that it proved to reflect self-critical attitude and fair self-evaluation process. It has also followed the ENQA structure and guidelines. On the other hand the panel found that it was at times redundant and repetitive, which led to unnecessary length. Moreover, SAR was at times confusing with many references to various documents while some had functioning links and others were left without any further information. The panel thought it would be better to include a list of all cited documents in an Appendix to the SAR.

As an unusual element in agency reviews the panel studied the SAR of another agency, i.e. the Republika Srpska's agency HEAARS (or RS HEAA), which was finalised in January 2017 and made available on HEAARS website. The reason for this is the complex HE and QA system of BiH, the interdependencies, and the differences in interpretations of legal regulations and roles and power of authority of the two agencies working in the same HE system. These differences have some impacts on the operation and ESG compliance of HEA as well.

### **Site visit**

The panel visited HEA between 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 in the agency's premises in Banja Luka. The panel met the following representatives of HEA and external stakeholders:

- HEA's Steering Board
- HEA's Committee for Quality Assurance
- HEA's Sector for Quality Assurance
- HEA's Sector for Development of HE
- HEA's Sector for legal, personnel, financial and general affairs as well as representatives of the management cabinet
- HEA's leadership
- HEA's experts / reviewers
- Representative of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH and representatives of ministries of BiH Cantons
- Representative of the Department for HE of Brčko District BiH

- Representatives of accredited HEIs and QA officers of HEIs
- Representatives of HEAARS
- Representatives of students
- Representatives of stakeholders: NGOs and employers

The panel also had a short Skype session with the former director of the agency, Mr. Husein Nanić.

HEA's staff and external stakeholders, whom the panel had a chance to meet, are representative of HEA's activities. Thus the panel feels confident that it has managed to verify or clarify the information that it has gathered prior to the visit. The panel is sincerely grateful for their time and availability for the interviews.

The panel greatly appreciates HEA's support before and throughout the site-visit. The premises and the logistical arrangements were good and adapted to the tasks of the panel. The information and documents requested before the visit and onsite were provided quickly and clearly, and the request for extra sessions for clarifications with particular staff was immediately accepted. The panel confirms HEA's commitment to provide answers to all types of requests as well as their kindness and professionalism throughout the process.

Finally, the support of the ENQA coordinator before, during and after the visit has been highly appreciated by the panel.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

### HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Higher education (HE) system in BiH consists of universities and colleges, both of which can be public or private. Universities are research and education institutions, offer academic degrees in all three cycles and have to guarantee a variety of disciplines, which is measured in them having to offer at least five study programmes in at least three different disciplinary fields. Colleges award first cycle degrees and can offer one study programme in one disciplinary field.

At the moment, there are 46 licensed HEIs in BiH. Out of those, eight are public universities and two public colleges while the others are private. Federation of BiH has six public and 19 private HEIs, Republic of Srpska (RS) has 17 private and four public HEIs and there is no official record of the number of HEIs in Brčko District (BD). However, the panel found at the site visit that there are apparently two private universities and one college in BD. In addition, three public universities have their branches there, namely the University of Sarajevo, the University of East Sarajevo and the University of Mostar. The number of students in BiH was 94,090 in the academic year 2015/16, which is the latest available information.

HE is organized in line with the Bologna Process principles, i.e. in three cycles as illustrated in Figure 1 below. First cycle consists of three to four years of undergraduate study or 180 – 240 ECTS. Second cycle is one to two years long or 60 – 120 ECTS; while the third cycle is a doctoral degree lasting 3 years or 180 ECTS. Medicine is defined as an exception. BiH has developed its qualification framework and drafted self-certification report to the QF-EHEA in 2017 with the support of the Tempus project (BHQFHE).

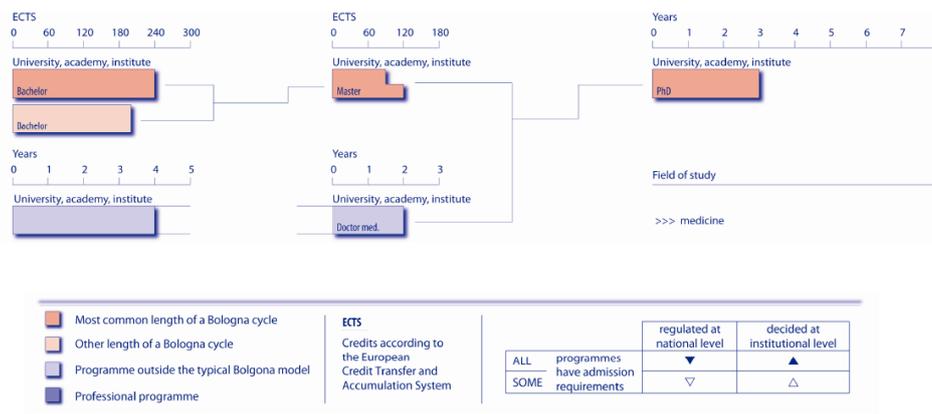


Figure 1. HE study structure in BiH. Source: Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (2012). Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, p. 2.

HE system in BiH cannot be understood separate to the state governance. Although HE has a long tradition in the BiH territory dating back for centuries, and the biggest public universities existing and working for decades, the HE system as a whole was in flux since 1991 with the start of the latest Balkan war. The Dayton agreement signed at the end of 1995 introduced a special tri-partite governance of the 'three constitutive peoples' of BiH – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – which has an effect in all spheres of public governance to date. As we will discuss in more detail later, the equal representation of the three peoples is required in all public institutions at the state level and so also in the working of HEA. Moreover, the special governance arrangement allows only very limited issues to be determined nationally and leaves competence for most issues to the BiH entities.

BiH is defined in its Constitution as an independent state consisting of two entities: "the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS). Brčko District (BD) has been established as a separate administrative unit under the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the Constitution of FBiH, this entity is [further] made up of ten cantons: Una-Sana Canton (I), Posavina Canton (II), Tuzla Canton (III), Zenica-Doboj Canton (IV), Bosnia-Podrinje Canton (V), Central Bosnia Canton (VI), Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (VII), West Herzegovina Canton (VIII), Sarajevo Canton (IX) and Herceg-Bosnia Canton (X)" (BHQE Tempus Project report, 2017, p.9). It is important to note that not all of the 10 cantons have HEIs in their territory at the moment.

Consequently, the competence over education (including HE) lies with RS, the ten cantons of FBiH and BD. As a result, there are 12 competent educational authorities (CEA) in the country, each responsible for its own education system working in its territory. Therefore, the 12 CEAs have their own ministries of education (in the case of BD, it is a department), education legislation, education funding arrangements and budgets, and the rights and obligations to govern their education systems. Hence, there is no education ministry at the state level. However, the state Ministry of Civil Affairs is responsible for coordinating activities in the field of education, harmonization of entity legislations and for the national internationalisation strategy. In addition, a Conference of Ministers of Education was established as a coordination mechanism, which consists of all 12 CEAs in BiH and the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

Framework Law on Higher Education (FLHE) at the state level was adopted in 2007 for the first time in the independent BiH. FLHE defines the basic structure, standards and principles of the HE system, with which the 12 mentioned HE laws, need to be harmonised. FLHE is rather loose in order to allow

the 12 CEAs to exercise authority over their own systems. There are only three institutions at the state level that were established by the FLHE, which are the HEA, the Rectors Conference of BiH and the Centre for Information and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (acting as ENIC/NARIC).

The panel found that the 12 separate laws are not always harmonised with the FLHE in terms of content, division of authorities, timeframe of expected actions, and other issues. Not all 12 CEAs follow the responsibility given to them by the FLHE. Consequently, there are numerous problems that HE actors face since there can be missing legal framework depending in which part of BiH they are based. For example, it happens that one canton harmonised its legislation while another did not, or that they are harmonised in different ways depending on different issues. The panel has learned that because BD did not harmonise its legislation, the HEIs based in that territory cannot even go through the accreditation process with the Department for Higher Education of BD and HEA because there is no legal foundation in their territory to do so, although the FLHE predicts that all HEIs in BiH must undergo accreditation. Moreover, the Ministry of Civil Affairs has no means to react; there is no implementation mechanism to compel all CEAs to follow the FLHE.

The panel learned that the context in which HEA operates is thus not only complex in terms of the multifaceted state constitution, governance and division of authorities, but is also rather unfortunate since HEA cannot always fulfil its obligations that it was given by the FLHE due to the legislative arrangements of the 12 CEAs.

Another peculiarity of the BiH HE system is that it has two separate evaluation processes, namely licensing and accreditation. CEAs are responsible for deciding and issuing both of these. FLHE predicts that both are obligatory, however, at the same time it states that HEIs can legally work and award degrees if they are licensed. The responsibility to initiate the accreditation process lies with HEIs and if they don't start the process, not all of the 12 laws prescribe consequences. In other words, a HEI needs a licence to start working, but then it is left without consequences if it does not start with accreditation process in due time in most of the 12 jurisdictions. For this reason there is a discrepancy in the number of licenced HEIs and the number of accredited HEIs in the country (see below).

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The current external QA system in BiH originates in the FLHE adopted in 2007 although some elements have existed before at the lower levels of governance (the 12 CEAs) and at the level of HEIs. International projects and international aid had an important impact on HE and QA systems in BiH in terms of capacity and funding. Most of the QA and HE arrangements, rules and documents were developed through internationally funded and coordinated projects with foreign experts. In 2007 the BiH Council of Ministers adopted two documents: *Standards and Guidelines for QA in BiH*, which was the first such document and was based on the ESG; and the *Recommendations for implementing quality assurance in HE in BiH*. Both of these documents were prepared within a project by the Council of Europe and the European Commission.

Today there are two separate external evaluation procedures: licensing and accreditation. Licensing is the process of determining the fulfilment of minimum standards for establishing HEIs and study programmes and is essentially a permission to work as a HEI. It is considered and issued by CEAs and each CEA prescribes its own standards in the form of explicit numeric requirements related to

human, material and technical resources. HEA does not actively participate in this process, but it does prepare a general recommendation to CEAs on the procedure and criteria of licensing.

Accreditation is a periodic external evaluation activity, which determines whether licensed HEIs work in line with the set standards and criteria. HEA actively participates in this process although the final accreditation decision is made by CEAs.

FLHE prescribes accreditation of HEIs and study programmes and instructs competencies to HEA and CEAs. In 2007 the transitional provisions of the law were that all CEAs will harmonise their laws with FLHE in 6 months after the FLHE adoption and that all HEIs will undergo institutional accreditation in two years. This was later prolonged for additional two years, i.e. 2011. There are 46 (+3 in BD) licensed HEIs, out of which 27 are accredited and five were in the process of accreditation at the moment of this review. Therefore, there are 14 (+3) HEIs that have not yet started accreditation although they should have done so based on the FLHE. (As the panel learned during the visit, in BD one HEI asked for accreditation still in 2015 but the BD Department for HE did not start the procedure due to the lack of appropriate BD regulations.) In the meantime CEAs issued licences and temporary accreditation to all existing HEIs. Therefore, technically speaking all 46 (+3) HEIs work legally and issue valid degrees. CEAs individually keep registers of licensed HEIs in their territory while HEA keeps the state register of accredited HEIs.

It is hard to determine where exactly is the problem of why some HEIs and corresponding CEAs have not yet started the accreditation process although the FLHE prescribes obligatory accreditation. The panel found several potential reasons for this at the site visit, such as some HEIs being afraid of not fulfilling the accreditation standards, CEAs not prescribing consequences for non-accreditation, CEAs potentially allowing existence of those HEIs for political reasons or economic reasons for benefits to the region, and so on. Based on the BiH governance arrangement, nobody at the state level can react to this issue. There are only few 'softer' measures that are possible. HEA and the state Ministry of Civil Affairs have, therefore, managed to achieve a practice where in public institutions/organisations only those graduates from accredited HEIs can be employed as civil servants, which is also stated in the FLHE (article 54). The state is the biggest employer in the country. The panel was also told at the site visit that ENIC/NARIC international network is being attentive to accreditation when dealing with recognition of degrees from Bosnian HEIs and therefore accreditation is supposedly having an effect on student or graduate mobility. However, the panel found all licensed HEIs on the Bosnian ENIC/NARIC website listed as recognised HEIs regardless of their accreditation status (see: <http://www.cip.gov.ba/index.php/en/higher-education-institutions>, last accessed 29 May 2017).

Regarding study programme accreditation, FLHE did not prescribe a time frame in which programmes should be accredited. HEA prepared first criteria for programme accreditation in 2013; however, it hasn't started programme accreditation yet. The criteria for study programme accreditation were amended in 2016 based on the revised ESG.

HEA was involved in two projects that conducted pilot accreditations of study programmes. Within the first project (ESABIH), 33 first and second cycle programmes at public universities were evaluated from 2011 to 2012. Within the second project (EQADE), 8 third cycle programmes at public universities were evaluated in 2014.

All in all, QA in BiH is quite complex and including many actors and authorities. There are different rules for licensing HEIs depending on CEAs albeit the panel was told that they are rather similar. HEA is competent to provide recommendation on the procedure of issuing the licence and on criteria for

licensing, but these recommendations are rather generic and procedural. For example, they state that CEAs should prescribe the number of staff or library units, but they do not recommend the specific number. In effect, each of the 12 systems is technically different.

Regarding accreditation, it is hard to determine the ownership of the process. The responsibility for starting the process lies with HEIs, but CEAs are competent to receive the application for accreditation and issue the final accreditation decision. HEA coordinates the review phase within the accreditation process that CEAs are at the end responsible for. The final act is enlisting HEIs in the state register of accredited HEIs, which is managed by HEA. The panel finds that there are many back and forth moves in the accreditation process, which seem confusing at the first glance. However, they were created in line with the complex BiH structure where entity level competences need to be absolutely respected as well as in line with the 'three peoples' representation and with keeping numerous actors involved in the processes, which is balancing the potential political and ethnical tensions.

## AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

FLHE defined HEA in 2007 and a year later HEA was officially established. The director and members of the steering board (SB) were nominated in the same year while first staff was employed in 2009. HEA was developing necessary rules, procedures and documents since 2009, became an ENQA affiliate in 2010, and started with institutional evaluations in 2012.

Like already mentioned, numerous projects were conducted in the past decade that financed the development of QA rules and documents, first evaluations of HEIs and pilot evaluations of study programmes, organisation of workshops, seminars and trainings, exchange of staff, and so on. HEA staff, evaluation experts, HEIs and HE community more generally benefitted from these activities in terms of capacity building. Today, HEA is able to independently take over financially and professionally the tasks of QA for the BiH HE system although it still shows high commitment to the EHEA, BP and international collaboration.

### HEA'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

HEA is defined as an independent institution by law. As a public institution it has to obey legislation relevant for all public bodies in the country, which has an impact on its organisation and structure. We discuss this in great detail under ESG 3.3 below.

HEA is structured as follows:

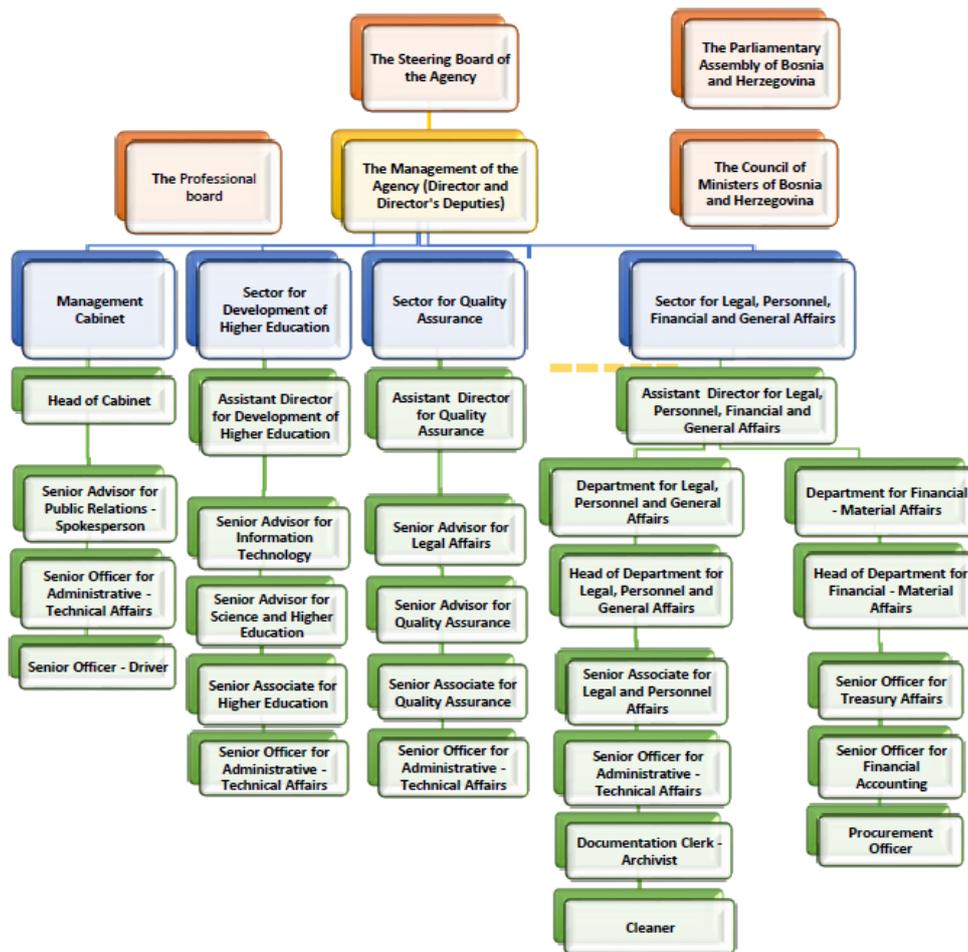


Figure 2. HEA’s organisational structure (Source: SAR, p. 17).

HEA’s bodies defined by law are the steering board (SB) and the director.

**SB** is HEA’s highest decision making body and consists of ten members, three from each of the three constituent peoples and one member from among the ‘others’. The ‘others’ can refer to anybody else, either some other minorities, foreigners residing in BiH, or a category, to which they all agree to be ‘others’. The logic of the SB composition is, therefore, not stakeholder composition or QA experts, but the logic of three peoples like with all the other public and political institutions in BiH at the state level. To be fair, the SB is not making accreditation decisions (these are made by CEAs) and not even the recommendations for accreditation of HEIs and the decisions on registration (these are made by the director of HEA). But it is adopting the accreditation criteria and recommendations for licensing procedures as well as any other HEA rules. SB members are elected by the BiH Parliamentary Assembly and have a term of three years. By law, 50% of members have to be university professors. In practice, currently all of them are university professors.

SB competences as defined by HEA statute are:

- a) adopts the Statute of the Agency and submits it for approval to the CM BiH;
- b) approves the regulations proposed by the Agency of its competence in the development of higher education and quality assurance, as defined in Articles 6 and 7 of this Statute;
- c) ensures that the Agency's work shall be in accordance with the responsibilities set out in the FLHE in BiH;
- d) ensures that the Agency's work shall be in accordance with the policy of priorities of the CM and the PA BiH in the reform of higher education in BiH,
- e) adopts the Agency Work Program for the period of the next calendar year, no later than 31st January of the current year, which regulates in detail the activities, jobs and funding of the Agency;
- f) monitors the implementation of the Agency Work Program;
- g) rules on appeals against the decision on annulment of accreditation;
- h) determines the types of services provided by the Agency and reimbursement of the amount of compensation for services rendered;
- i) before 31st March each year adopts the report on the work of the Agency in the previous year to be submitted to the CM BiH;
- j) delivers an annual written report to the PA BiH on its work;
- k) performs other duties in accordance with the FLHE and the Statute.
- l) The SB meets at least four times a year. SB makes decisions by a majority vote of the total number of votes, provided that such majority includes at least two thirds of representatives of each constituent people.

The **director** competences as defined by HEA statute are to:

- a) organize and manage the work of the Agency;
- b) represent the Agency in the country and abroad;
- c) be responsible for legality of the work of the Agency;
- d) participate in the work of the Steering Board without the right to vote;
- e) adopt general acts of the Agency in accordance with the law;
- f) propose rulebooks and other general acts, from the jurisdiction of the Agency, to the Steering Board;
- g) decides on the recruitment and assignment of civil servants and employees to jobs and tasks in accordance with the law;
- h) submit reports to the Council of Ministers and the Steering Board, at least twice a year;
- i) performs other tasks stipulated by this Statute, the Framework Law on Higher Education and other regulations.

The director has two deputy directors and each of the three of them must come from the different three constituent peoples. They are appointed by the Council of Ministers of BiH for four years following a public competition. The three of them are defined as the management of HEA. The director is responsible to the SB of the agency and the Council of Ministers of BiH.

The management has established a professional board, but it is not an official agency body. The professional board more or less consists of the agency management (the director and the two deputy directors) and heads of other organisational units. It serves as a consultation body to the director for day-to-day management and is regulated internally.

HEA has altogether 22 staff, three of which are management, 11 civil servants and 8 employees. Civil servants are regulated by the state rules on public employees and officially recruited by the Civil Service Agency of BiH. Employees are not subject to the state regulation for public employees and are recruited by HEA. The difference between civil servants and employees is their education level and complexity of the job description, where civil servants are placed in more demanding jobs. This sort of division of civil servants and employees is in line with the general rules of BiH system for public institutions and the general *modus operandi* in the country.

HEA has four main **organisational units** (see Figure 2 above): Sector for Quality Assurance, Sector for the Development of Higher Education, Management Cabinet, and Sector for Legal, Personnel, Financial and General Affairs. The organisation of the agency is regulated by the *Rulebook on Internal Organization*.

### **HEA'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES**

HEA performs a series of tasks according to the FLHE, which relate to two major types of activities, QA and HE development, respectively, and which could for descriptive purposes be broken down to the following processes:

#### **National list of experts (QA)**

HEA is in charge of keeping and administering the national list of experts, who are then named to particular expert committees in accreditation procedures. (See detailed under ESG 3.3 and 2.4)

The adopted rules and developed support documents in relation to the national list of experts are the following:

- *Decision on criteria for selection of national and international experts*
- *Rulebook on the manner of conducting the public competition for the selection of national and international experts*
- *Decision on the method of forming the Committee for the selection of national and international experts*
- *HEA Expert training manual*

#### **Accreditation of HEIs (QA)**

CEAs and HEA are involved in the accreditation process with CEAs making the final decision. HEIs initiate the process and apply to their respective CEA, who checks and processes the application, proposes experts and sends this to HEA. HEA then processes the received documents, checks the proposed experts for the conflict of interest and appoints the expert committee. The committee then studies the material, SAR of the HEI in question and conducts a site visit. They send their draft report to HEI for factual checking and after it is completed, they send it to HEA. HEA's Committee for issuing recommendation for accreditation (composed of 3 staff members) checks the report and if necessary, asks experts for clarifications. The committee prepares the proposal for recommendation for accreditation and the director approves and sends the recommendation to CEA. CEA then issues accreditation decision and sends it back to HEA.

The adopted rules and developed support documents in relation to the accreditation of HEIs are the following:

- *Instructions on the appointment of the Committee of national and international experts*
- *Decision on the criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- *Decision on norms for determining minimum standards in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- *Instruction on issuing recommendation on accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- *Methodology of writing reports*

### **Accreditation of study programmes (QA)**

In principle, the accreditation of study programmes should follow the same line as accreditation of HEIs. However, accreditation of study programmes has not yet commenced. The first criteria for accreditation were adopted in 2013, but never used. They were updated after the adoption of the revised ESG in order to accommodate the change.

The adopted rules in relation to the accreditation of study programmes are the same as before with the exception of the accreditation criteria:

- *Decision on the criteria for accreditation of study programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina (this document is adopted and waiting to be published in the official BiH Gazette).*

### **State register of accredited HEIs (QA)**

After receiving accreditation decision from CEA, HEA checks compliance of the decision with the accreditation criteria and the minimum standards for HE. If all is compatible, the HEI is listed in the national register of accredited HEIs. If it is not compatible, HEA sends the decision back to the relevant CEA, however, in practice this has never happened yet.

The adopted rules and developed support documents in relation to the state register of accredited HEIs are the following:

- *Instructions on the manner of conformity assessment of accreditation decisions with minimal standards in the field of higher education and criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- *Rulebook on Keeping the State Register of Accredited Higher Education Institutions*

### **Thematic analysis (QA and HE development)**

HEA conducts various analyses and evaluations that are mainly satisfaction surveys in which HEA collects responses from accredited HEIs or involved experts about their experience with accreditation. The purpose is to improve its own procedures and ways of working. HEA has also analysed experts' evaluation reports of HEIs to analyse the state of the BiH HE system more generally.

The panel found that HEA has an important supportive role for student bodies at different levels in BiH. This is particularly noticeable in BD, where the HE system is least developed. HEA is still communicating with students at HEIs in BD, sending them information, training them and including them in HEA's activities. Students also reported that HEA provided a platform for them to meet at the national level, which enabled them to start forming relations between themselves. Moreover, HEA is holding workshops and trainings on QA for various stakeholders more broadly, which has positive impacts in relation to the QA capacity, but also for different stakeholders to meet and start cooperating.

### **Licensing procedures (HE development)**

HEIs need a licence to work as HEIs and for offering particular study programmes. Therefore, all new HEIs need to apply and be granted a licence to start working; while all HEIs (old and new) need to apply for a licence if they wish to launch a new study programme or restructure an existing one. CEAs are competent to issue these licences while HEA prepares recommendations for the licensing procedures and criteria. CEAs adopted their criteria for establishment of HEIs and study programmes, which are specific and technical – like the number of square meters, the number of employed staff or library units. When CEAs receive application for a licence, they form a committee to check the compliance with the criteria and they issue a decision based on the committee proposal.

The adopted rules and developed support documents in relation to the licensing of HEIs are the following:

- *Recommendations on criteria and standards to the ministry of the Republic of Srpska, Cantonal Ministries and the Brčko District BiH for establishment and closure of higher education institutions and for restructuring of study programs*
- *Recommendations on criteria for licensing of higher education institutions and study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina*

### **Participating in Conference of Ministers of Education meetings and RC meetings (HE development)**

HEA is a non-voting member of the Conference of Ministers of Education in BiH and BiH RC. The director or his delegate attend meetings and are able to participate in discussions. HEA normally gets a point in the agenda to present its work and initiatives.

### **Being active partner in the BiH higher education (HE development)**

HEA is an active member of the HE space in BiH. It is initiating measures and decisions based on its mission, such as the practice of employing graduates of accredited HEIs at public institutions. HEA is part of the 'Priorities for 2016 – 2026 Higher Education Development in BiH', which were adopted in 2015 and prepared with the help of the EU and the Council of Europe.

### **Instructions on the form of diploma supplement (HE development)**

HEA has prepared instructions on the form of the diploma supplement as requested by FLHE.

The adopted rules and developed support document in relation to the diploma supplement:

- *Instructions on the form and content of Diploma and Diploma Supplement issued by accredited institutions of higher education*

### **International activities: affiliate to ENQA, CEENQA, international projects**

HEA is highly internationally active and committed since its establishment. HEA is a member of INQAAHE and CEENQA and an affiliate to ENQA. It has bilateral cooperation with European QA agencies and has signed agreements on cooperation with six agencies and memorandum of understanding with two agencies. HEA was part of the EU IPA Twinning project with the Austrian QA agency and part of many Tempus projects. HEA is one of the founders and full members of the Regional platform for cooperation and research in higher education.

The adopted rules and developed support documents in relation to the international activities:

- *Memorandum on understanding with the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Slovenia (NAKVIS/SQAA)*
- *Memorandum on understanding with the Agency for Science and Higher Education in Croatia (AZVO).*
- *Agreements on cooperation are signed with the following agencies:*
  - *the Agency for Evaluation Baden-Wurtemberg (EVALAG), Germany;*
  - *the National Center for Public Accreditation (NCPA), Russia;*
  - *the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Ranking (IAAR), Kazakhstan;*
  - *the Center for Quality Evaluation in Higher Education (SKVC), Vilnius, Lithuania;*
  - *the Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (AAQ) Switzerland;*
  - *the Agency for Accreditation in Higher Education (APAAL), Albania.*

### **HEA'S FUNDING**

HEA's budget is state funded and HEIs are not charged for external QA exercises. HEA prepares a financial plan for a three-year period, which includes a review of spending priorities for a specified period. HEA follows these priorities and the upper financial limit when it prepares annual financial plans, which are sent to the Council of Ministers for approval each year. After the approval, HEA requests and receives funds from the national budget.

The budget provides funds for the salaries and allowances of employees of the HEA, material costs (travel expenses, utility bills, office supplies, maintenance of equipment and property necessary services), and capital expenditures for the purchase of necessary equipment. Generally speaking, the BiH national budget makes provision for steady funding of HEA (see Table 1).

Table 1. Review of the HEA's budget for the last five years

<b>Year</b>	<b>HEA's budget (in EUR)</b>
2013	544,526
2014	571,113
2015	579,294
2016	521,518
2017	517,939

(Source: SAR, p. 35).

The reduction of funds in the last two years is a reflection of reduced costs for renting an office as the premises are now provided by the state for HEA. Moreover, in the previous years HEA received funds from international projects and EU pre-accession funds. These funds were crucial in the first years after establishment and in the period of capacity building.

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF HEA WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

## ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

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

#### Evidence

HEA has been consistently working in HE QA since its establishment. As already mentioned, its competencies as defined by law are mainly preparing rules and guidelines for accreditation of HEIs and their programmes, taking part in the accreditation procedures, analysing the BiH HE system and give policy advice to the state and the 12 CEAs.

HEA has adopted the accreditation rules and procedures, which directly refer to the ESG. It has also updated these regulations according to the revised ESG. Without a doubt, HEA is committed to the EHEA, which is also reflected in its vision and mission (see below).

HEA has been involved in accreditation procedures of HEIs regularly since 2012/2013. So far it has taken part in 27 accreditations of HEIs (see Table 2 below). To date it has not yet started with programme accreditations.

Table 2. Number of accreditation procedures coordinated by HEA.

Year	Number of accredited HEIs
2013	5
2014	8
2015	5
2016	8
2017	1

(Source: SAR, p. 13).

Besides taking part in the accreditation procedures, HEA has conducted several thematic analyses, some of which it has presented to the specific actors like educational authorities or HEIs, or used them to update its own rules and procedures. HEA is also a relevant stakeholder in the national HE context in that it is a member of the Rectors Conference and the Conference of Ministers of Education in BiH albeit without voting rights. Nevertheless, its inclusion in these national bodies is already recognition for its status or relevance within the national HE system.

HEA's Vision and Mission, which are also published on HEA's web page, are as follows:

*Vision*

*Higher education is compatible with European standards and recognisable in international context, and HEA is recognised in the European Higher Education Area.*

*Mission*

*Continuous development and enhancement of quality and set quality standards in higher education in BiH, in line with the best European and international practices.*

The agency has developed strategic documents in which the above vision and mission are reflected. The main strategic document is the 2014-2018 Strategy, based on which HEA prepared a Mid-term plan of work 2016-2018 and consequent annual work plans.

HEA also follows other strategic documents and processes that are relevant for its work, such as *Priorities for 2016 – 2026 Higher Education Development in BiH* that were developed by the joint EU and CoE project.

Regarding stakeholder involvement, HEA does work with stakeholders, but they are not included in all levels of HEA's work. Formally, stakeholders are not represented in the SB, which is the main decision making body (see HEA's organisation above), but they are included in the expert committees in the accreditation process. The expert committees consist of university representatives, business and practice representatives, students and international experts. More than formally involving stakeholders, we can notice HEA continuously organising workshops, seminars or meetings to communicate with HE stakeholders in the country and to engage them in the QA and HE processes.

**Analysis**

Regarding accreditation procedures, HEA has been consistently involved in them since 2012/13. Therefore, it does comply with the ESG with respect to the continuity of work. However, HEA has encountered several challenges in its work. First, many times the procedures take long time and sometimes the communication with the 12 CEAs is not the best or CEAs' response is slow, or cooperation with HEAARS in relation to RS HEIs is not smooth enough. Second, 14 (+3) HEIs in BiH did not start the accreditation procedure yet although the FLHE stipulated that they would do so in two years after the Law was adopted in 2007. Third, HEA has not yet managed to start with programme accreditation at all, although this activity was planned already in the 2014 work programme.

The vision and mission are defined, published and followed in the HEA's Strategy, the Mid-term work plan and consequent annual work plans.

Regarding stakeholder involvement, the panel recognises the HEA complex environment; however, the panel believes that more could be done to formally involve stakeholders in the SB – even following the current legislation. The law states that 50% of members should be university professors and therefore other members could be named from various stakeholder groups. Keeping in mind the lack of formal involvement of stakeholders, HEA did prove its dedication to work with stakeholders through numerous events and similar platforms. Moreover, as the panel learned at the site visit, HEA's previous director proposed to the Ministry of Civil Affairs changing the composition

of SB to include student and labour market representatives. HEA could continue with efforts like these.

The division of powers and the interactions between HEA and CEAs and HEAARS are rather complex and not easy to follow. HEA's Mission statement and other documents do not really help in this respect. The 2016-18 Mid-term work plan states: "A clear definition of roles of each of the participants in the [QA] process shows up as a key challenge" (p.7). Moreover, there are different interpretations of the FLHE among actors, especially between HEAARS and HEA, e.g. as to the nature of the framework law or the final stage of the accreditation procedure (accreditation decision or state registration).

As to the scope of authority and operations of HEA, legally (FLHE) they cover the entire BiH but in practice HEA has more or less full authority in its tasks in FBiH cantons, constrained authority in RS (HEAARS), and for the time being no actual operation in BD.

HEA's QA and HE development activities are not sharply separated due to the relatively few staff members who usually work in both areas together. This is not a problem however, since HEA's HE development activities are rather general, on the policy level or just recommendations in relation to the process of establishment and licensing of HEIs, while HEA does not take part in the licensing procedure itself.

HEA is highly internationally involved and connected, which is also a consequence of its specific history and political context. A big number of its documents and rules were developed through international development programmes and international aid. Moreover, HEA became active in all relevant international QA networks and has formalised its cooperation with foreign QA agencies with memorandums of understanding.

HEA has done a relatively high number of so-called thematic analyses looking at HE more generally and analysing QA processes more specifically. See detailed under ESG 3.4.

Although HEA should implement a number of improvements in the context of the ESG part 2, the panel believes that HEA somewhat runs its activities in line with the criteria defined under part 2. More specifically, the panel finds HEA fully compliant with ESG 2.4, substantially compliant with 2.1 2.5 and 2.6, and partially compliant with ESG 2.2, 2.3 and 2.7. HEA is aware of its deficiencies and is motivated to tackle them, however, the state governance arrangements and the workings of the state institutions remain a great challenge that HEA alone cannot change.

### **Panel commendations**

HEA is to be commended in its efforts for implementing a relatively systematic external QA system in BiH despite many challenges. Moreover, HEA is working hard to include stakeholders and keep the relationships alive. Finally, HEA is highly internationally active, which contributes to its capacity.

### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel recommends including stakeholders in all levels of the agency work – spanning from formal decision making bodies, to expert groups and to wider consultation processes. Specifically, we suggest naming stakeholders in the SB in next nomination of members.

The panel recommends making further efforts in completing the first institutional accreditation for all existing HEIs and commencing programme accreditation procedures.

The clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of the different actors in the QA process could be agreed and published.

#### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The panel understands the position in which HEA was relying heavily on international support to develop the BiH HE and QA system, which is reflected also in its vision and mission. However, the panel suggests that HEA now strengthens its independence and confidence to drive the BiH HE QA in future autonomously. At the same time HEA should keep fostering its international engagement.

The panel would suggest to the BiH authorities to maybe consider adapting the FLHE so to strengthen the participation of international experts in HEA's governance body and/or its advisory bodies if they would be established in the future. This could add an international perspective to HEA's operations at the level of institutional decision-making.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### **ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS**

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

HEA was established by the BiH FLHE in 2007, which in Part 4, Articles 47 to 52, specifies HEA's status, bodies, and competencies. In this law HEA is defined as an autonomous administration unit responsible for the there listed elements of the QA procedures in the country. Following the law the Council of Ministers of BiH in 2008 adopted the '*Decision on beginning of the work and determination of the seat of the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance*'. HEA's work is regulated by its Statute, adopted in 2009 by the HEA's SB, to which the Council of Ministers of BiH gave its consent.

There are a number of regulations that have been adopted by the HEA's bodies pursuant the law (see Appendix 3 of the SAR).

The interviews reassured that HEA is formally recognized by the different stakeholders, as the interlocutor and competent authority in charge of the FLHE listed elements of procedures for external QA of HE in BiH.

#### **Analysis**

Although HEA was established by the state FLHE, in effect it is working with 12 different CEAs. Each of these has its own laws and juridical competence over its HE system. Therefore, it is these 12 CEAs that are legally responsible for establishing, licensing, and accrediting their respective HEIs; and they cooperate with HEA as defined by the FLHE and the 12 laws of particular juridical units. In practice these units work with HEA to a bigger or lesser extent and the laws do not always seem to be followed consistently.

First, although the FLHE elaborated a particular timeframe in which all HEIs should have undergone the accreditation, not all HEIs have started the procedure, like already discussed before.

Second, technically speaking the 12 CEAs do not necessarily have to follow HEA's recommendations, such as recommendations on particular criteria for establishing or accrediting HEIs, or recommendations on accreditation decisions after reviews of HEIs, as these are 'recommendations' and not 'rules'. However, the panel found at the site visit that in practice HEA's recommendations are followed and it has not happened thus far that a CEA would issue a different decision than it was recommended by HEA.

Third, the RS has established its own agency (HEAARS) by its HE Law. Although HEAARS is indeed defined as being the responsible body for QA in the RS, the RS law states that it should work in collaboration with the HEA as stipulated by the FLHE. In this respect it could be argued that HEA is recognised by the RS too.

Albeit in practice the 12 CEAs work with HEA in different ways, it can be said that HEA is legally and morally recognised as a QA agency, as the national agency responsible for a good part of the HE QA processes.

### **Panel commendations**

HEA is trying to be a proactive HE actor in its complex environment. It is proving to be a hard task in itself; however, HEA is trying to balance the complex juridical and political relations in the country by issuing particular documents and recommendations and by particular initiatives such as meetings, briefings, working groups and projects.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

There is a general and wider problem of governance in BiH that has a consistent and pertinent effect on HE in the country. Although HEA is doing its best in following its QA competence, it is too often found that particular administrative units do not follow the state or even their own juridical legislation. It is hard, if not impossible, to work under such circumstances and have a coherent HE system.

The panel would like to encourage HEA to continue striving for dialogue between various parties in the country and for coordination of the system.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## **ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE**

Standard:

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

### **Evidence**

The FLHE states the following:

*Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (hereinafter: the Agency) shall be established by this Law.*

*The Agency is an autonomous administrative organisation.*

In addition, the HEA's Statute stipulates that:

*(3) The Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance is an autonomous governing organisation with all the rights and duties prescribed by the Framework Law on Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

*(4) The Agency shall carry out the external quality assurance activities independently within its jurisdiction.*

After careful analysis of all available information and documents as well as considering information gathered by the site visit, the panel found that HEA's independence is not as straightforward as defined by law. The agency does seem to be independent in defining its procedures and criteria; however, the selection of experts is influenced by the 12 CEAs of the state since HEA formally proposes the list of experts to be added to the national list and the 12 CEAs have to adopt / approve the list. Moreover, HEA has to seek consent for particular decisions and documents from different state authorities.

The SB, composed of 10 members, is appointed by the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. The composition of the SB does not guarantee stakeholder involvement as the law only stipulates that half of the members need to be university professors. It is legally and de facto the main decision-making body of the agency and it adopts agency's rules and procedures. It does not, however, make any (recommendations of) accreditation decisions or any other decisions in the QA processes as such. The recommendation for accreditation is prepared by the HEA committee composed of agency staff and the decision on recommendation is adopted and issued by the director. Then it is sent to the relevant CEA. After receiving the accreditation decision from CEA, the HEA committee for compliance composed of HEA staff checks the decision and the fulfilment of accreditation criteria and minimum norms, and prepares the decision about the enlisting of the HEI into the state register of accredited HEIs. The director then makes the decision followed by listing the HEI into the register.

As for the selection and nomination of experts, a public call is launched and the experts (national and international academics, students and business sector representatives) can apply if they fulfil the selection criteria requested by HEA. After experts apply, the HEA committee makes a list of selected experts, which then needs consent of each of the 12 CEAs. When it gets to particular accreditation procedure, the experts are proposed by the respective CEA to HEA, who then selects and names the experts committees. In the past the authorities would suggest five experts who were then confirmed by HEA. Since 2014 authorities suggest higher number of experts out of which HEA chooses and appoints five, with the exception of RS that nominates the committee and HEA just confirms this nomination. The CEAs are requested to send proofs of non-conflict of interest together with experts' proposal.

Once selected for particular reviews, the agency checks the absence of the conflict of interest for each expert, who all sign the 'Declaration on the absence of conflict of interest'. The official decision on naming expert committees states that all experts will act in accordance with the *Norms on minimum standards* and the *Criteria for accreditation of HEIs in BiH*. Based on this, experts should work in line with the rules and expertise and in their personal capacity. The decision about the expert committee is communicated to each member of the committee, the CEA and the HEI.

The strategic plan, annual reports and work plans, procedures, criteria, and members of the panels are all published on the agency website and are, therefore, accessible to the general public.

HEA is funded by public funds. HEA prepares a document called *Budget framework document*, in which it elaborates a spending plan for a three-year period. This document is then used to prepare annual financial plans, which are ratified by the Council of Ministers of BiH.

Regarding the independence of outcomes, the decisions or recommendations of the experts' panels are taken unanimously. If agreement cannot be reached, then members can issue separate opinions although this has not happened yet. After the reports are finalized, they are sent to the HEA secretariat, who issues a recommendation, always respecting – while not necessarily having to follow – the committee's judgements and proposals concerning the accreditation result. This recommendation is then sent to the CEA, who then issues the accreditation decision. The decision is sent back to the agency for checking the compliance with the minimum standards and if all is found to be in compliance, then the director of HEA makes a decision to list the HEI in the state register.

The reports prepared by expert committees are published on the webpage of HEA and HEIs are in principle expected to prepare a follow-up plan. In practice the follow-up varies as it is defined separately by each of the 12 CEAs. HEA's role and competency is different based on where the HEI is situated and in most cases no follow-up is done. To date, re-accreditation of a HEI has not happened.

### **Analysis**

Although HEA is defined as independent in the law and in its statute, there is some evidence of political influence on its work. Formally this is reflected in the constitution of the SB in that each of the 'three constituent peoples' of BiH have three representatives in the SB and the tenth member is someone that apparently they can all agree to. This legal constellation of 3x3 representatives seems to make the SB quite political in its decision making (majority vote must include at least two thirds of representatives of each constituent people, which means that the vote of the 'other' person literally does not count) and consequently affects the work of the agency more generally. This is also reflected in naming HEA's management as the director and the two deputy directors each have to come from the 'three peoples' too. In the new norms on minimum standards (that are now in the draft form) such three peoples constellation is predicted also in the experts committees. Essentially this means that when composing the experts committees, CEAs, HEAARS and HEA will have to follow the expertise of experts, their status and affiliation, as well as their ethnic origin. The 'three peoples' political balance is present at all levels – SB, management, experts committees and staff structure.

The panel does not see problems only with the official procedures of nominating HEA's leadership and the members of the SB, but also that in practice there are no representatives of stakeholders besides HEIs in the SB. This way it seems that HEIs have a one-sided influence on the HEA as the SB members are coming – currently exclusively – from HEIs. One of the SB members is even a current rector of a university, which the panel interprets as conflict of interest. Another member is a dean and all current members are university professors. What is more, all ten persons come from only 4 public universities: University of East Sarajevo (3), University of Mostar (3), University of Sarajevo (3), and University of Zenica (1). There are no members from colleges and/or private HEIs. In the previous SB term there was one member from Ministry of Civil Affairs and one from a private HEI.

Moreover, HEA is somewhat not immune to the politics going on in the country. This became evident to the panel during most of the interview sessions, no matter who the actual interviewees were. The agency's leadership is officially stated to be selected based on the public competition and based on the competences, however, the panel found reports in the news about the larger political nominations of the leadership. While the panel found the management committed and professional, they were political persons in the past as the director was a state ambassador and one of the deputy

directors was a minister. This information refers to the struggles between particular political parties as well as between the three main peoples of the state.

The panel discussed the independence of HEA also based on the legal requirements where the agency needs consent or positive opinion about its decisions or documents from the state authorities. The BiH Council of Ministers is legally required to give consent to the agency's Statute and to the *Rulebook on Internal Organisation*. Moreover, the mid-term work plan of the agency needs to have opinions from Ministry of Finance and the Treasury of BiH. Each new employment at the HEA needs to be approved by a special decision of the BiH Council of Ministers. (This is a provisional measure introduced for the obligations assumed by signing the Reform Agenda and the Letter of Intent with the International Monetary Fund.) The panel was reassured at the site visit that these opinions and consents are technical and refer to financial checks, which is not an unusual practice. The Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Finance and the Treasury of BiH do not interfere with content decisions.

What is a particularity here, however, is that agency staff who are civil servants, are recruited and employed by the state Civil Service Agency of BiH. This is the agency that employs all civil servants in the country. On the one hand it is understandable that HEA is part of this procedure as it is a state/public institution, but on the other hand this means that HEA is not independent in its own recruitment.

Regarding the overall list of experts, the panel does not see problematic that the committee choosing the experts based on the public call consists of representatives of authorities and the Rectors' Conference. But, after the experts are chosen by this committee, all of 12 CEAs have to agree on the proposed list. This way the appointed committee and HEA are not independent in their choosing of experts, even if in practice no veto from any CEA has happened as yet.

Furthermore, when it comes to naming particular expert committees, HEA indeed has the official competency to name the five-member committees. However, the CEAs propose these members to the HEA from the experts list. HEA recognised that this practice is problematic for its independence and hence it proposed to authorities in 2014 to suggest 15 experts out of which HEA would choose five. This practice is now used in relation to all CEAs with the exception of RS (and BD, where there have been no accreditation procedures as yet). There it is HEAARS that names the panel and only communicates this to the HEA; and then HEA officially confirms these names. The practice where CEAs propose more than five experts is better than before, but is still not the best; while in the case of RS it is even more problematic.

Even though HEA defined the minimum quality standards and the accreditation criteria, the final responsibility of accreditation decisions and follow-up are not in HEA's competency. Admittedly, HEA does prepare a recommendation on accreditation and so far CEAs have followed these recommendations. However, the decision on licensing and accrediting an institution (or programme) in a given individual procedure is entirely vested in the 12 CEAs. The agency has only the final (or 'post-final') say as it is responsible for listing HEIs in the state register. From the agency's side, however, the real final outcome of its QA procedure is the external review report, for which HEA does have full responsibility to deliver and use.

The panel encourages HEA to make efforts for its organisational independence to be improved in the sense of the SB structure so that it is not HEIs' dominated and especially that no members have leadership positions at HEIs, and the composition should be much more balanced as to the HEI affiliation of members. Second, HEA has some troubles with operational independence as the expert

list has to be approved by CEAs and then CEAs propose particular experts for the concrete accreditations.

It must be added that HEA works in special national setup and legal regulatory environment. Quite few elements related to its independence are not in HEA's direct power to determine or change. The panel took into account these mitigating circumstances when making its conclusion on HEA's compliance with this standard.

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel appreciates that HEA recognised the recommendation of the international projects, which stated that naming the expert committees are not in line with the ESG. This was when the authorities would suggest the five experts that HEA would only confirm. Therefore HEA asked the authorities to now suggest more people out of whom it can choose five. This practice is still problematic, but better than before.

#### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The composition of the SB should be more balanced, not have only members coming from HEIs (public universities), and especially them not having any leadership positions at their HEI.

The panel suggests that HEA takes over the whole responsibility for creating the national list of experts and then appointing expert committees in the accreditation procedures.

The panel recommends the accreditation decisions to be made by the SB of HEA.

#### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The panel suggests the BiH authorities to consider further changes to the QA system at the national level. The current arrangement in which the relevant authority and HEA go back and forth in the accreditation process seems not to be coherent, efficient and reliable. Moreover, the panel believes it might not be best practice to effectively have different rules across the 12 BiH entities as consequently HEIs work under different conditions.

#### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

### **ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

HEA has been active in analyses since its establishment. At the beginning HEA was a member of international projects that were setting up Bosnian legal frameworks and institutions, and later analysed the Bosnian system against the EHEA. Later HEA continued with reflection and analyses of particular QA or HE practices.

So far HEA produced 10 thematic analyses, out of which four are published on its webpage. These different analyses were conducted for various purposes / parts of the HE space that span from more general overview of the HE system (for example, analyses of the state of implementation of the

Bologna process in BiH, of the BiH legal frameworks against the EHEA requirement for the Diploma Supplement) to more specifically QA related (analyses of the accreditation procedures, satisfaction of HEIs with accreditation and analyses of the expert committees).

HEA includes analyses in its work plans, including in the current, 2017 work plan. It specifies the production of thematic analysis as one of the key aims, which is also quantified in that HEA plans to produce three such reports in 2017.

### **Analysis**

HEA has used the results of the analyses for updating its own rules and procedures. Importantly, it has also used the results for informing the HE community more generally. It seems common that HEA organises workshops and seminars to which it invited stakeholders to present the results and discuss further development of HE and QA in BiH.

However, the analyses are mainly about HEIs opinions and satisfaction with the accreditation process and the HE analyses are mainly about formal legal compliance. There has been only one analysis so far examining the results of accreditation procedures as such.

The panel believes that the analyses could improve in the critical approach so that it is not just about collecting the data and presenting the basic statistics, but it is also about analysing what this all means. While following satisfaction of HEIs and experts with HEA procedures and support is important, there is so much more that HEA – and the BiH HE community – could learn from experts' reports. It would be useful to make analyses that would in fact learn from the hitherto accreditation procedures and that would critically examine the reports to analyse the state of the BiH HE system. That sort of analyses could fruitfully contribute to the BiH HE system instead of focusing just on technicalities and rules.

Nevertheless, given the size and the age of the agency the panel considers that HEA is working in the good direction.

### **Panel commendations**

In spite of the fact that the agency is relatively new and it has not even finished the first round of institutional evaluations, several thematic analyses have been produced by both the HE Development, and the QA departments, respectively.

### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel recommends HEA to use the review reports and other available information to analyse the actual findings of evaluations and the state of the BiH HE system more systematically and generally. Moreover, the analysis of the accreditation documents for their fitness of purpose would be useful. The thematic analyses could be more than satisfaction surveys and could improve in the critical approach.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

### ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

#### Evidence

HEA financial resources come from the state budget. The agency develops a three-year financial plan, which represents a top spending limit for preparing annual financial plans. Both types of financial plans, three-year and annual, need to be confirmed by the BiH Council of Ministers. The review of the annual budget is given in the section above on HEA's funding (p. 16) and amounts to about half a million Euros. HEA has also benefitted from the EU and pre-accession funds, which have been crucial in establishing the agency, while at the moment it is receiving stable funding via the state budget like mentioned before. The FLHE provides the possibility of other sources of funding of HEA, but the agency has not developed a system of this type of financing.

In terms of human resources, the agency employs 22 staff, out of whom three are appointed (the director and two deputy directors). There are 11 civil servants and eight employees. Five out of those 22 employees work in the quality assurance (QA) section and four in the HE development section. HEA currently has no full time IT specialist.

The agency has officially 35 work posts, thus 13 being unoccupied. HEA states the reason to be heavy administrative procedures for employment at public institutions in the country as the BiH Council of Ministers has to give consent to each new employment. This practice could also be viewed problematic in terms of HEA's independence and therefore we have discussed this earlier (standard 3.3).

HEA's staff working on QA and HE development has worked on different projects through which they have attended various trainings and enjoyed staff development opportunities. Moreover, depending on the need the staff can join trainings for civil servants organised at the national level and targeted at various generic skills ranging from management to language, IT, social skills and so on. The staff is subject to evaluation by the management twice (civil servants) or once (employees) a year. Moreover, the agency conducts satisfaction surveys among its staff.

From the viewpoint of infrastructural resources, HEA has 37 computers, two copy machines, 22 printers, 18 laptops and IP phone system, that are bound by network and server (2016) in this moment. Also, agency currently has the equipment for a conference room for 20-30 persons (projector, LCD screen, wireless Internet), which can be used for meetings, presentations, Skype conferences and training of foreign experts but in the current premises HEA has no separate meeting room where this equipment would be permanently available for use.

The panel verified at the site visit that HEA has a good database and document management system.

#### Analysis

Albeit the SAR states that at times there is a lack of space, the site visit revealed that the agency's resources allow it to perform the duties which it was tasked to do. The agency is lacking a seminar/conference room and the office space for the individual sectors is rather tight, but seems to be enough for the enthusiastic and motivated current staff.

The Agency is at the present stage, after more than seven years of work, sufficiently institutionally constructed to be independent from international sources and funds, relying on funds provided from the budget of BiH institutions to perform the tasks that are entrusted by the mandate.

HEA seems to have enough staff to manage its current activities. The agency will, however, need more staff and resources if it will start with programme accreditation and the new practice in which the agency staff will accompany the expert panels at site visits. This means not just more staff, but also more office space and finance.

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel would like to commend the commitment and dedication of the HEA staff.

#### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel is concerned about the human and other resources should HEA start with study programme accreditations and also with the new practice in which HEA staff member accompanies expert committees in the site visits. These two major changes will demand substantial additional resources that HEA will need. The panel recommends HEA to strengthen its human and financial resources to be able to fulfil the predicted tasks.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### **ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

HEA has developed a lively internal QA practice, which is evident from the existence of the 'Committee for Quality Assurance of the Agency', development of the internal QA system, and also from the large number of other internal rules and regulations.

Committee for QA of the Agency was established as a permanent body of the agency in April 2016. It is responsible for internal QA and for preparing the SAR. It consists of four members, namely one from each of the HEA's organisational units. It works in line with *Rules of Procedure of the Committee*.

The internal QA system is regulated by the *Quality Manual*, adopted in 2015, and which is not available on HEA's website. The purpose of the Manual is to describe HEA's internal QA system. It serves as a guide for the professional conduct of HEA's employees and contractors as it describes working procedures of HEA. It describes the processes of: management, core activities and support activities. Each of the procedures in these three process groups has further elements with stated objectives, indicators, responsible persons and reference documentation. For each process the stages of planning, implementation, and verification/evaluation and process improvement are presented. This Manual is to be used for the implementation of the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) quality management model, which HEA adopted in the context of the 'Program for Strengthening of Public Institutions in BiH', required by national rules since 2016. It is a tool generally understood as representing the 'total quality management (TQM)' principles.

Part of the *Quality Manual* is the Quality Policy, which is accessible on the agency website. The Quality Policy is a list of principles on HEA's work.

As mentioned before, HEA has adopted a number of internal rules for its work, such as rules on staff bonus for 2016, rules on action in case of anonymous corruption report, rules on HEA's internal corruption report, rules on the procedures of work of various HEA's bodies, and so on.

HEA aims to collect feedback on its work from its stakeholders. So far it has administered three online surveys of HEA's users, namely in 2013 through the consulting firm IPSOS Sarajevo, and on its own in 2015 and 2016. Based on the results, especially of the surveying in 2015, HEA took measures to improve its communication with stakeholders. Moreover, in 2016 HEA conducted a survey of experts, who have been part of the accreditation processes in BiH. The responses showed overall satisfaction of experts with HEA's work.

Finally, HEA constantly organises events to target particular stakeholders either on its own or with support of particular projects or international organisations.

### **Analysis**

HEA's *Quality Manual* indeed in detail describes all of HEA's processes, which are broken down to particular tasks and are assigned responsible individuals for each task. However, this manual does not allow the coherent approach to actually consolidating a cyclical self-evaluation. In other words, there are 21 defined HEA's processes and each has a description of how it is monitored and improved. But HEA does not have a process in which it would actually consider its work and processes as a whole, evaluate them and consider its work coherently once a year (or cyclically any other period of time). The Quality Manual is scattering HEA's processes and tasks. The panel found at the interviews that HEA staff is not aware of the internal QA process as a holistic activity of self-reflectivity. Harmonising the process approach of the current *Quality Manual* with the somewhat more holistic principles-criteria approach of the CAF (EFQM, TQM) model is still a task ahead of the agency.

HEA has developed a big number of rules, documents governing its internal work. The panel initially thought that this might be over-regulation and is confusing and counterproductive. At the site visit, however, the panel learned that the staff is aware of all the rules and that they find them useful. Some said this is the working culture in BiH more generally where everything needs to be prescribed.

Internal feedback from and to staff is mostly direct and oral. Interestingly enough, the 2015 staff survey revealed that employees are not fully satisfied with feedback. Improvement of internal communication in both directions was proposed.

The panel finds the connection between HEA and stakeholders and experts working well. HEA is constantly surveying participants in its accreditation procedures for feedback and is accordingly adapting the procedures. Moreover, HEA provides information about the QA and HE to the wider audience through webpages, email and other communication. It also provides support to HEIs and student unions at HEIs. It is providing an important platform where stakeholders are meeting to discuss HE and QA and a possibility for them to network and share knowledge. Therefore, it is connecting HE stakeholders in the country more generally. The stakeholders and experts were satisfied with HEA's work and how it is including them in the agency's processes.

### **Panel commendations**

The panel would like to commend HEA for its large collaboration with the different stakeholders involved in its activities and the attention paid to their opinions which are listened and transferred into adequate action.

### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel advises HEA and the Quality Committee to implement a coherent annual self-evaluation process as planned according to the SAR (p.6).

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The panel believes that HEA works with and in a highly regulated system and wonders if it is possible to reduce the number and complexity of documents regulating internal and external work of the agency. The panel suggests HEA to critically examine all of its rules and regulations to see if it can streamline the regulative environment.

### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## **ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES**

Standard:

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

### **Evidence**

This is the first formal external review of HEA based on ESG 2015. A partial 'pilot' review of the agency (based on ESG 2005) was made in 2012, in the framework of the CUBRIK project. The 2013-15 IPA Twinning project dealt with HEA's ESG compliance as well. HEA does show commitment to the EHEA, the ESG and its decisiveness for its constant improvement within the limits of the BiH legal and political context.

### **Analysis**

HEA has demonstrated a firm commitment to the EHEA, the ESG and to internationalisation more generally. It has been part of several projects funded by the EU and other international actors, which were targeted towards developing and improving BiH's HE and QA system. Some of those projects were also touching upon evaluation of the HEA and the BiH QA, albeit not as thorough as for the purpose of the ENQA membership.

One such project was CUBRIK in 2012 that found the development of the accreditation criteria and the QA standards and guidelines as positive developments in BiH's QA. The challenges that were identified in that project were the consistency of accreditation decisions among the 12 CEAs in terms of them following HEA's recommendations; and second, the nomination of experts was found not to be in line with the ESG. Based on this finding the HEA changed its procedures so that it now receives a higher number of proposals for experts from CEAs out of which it chooses five (with the exception of RS).

The other activities were a series of workshops in 2013 in the context of the IPA Twinning Project to analyse the compliance of HEA's procedures with the ESG. HEA states that these two workshops

further developed HEA capacity in the QA field. Moreover, in the framework of this project, international experts led by AQ Austria conducted an extensive analysis of the QA situation (including HEA's ESG compliance) in BiH and made detailed recommendations in 2014 and 2015, respectively, together with timelines for implementation. Most of the key recommendations, however, have not been appropriately followed up by the relevant authorities, for the time being. (E.g. the completion of the first round of institutional accreditation was recommended by the end of 2016.)

Although this is the first formal HEA review, it is clear that HEA is highly committed to the ESG and the EHEA. Therefore we do not doubt its commitment to undergo cyclical evaluations every 5 years.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

### ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

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

#### Evidence

HEA has updated their institutional accreditation criteria in 2016 in order to accommodate the revised ESG.

Regarding the revision of the accreditation for study programmes, the SB has already adopted the revised accreditation criteria, which have 16 criteria altogether. The first ten apply for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle study programmes, while all apply to the third cycle. They are adopted and are waiting to be published in the official Gazette of BiH.

HEA has in addition drafted separate criteria for accreditation of the third cycle, but they are not yet adopted by the SB.

The panel was explained that Table 3 below, which was prepared by HEA and published in SAR, is referring to the following documents: the first column refers to the new and revised accreditation criteria for HEIs. The second column refers to the adopted criteria for study programmes, but they are not yet published in the official Gazette. The third column refers to the drafted 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle criteria that are not yet adopted. Nevertheless, the panel has trouble relating the particular numbers in these columns to particular standards in HEA documents. It seems that all numbers should begin with the number of the given row (e.g. for criterion 2 (design and approval...), the sub criteria in the HEI column are 2.1 and 2.2 and b1, b2 in the Methodology).

Table 3. ESG part 1 and corresponding HEA criteria (SAR, p.44).

ESG I group (2015)	Criteria for accreditation of HEIs in BiH ("Official Gazette of BiH No. 75/10 and 44/13) 96/16)	Criteria for accreditation of SPs in BiH (I and II cycles of studies)	Criteria for accreditation of SPs in BiH (III cycle of studies)	
1	Policy for quality assurance	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.6	1.1; 1.2; 1.3	1.1; 1.2
2	Design and approval of programmes	1.1; 1.2	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.6	1.2; 1.4
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	1.6; 5.5i; 5.6; 6.3
4	Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	1.1; 1.2; 1.3	1.1; 1.2; 1.3	2.2; 2.3; 5.1; 5.2; 5.3; 5.4; 5.6
5	Teaching staff	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4	3.1; 3.2; 3.3
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	1.3; 2.1; 4.1; 4.2
7	Information management	1.1; 1.2; 1.3	1.1; 1.2	1.7
8	Public information	1.1; 1.2; 1.3	1.1	2.4
9	On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	1.1; 1.2; 1.3	1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4	1.7; 3.4
10	Cyclical external quality assurance	1.1	In Decision on norms is defined that "External quality assurance of higher education institutions should be undertaken at a specified time interval regulated by respective regulations, considering that external quality assurance is an ongoing process."	
			10. Mobility of academic staff and students <sup>34</sup>	
			10.1; 10.2; 10.3	

The adopted and published HEIs accreditation criteria have ten general criteria:

- Quality assurance policy
- Preparation and approval of the program
- Learning, teaching and evaluation focused on students
- Registration and progression of students, recognition and certification
- Teaching staff
- Learning resources and student support
- Information management
- Information to the public
- Continuous monitoring and periodic review of programs
- Periodic external quality assurance

Each of these has sub-criteria so that altogether there are essentially 34 criteria. The *Methodology for writing reports* has developed for each of them a descriptive text for what it would mean if the

given criterion is fully, substantially, partially or non-compliant. For example, the first sub-criterion of the third criterion are specified as follows in Table 4 below.

Table 4. An excerpt from the *Methodology for writing reports*.

c) THE STUDENT AIMED LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT					
		UNFULFILLMENT OF CRITERIA	PARTIAL FULFILLMENT	SIGNIFICANT FULFILLMENT	TOTAL FULFILLMENT
c1	A higher education institution applies procedures to ensure a fair, transparent and consistent way of evaluating students and which provides for the possibility of complaints of students. The procedures are formalized and publicly available.	The higher education institution does not have defined procedures or they are not formally adopted by the Senate.	The higher education institution has procedures established by a formal act, but the Senate did not adopt them, they are not publicly available and the possibility of complaints of students is not predicted.	The higher education institution has and conducts procedures that guarantee fair, transparent and consistent evaluation of students established by a formal act, that the Senate adopts and are publicly available. The procedures should be introduced to students and the teaching staff for their consistent application. The higher education institution has defined procedures that provide for the possibility of complaints of students.	The higher education institution has and completely conducts procedures that guarantee fair, transparent and consistent evaluation of students established by a formal act, that the Senate adopted and are publicly available. The procedures are well introduced to students and the teaching staff for their consistent application. The higher education institution has defined procedures that provide for the possibility of complaints of students and applies them in practice.

The adopted, but not published criteria for accreditation of study programmes have 16 criteria:

- Quality assurance policy of the study programme
- Preparing and adopting the study programme
- Teaching, learning and evaluation based on the student
- Student enrolment, recognition and certification
- Human resources
- Resources and financing
- Information management
- Informing the public
- Continuous monitoring, evaluation and revision of the study programme
- Mobility of staff and students
- Organisation and structure of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle
- Policies and conditions for enrolment to the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle
- Supervision
- Scientific research and doctoral thesis
- Evaluation of the doctoral thesis
- Internationalisation of the doctoral study programme.

The first ten criteria that apply to all study programmes have sub-criteria so that altogether there are 41 criteria and 21 additional ones for the doctoral programmes.

### Analysis

In this section, the panel is addressing each of the ESG Part 1 standards separately to analyse how HEA is addressing the effectiveness of HEIs' internal QA. Here the panel is following the logic to analyse documents that are at the moment relevant and adopted. Therefore, it is using the following documents in this exercise:

- Regarding institutional accreditation: HEA is using two adopted rules for accreditation of HEIs, namely the accreditation criteria and the norms for determining minimum standards in

HE in BiH. The panel is analysing both of these documents below to address the standards of the ESG Part 1.

- Regarding accreditation of the first and second cycle study programmes: HEA has not yet started the programme accreditation. However, the agency has adopted the criteria for accreditation of the first and second cycle programmes in 2013 and changed them in 2016 as a consequence of revised ESG. The revised criteria have been adopted, but not yet published in the Official Gazette of BiH. Therefore, the panel is using these revised criteria for the first and second cycle to analyse how they touch the ESG Part 1. The panel is, however, not analysing the six additional criteria specified for doctoral studies. The reason is that HEA is also not referring to it anywhere since it is preparing new criteria specifically for doctoral studies, which we mentioned before and are drafted, but not adopted.

It is also important to remind that HEA has drafted revised norms on minimum standards in HE in BiH, which we mentioned above and will be changing some of the HEA practices and rules. This document already underwent public discussion and consultation with stakeholders. It is now waiting to be discussed and approved at the SB. The panel is, however, not including this new document in the below analysis of ESG Part 1 since the document has not yet been adopted. The panel is including the currently valid *Norms on minimum standards* (which are based on the ESG 2005 and adopted in 2011).

The panel finds HEA to address the effectiveness of HEIs' internal QA in relation to the standards described in Part 1 of the revised ESG in the following way:

#### 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

##### **Criteria for accreditation of HEIs**

The first HEA criterion 'quality assurance policy' consists of six sub-criteria. They refer to HEIs having a vision and mission prepared and revised in stakeholder consultation. Furthermore, HEIs are required to prepare and revise a strategy in stakeholder consultation, which is formally adopted and publicly available. The strategy should refer to the teaching process, research or development of arts and contribution to the society. HEIs should have formally adopted and published procedures for internal QA, which are in line with the institutional strategy. The internal QA procedures collect feedback from internal stakeholders and from the system monitoring. They are focused on improvement in all of the areas from the strategy. HEIs should also have an international strategy that is aligned to the institutional strategy and provides an overview of international activities.

##### **Criteria for accreditation of the study programmes**

The first HEA criterion 'study programmes quality assurance policy' has four sub-criteria that expect HEIs to: adopt and publish a study programme QA policy, which is part of the overall HEI strategy; have an action plan for implementing strategic goals; a policy which supports quality culture in which all internal stakeholders take their responsibility and which also includes external stakeholders; study programme QA policy incorporates teaching and learning, research, internationalisation and mobility, and has measures against plagiarism.

##### **Norms on minimum standards**

The first 'rule for attaining standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance' is called 'Development and strategy, and organisation of higher education institution and internal quality assurance system', which elaborates in descriptive manner how the policy should be developed, consultation with stakeholder organised, which procedures it should have and so on.

## 1.2 Design and approval of programmes

### **Criteria for accreditation of HEIs**

The second HEA criterion 'preparation and approval of the programme' has two sub-criteria. They require HEIs to have explicit procedures for creation and adoption of study programmes, which should be in line with the institutional strategy. The learning outcomes and ECTS assigned in the programmes should be in line with the national qualification framework and allow acquiring knowledge and skills outside of the HEI.

### **Criteria for accreditation of the study programmes**

The second HEA criterion 'design and approval of study programmes' has eight sub-criteria that expect HEIs and their study programmes to: have procedures for the design and approval of study programmes that include students and other interested parties; be in line with the education standards of the discipline, international trends and labour market; have study programme objectives clearly defined and aligned to the study cycle level and the institutional strategy; have study programmes objectives be comparable to similar study programmes in BiH and other countries; have learning outcomes aligned with the national QF and the FQ-EHEA; have teaching plans which include each course and module information with assigned literature, student workload, ECTS information, method of student assessment, study programme QA procedure, and needed equipment; offers seminars and elective modules; interdisciplinary of the study programme, international dimension, interaction with practice, practical teaching and active student participation.

### **Norms on minimum standards**

The second 'rule for attaining standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance' is called 'Monitoring and periodic review of study programmes' and it describes the criteria specified in the other two documents.

## 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

### **Criteria for accreditation of HEIs**

The third HEA criterion 'Learning, teaching and evaluation focused on students' has three sub-criteria that require fair, transparent and consistent assessment of students and the possibility for students complaints. Students are required to be active participants in the institutional governance. HEIs are required to facilitate international student and staff mobility and sharing of good practice experience.

### **Criteria for accreditation of the study programmes**

The third HEA criterion 'Student centred learning, teaching and assessment' has six sub-criteria. They include: defined and published procedures for fair and transparent student assessment aligned to the objectives of the study programme; the assessment procedures regulate the organisation and methods of assessment, student acquaintance with the assessment expectations and QA of the assessment process; academic staff ensures student inclusion in all parts of teaching and learning and research processes; HEIs to have rules on student final assignment and the supervision procedure; student representatives are included in HEIs' decision making bodies; and HEIs to have career support services.

### **Norms on minimum standards**

The third 'rule for attaining standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance' is called 'Student assessment', which elaborates in descriptive manner the procedures for student assessment, how they should be developed, what is the role of staff and other internal and external stakeholders and so on. Since this document is based on ESG 2005, it does not contain any requirements related to student-centred learning and teaching. It deals only with student assessment.

#### 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

##### **Criteria for accreditation of HEIs**

The fourth HEA criterion 'Registration and progression of students, recognition and certification' has three sub-criteria. They require HEIs to ensure adequate conditions for students and provide support in the academic progress of students. Moreover, HEIs need to apply the Lisbon recognition convention and recognise prior learning. HEIs need to issue students degrees/certificates in a timely manner and provide the diploma supplement.

##### **Criteria for accreditation of the study programmes**

The fourth HEA criterion 'student admission, progression, recognition and certification' has three sub-criteria. HEIs are requested to: ensure students are legally admitted, based on clear and transparent criteria and the public call, and based on the available resources, societal needs, and the student academic merit; have procedures for recognition of prior learning; issue certificates confirming student qualification, learning outcomes and the context of study.

### **Norms on minimum standards**

The third 'rule for attaining standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance' is called 'Student assessment', which describes also how student assessment is supposed to be organised. (Same criterion as above, under 1.3.)

#### 1.5 Teaching staff

##### **Criteria for accreditation of HEIs**

The fifth HEA criterion 'teaching staff' has five sub-criteria. They predict HEIs to employ a sufficient number of academic staff, have employment planning in place, practice fair and transparent recruitment, offer career and professional development opportunities, and provide conditions for active research engagement.

##### **Criteria for accreditation of the study programmes**

The fifth HEA criterion 'human resources' has four sub-criteria that require HEIs to have adequate number of teaching and administrative staff to execute the study programme and to fulfil the licensing criteria; have elaborated policy on human resource management; support teaching and learning, research and art work of its staff and students; offers staff training, in particular for information management.

### **Norms on minimum standards**

The fourth 'rule for attaining standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance' is called 'Human resources', which describes how HEIs are supposed to work with academic staff at all levels

and stages (from recruitment, to progression, evaluation and support), the relationship with external staff, and information management in relation to staff.

#### 1.6 Learning resources and student support

##### **Criteria for accreditation of HEIs**

The sixth HEA criterion 'learning resources and student support' has five sub-criteria. Here HEIs are required to have: adequate material conditions and physical resources such as classrooms, labs, computers and the like; sufficient library resources and space to use the library; systemic and effective plans and actions to keep the adequate level of resource; sufficient number of administrative staff; and enough resources to carry out international aspects of their work.

##### **Criteria for accreditation of the study programmes**

The sixth HEA criterion 'resources and financing' has five sub-criteria that require HEIs to: provide adequate resources for study programme execution, which are aligned to the respective licensing criteria; have appropriate equipment and literature in line with licensing criteria; have appropriate space, library and computers; have a plan of investing into resources; through institutional agreements ensure possibilities for its members to use other HEIs' resources.

##### **Norms on minimum standards**

The fifth 'rule for attaining standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance' is called 'Quality of physical resources', which describes the physical resources that HEIs should make available to students for their academic needs.

#### 1.7 Information management

##### **Criteria for accreditation of HEIs**

The seventh HEA criterion 'information management' has three sub-criteria in which HEIs are to: use the information system to collect, analyse and use information in relation to all of their work; collect and analyse data on student progression and success; and collect and analyse data on staff.

##### **Criteria for accreditation of the study programmes**

The seventh HEA criterion 'information management' has two sub-criteria in which HEIs are requested to: have a system of gathering data about all aspects of the study programme and students, and analyse them; gather data about their staff.

##### **Norms on minimum standards**

The sixth 'rule for attaining standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance' is called 'Information system', which describes what kind of information system HEIs should have in place and what kind of information they should gather and process.

#### 1.8 Public information

##### **Criteria for accreditation of HEIs**

The eighth HEA criterion 'information to the public' has three sub-criteria. HEIs are expected to: provide information about their activities including information on study programmes on the internet in one of the BiH languages and English; publish information on the internet about research and research outputs; ensure systematic communication with external stakeholders.

### **Criteria for accreditation of the study programmes**

The eighth HEA criterion 'informing the public' has two sub-criteria that ask HEIs to publish information about its study programmes with a special focus on study programme objectives and learning outcomes; part of information is required to be in English.

#### **Norms on minimum standards**

The seventh 'rule for attaining standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance' is called 'Public information', which describes what kind of information HEIs should publish and how.

#### **1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes**

##### **Criteria for accreditation of HEIs**

The ninth HEA criterion 'continuous monitoring and periodic review of programs' has three sub-criteria that predict HEIs to: monitor their study programmes and update them with stakeholder involvement; have procedures to monitor the implementation of programmes; analyse how the procedures for information collection contribute to the improvement of the study programmes.

##### **Criteria for accreditation of the study programmes**

The ninth HEA criterion 'continuous monitoring, periodic evaluation and revision of study programmes' has four sub-criteria that ask HEIs to have procedures for evaluation and revision of study programmes that include students and other internal and external stakeholders; implement student and staff questionnaires for evaluation of study programmes; monitor and evaluate internationalisation action plan, benefits from the international cooperation agreements, percentage of international staff and students and so on.

#### **Norms on minimum standards**

In 'other rules for attaining standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance' HEA specifies the periodic evaluation of study programmes and consequent revision or change of programmes.

#### **1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance**

##### **Criteria for accreditation of HEIs**

The tenth HEA criterion 'periodic external quality assurance' has one sub-criterion, which states that HEIs need to periodically undergo external QA.

##### **Criteria for accreditation of the study programmes**

In other criteria HEA specifies the periodic evaluation of study programmes and consequent revision or change of programmes.

Regarding all of the ESG Part 1 standards and the HEA criteria and rules, the panel finds that both the revised accreditation criteria for HEIs and the revised accreditation criteria for study programmes directly correspond to the ESG Part 1. Both revised documents have 10 main criteria that have more or less the same titles as ESG Part 1 standards (with the exception of 10<sup>th</sup> criterion in the study programme document). Although there seems to be direct translation of the ESG standards into the HEA accreditation criteria, the panel believes that HEA still has some work to do to grasp the intent of the ESG Part 1. Particularly the following requirements of ESG Part 1 are not met in full:

- In relation to student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, HEA can improve HEIs attention to respecting diversity of students needs;
- In relation to student progression and student support, HEA can motivate HEIs for pastoral and comprehensive student support; resources mean more than physical resources for academic progression and student wellbeing refers to more than only academic part of student life;
- In relation to information management, HEA can motivate HEIs to not only collect, but use the gathered information in every day managements as well as in strategic management;
- In relation to cyclical external QA, HEA should make sure that re-accreditation of HEIs will indeed be introduced in the system and that if study programmes will be accredited, that they will also become part of the re-accreditation process in future.

The panel is also worried that the HEA rules are more on the technical side and less attention is paid for the actual evaluation of HEIs and programmes. At the same time different documents are repeated – accreditation criteria for HEIs and study programmes are strikingly similar to each other (due to the ESG approach). Moreover, norms are targeting the same issues again, with methodology issues, definitions and the external QA process description added.

#### **Panel commendations**

HEA is to be commended for its efforts in revising the accreditation criteria and relevant documents in order to be in harmony with ESG 2015.

#### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel recommends HEA to make interpretation of particular criteria more explicit and to include all aspects of the ESG Part 1.

#### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

The panel suggests HEA to rethink the necessity for multiplication of rules. And if they are needed, then HEA should rethink if multiplication of the same criteria/content or at least such similarity is needed. For the purpose of clarity and efficiency it might be better to have fewer rules and those to be explicit and specific without multiplications.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### **ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE**

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

HEA has developed rules and regulations that it was tasked with by the FLHE. Besides providing advice for HE and QA to the BiH authorities, the key documents/rules that HEA has developed are:

- Norms for determining minimum standards in HE in BiH
- Criteria for accreditation of HEIs in BiH

- Criteria for external experts
- Recommendations to the 12 CEAs on criteria for establishing and closing of HEIs
- Recommendation to the 12 CEAs on licensing HEIs and study programmes

There are also many other rules and procedures adopted by HEA as described in the section 'HEA'S functions, activities, procedures'.

The rules developed by HEA are published in the BiH Gazette and on its webpage in Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and mostly also in English languages.

According to the *Decision on norms for determining minimum standards in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina* document, which can be regarded as the major methodology description, the purpose of external QA in BiH is both accreditation (i.e. accountability) and quality improvement.

HEA has included stakeholders in developing QA rules and procedures. First, it has published drafts of the documents on its webpage and asked for feedback. Second, it has organised events and workshops to which it has invited stakeholders. Moreover, most of these procedures were developed as a direct outcome of international aid and development projects. It will now be up to the HEA and the state of BiH more generally to keep this system, make use of it and adjust it further in future.

### **Analysis**

HEA designed its processes in harmony with the FLHE and the complex national context. The above mentioned documents are aligned with national legislation. The rules and procedures developed by HEA are numerous, but the panel wonders whether the effects of these rules do completely fulfil the purpose. The panel worries that the system is over-regulated although the agency staff is clear about the function of all these rules. There are two particular concerns that the panel would like to point out.

There seems to be multiplication and overlapping of particular documents and criteria. Such is the case with the Criteria for accreditation of HEIs, Criteria for accreditation of study programmes and the Minimum standards in HE. All of these seem to cover a very similar scope and areas of evaluation and checking. On the other hand, the criteria that are developed are rather generic and it seems that it is in discretion of each particular committee to decide about their fulfilment. The criteria are broad and cover wide range of HEIs' activities (from staff to space, internal QA procedures and so on), but they seem not to be specific enough. Thus, there is room for incoherence of decisions between the expert committees and later between the 12 CEAs. The panel understands that the accreditation criteria have been developed and revised with strong involvement of international experts and that it is not at all unusual for agencies not to have requirements defined in numbers. However, the panel is of the opinion that in the current state of development of QA of HE in BiH it would be useful to apply some more specific criteria as well.

Second, the recommendations that HEA is giving to the 12 CEAs (such as on criteria for establishing and closing of HEIs and for their licensing) are very generic. For example, the recommendations say that the authorities should prescribe the number of staff or library units, but they don't suggest such numbers. In effect this means that each of the 12 different systems can have different licensing criteria. The panel wonders if such recommendations are fit for purpose.

Finally, the aim of the QA system in BiH is not just to regulate, but also to develop the HE system as such. The designed processes with all the rules and procedures are quite burdensome in terms of administration and the panel wonders if the system is fit to be also developmental.

The panel finds interesting that all of the 27 evaluations so far have resulted in positive recommendations and accreditations. Is the QA system sensitive enough to spot the problems? Or have only excellent HEIs undergone evaluation so far?

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel commends HEA for carefully making all the documents prescribed for it by the FLHE and involving stakeholders in the processes of creation.

#### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel recommends a thorough review of the different documents related to the methodology of external QA in BiH, with special regard to multiplication and overlapping; number, content and interpretation of criteria; level of generalisation; and sensitivity to substandard operations.

#### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

### **ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES**

Standard:

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

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

#### **Evidence**

Accreditation processes in BiH include CEAs and HEA, like already elaborated above. HEA's part of the accreditation process – coordinating the evaluation part of accreditation – is elaborated, pre-defined and published as well as consistently applied.

The accreditation model is the following:

- HEIs' self-evaluation report
- Site-visit to the HEI to assess its compliance with the accreditation criteria and the norms on minimum standards
- External review report published on the HEA website
- Accreditation decision
- Enlisting in the state register of accredited HEIs

All HEA accreditation procedures include a self-evaluation report elaborated by the HEI and provided by the respective CEA. The *Norms on minimum standards* specifies the structure of the self-evaluation report and prescribes the languages in which it needs to be prepared (i.e. in one of the official BiH languages and English). HEA has organised numerous workshops and continuously holds meetings with HEIs to support them in their internal QA processes and in their preparations towards external QA. HEA also provides guidelines for drafting self-evaluation reports of and general support to HEIs.

The site-visit is coordinated by HEA in that HEA appoints the expert committee members, supports the experts, provides them with the documents, and the methodology to write the reports. The visit lasts between two and three days depending on the size of the HEI and the complexity of the evaluation. There is a difference between evaluations under the auspices of RS CEA and other CEAs. In case of RS, the HEAARS coordinates the evaluation process; HEAARS representative is present throughout the visit, acts as the panel secretary and drafts the report. The role of HEA is to appoint the expert panel accepting the HEAARS proposal, and to issue the accreditation recommendation after receiving the external evaluation report. In case of other CEAs, the HEA takes over the whole coordination role. However, HEA supports the expert panel by providing the information and documents. At the moment, it does not accompany the expert committee to the site visits, nor does it serve as committees' secretary. The committee's secretary is decided among the members themselves. At the first day of the site visit HEA and CEA are present to provide preparatory briefing, after which the panel is left to perform the site visit alone.

After the site-visits, an external review report is drafted by the panel and sent to the coordinator of the review at HEA and to the staff committee, which is responsible to issue the proposal for accreditation recommendation. This committee then reviews the draft to make sure that all relevant criteria are covered and that the structure of the report is correct. The reports differ between each other in terms of depth of analysis and length of the text, but HEA is trying to work towards consistency of decisions in the external evaluation reports (see ESG 2.6 for issues related to the reports).

Based on the expert report, the director of HEA produces recommendation for accreditation and sends it to the CEA of the particular HEI. The CEA then produces its accreditation decision and sends it back to the HEA. HEA's committee of compliance (3 staff members, ad hoc) checks compliance with the accreditation criteria and norms on minimum standards. In case of positive finding, it suggests to the director of the agency to enlist the HEI into the state register. In case of negative finding, it is sent back to the relevant CEA and the procedure is repeated. The procedure ends with the HEI being enlisted into the state register. So far, no negative decisions about enlisting into the state register have happened.

Regarding the follow-up procedures, HEA's *Norms on minimum standards* predict a follow-up. After receiving the accreditation decision, HEIs are asked to prepare and publish an action plan specifying a timeframe and responsible individuals to implement recommendations as set in the external report. HEI is further expected to annually produce a report on the state of implementation of the action plan and publish it on its webpage. The responsibility to monitor the follow-up is, however, not prescribed and is inconsistent across the country.

The panel found that stakeholders have a clear understanding of the accreditation process and receive support by HEA if necessary. However, there seems to be confusion about the accreditation criteria and the norms on minimum standards.

### **Analysis**

There are several issues that the panel believes are important in the context of the reliable, predefined and trustworthy system of external QA.

It is hard to determine the ownership of the accreditation process as a whole, especially with the back-and-forth activities between the HEA and CEAs. CEAs are involved at crucial points in the process, which raises issue with independence of the agency like discussed under ESG 3.3. However, this causes also other practical and principal problems.

Although the accreditation criteria and the minimum standards are predefined and available, their effects are not necessarily consistent across the state as each of the 12 CEAs can define their own particular system. HEA is trying its best to make the system consistent by taking care of the consistent interpretation of the accreditation and QA criteria, organising expert committees, preparing the accreditation proposal for the relevant authorities and later checking if the accreditation decisions are in line with the accreditation criteria. Here, the biggest deviance seems to be the RS as it has its own system and differences of views in the cooperation with HEA. The panel learned that in the case of other CEAs the system seems to work without conflicts in interpretation of the FLHE and responsibilities in practice. However, inconsistencies of accreditation judgements could theoretically happen due to scattered responsibilities. Such a system also causes delays in procedures, particularly in time and communication.

Finally, there is a problem with the follow-up procedures. While current HEA rules predict HEIs to prepare action plans and report on their implementation, the monitoring of follow-up depends on the particular CEAs. In case of the Sarajevo and Tuzla Cantons it is HEA's responsibility; and in case of Una-Sana and Central Bosnia Cantons it is HEA in cooperation with the Cantons' ministries. However, HEA did not manage to actually monitor the follow-up as the cooperation with CEAs could not be established for this purpose. In Canton Zenica – Doboj it is not clear who is responsible for monitoring the follow-up at all. RS has yet another set of rules for the follow-up, namely HEARS and the HEI agree on concrete action plan to be done by the HEI, which is followed by an audit 18 months after accreditation. If it is found that the HEI did not fulfil its task, the accreditation is revoked and the HEI is deleted from the state register of HEIs.

HEA has organised a surveying of the HEIs that have undergone accreditation and the corresponding authorities in the beginning of 2016 and the follow-up consultation. Based on this consultation HEA is proposing changes to the authorities for better incorporating the follow-up procedures in their respective rules.

### **Panel commendations**

The panel found HEA to be dedicated to improving its own work and QA processes. Based on feedback it has received from experts, HEA has prepared further documents on interpreting standards and norms on minimum criteria so that it is trying to support expert panels in their interpretation and decision making.

Moreover, in the draft new norms on minimum standards it is predicted that HEA coordinator will have even more consultative role at the site visit and will even better support the experts.

### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel recommends that with the stronger consultative and supporting role of the coordinating staff member the consistency of accreditation procedures be further improved.

Although this is not a direct responsibility of HEA, the panel finds it necessary that BiH authorities consider updating the FLHE and corresponding rules to at least give the responsibility to HEA of monitoring the follow-up procedures and reacting if needed with consequences for HEIs.

**Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

#### **ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS**

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

HEA regularly issues a public call for experts, who are then added to the approved (by CEAs) national list of experts, from which the particular expert committee members are proposed (by CEAs) and appointed (by HEA). Each expert committee consists of four or five members, who are representatives of: the BiH academic community, the BiH economy and practice, students and an international expert.

The criteria for the selection of experts are described in HEA's rules and published on the internet. They are clear and straightforward for each representative in the expert committees. The rules predict that the academic members of the expert committees have good knowledge in their academic disciplines, good knowledge of English or other key foreign language, leadership experience, teaching experience and generic skills such as good communication skills and team work. The representative of business and practice should have at least HE qualification, 10 years of work experience, leadership experience, English language knowledge and other generic skills like mentioned before. Students should have particular minimum average of grades, be active students, and have experience in HE reforms, English language knowledge and generic social skills. Finally, international experts should hold a doctorate in the relevant field; have good knowledge of English or other foreign language, HE leadership experience, experience in HE QA and other social, organisational and communication skills.

In its own rules, HEA states that it will issue a public call for experts once per year, but more often if necessary. In practice, however, it issued a call in 2010, 2013 and 2015. After the call, HEA's director names a selection committee to review the applicants. It has one representative of the following bodies: the national Rectors' Conference, one cantonal ministry of education, Ministry of Education and Culture of the RS, the Department for education the Government of the BD, and the HEA. The selection committee prepares a list of experts that fulfil the above specified criteria. The proposed list is adopted by HEA's SB and then it needs consent from each of the 12 CEAs. At the moment, there are 446 experts on the list. HEA updates the contact and personal information of experts twice per year.

HEA is also responsible to organise experts training. So far, it has done three 'cycles' of training, each with support of international projects. The first cycle was organised in 2010/2011, which trained 228 experts and was supported by the Tempus ESABIH project. It had 14 workshops, out of which 4 were theoretical in nature and 10 practical training. The second cycle was organised in 2015 as part of the IPA Twinning Project and 45 experts were trained. Finally, the third cycle was organised in March 2017. In addition to these trainings, HEA was a partner in a Tempus project led by the University of

Heidelberg. Within this project, a certain number of experts attended training for accrediting doctoral study programmes and then participate in pilot accreditation of 8 such programmes in BiH.

International experts are not part of the training due to financial and pragmatic reasons. Instead, they receive all documents and are part of the briefing, which is organised on the first day of the site visit.

In one of the thematic analyses, HEA found that experts were not sufficiently trained and has developed the *Manual for training of experts* as a consequence.

HEA has also developed a practice of preparatory meeting of expert committees on the night before the site visit to the HEI. At this preparatory meeting, representatives of HEA and CEA are present to provide contextual information and answer any questions.

All experts who participate in HEA coordinated accreditation procedures sign the *Declaration on the absence of conflict of interest*.

### **Analysis**

The criteria for experts to be included in HEA's pool are clear, published and consistently applied. The composition of particular expert committees is again clear, published and, as a rule, appropriate. Although it is a matter of ESG 3.3, the panel would like to remind here of the problematic practice in which CEAs need to give consent to the selected experts to be listed in the pool of potential experts, and that CEAs suggest experts for particular committee.

The new *Norms on minimum standards* (not yet adopted) predict the particular expert committees to have a 'three peoples' composition. While this seems strange at the first glance, as this is expert work, it is consistent with everything else in BiH and HEA. Essentially this means that HEA needs to appoint the individual expert committees being attentive to the composition of representatives of the four groups (academic community, business and practice, students, international experts), expert disciplines and also their ethnic background.

HEA realises it needs to improve the training practice so that it also includes international experts and so that it is held more often. In this respect, it started working towards developing webinars and producing documents to support international experts. It has already introduced the preparatory meeting on the first day of site visits.

The panel found that HEIs find experts' committees independent, and site visits and external reports useful. At the same time, there are some critical remarks concerning the list of experts and HEA's appointment and training procedures of experts in the SAR of HEAARS. (Not enough experts on the list, call for application not every year, length and complexity of procedures [with political obstructions in cases], time interval between expert training sessions.) These remarks were reiterated during the interview with HEAARS representatives.

### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel recommends HEA to make the call for application to the experts list on an annual basis.

The panel recommends HEA to organise trainings regularly and to practice refreshment trainings for experts that are in the pool for years, but have attended training only once a while ago.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

### Standard:

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

### Evidence

In the accreditation procedures, HEA uses the criteria for accreditation (*Decision on the criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina*) and the norms on minimum standards (*Decision on norms for determining minimum standards in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina*). Both of these documents are publicly available in BiH languages and English.

The accreditation criteria have ten broader criteria and each have further sub-criteria. The norms on minimum standards have two parts. First part, for evaluation of HEIs' internal QA, has more or less same sections as the accreditation criteria; while the second part describes the aims, method, and process of external QA, namely how to prepare HEIs' self-evaluation and external evaluation reports, the structure of reports, the site visit, what judgements expert committees make (full compliance, substantial compliance, partial compliance or non-compliance), and other procedural descriptions of the external evaluation.

To contribute to better consistency of judgement HEA prepared the *Expert training manual* and the *Methodology for writing reports*. In the latest training of experts in 2017 HEA has focused training to the coherence of interpretation of the criteria.

HEA also issued some recommendations required by the FLHE – namely recommendations for licencing HEIs and establishing and closing HEIs. These recommendations are published and are generic in nature. This means that HEA proposes scope of the licencing criteria, but does not recommend particular standards in numeric terms. This is left to CEAs.

### Analysis

The accreditation criteria and minimum standards are rather generic documents.

The panel checked a few external evaluation reports and found that they vary in terms of depth of analysis. Most interestingly, albeit reports identify anomalies in HEIs' operations, they still have positive judgements and consequently positive – though conditional, in cases – accreditation decisions follow. So far, not one accreditation decision was negative. HEA's staff, as well as experts, think that the reason for this is that it was important to even start the external QA in BiH, to establish the QA processes and build competence and trust in the system. They predict that re-accreditation will be stricter.

There is a problem with consistency of judgements between different expert committees. The accreditation criteria and norms on minimum standards are rather generic and it happens that different committees assess things differently. The panel found that each particular expert committee seems to agree on how to interpret criteria on their own at the preparatory meeting on the first day of the site visit without having guidance from HEA. The further inconsistency is also about which criteria are used in their work, namely do they use the 'accreditation criteria' or also

‘norms on minimum standards’. They should be using both, but in practice this is not always happening.

At the moment, HEA attempts to ensure consistency of expert committees’ judgements so that HEA committee, which prepares the proposal for accreditation recommendations for CEAs, carefully studies external reports and ask experts for explanations or additional information if necessary. HEA’s committee in this respect tries to make judgements coherently as it is at this level that accreditation recommendations are made. It has not happened yet that experts would not reach consensus in their work. But it has happened once so far that HEA has proposed ‘conditional accreditation’ while experts proposed full accreditation. The reason was that the HEA committee did not see enough evidence and justification for full accreditation.

HEA has identified the problem of consistency of judgement when collecting feedback from experts. As a result, HEA has produced a *Methodology for writing reports*. Moreover, it has prepared a revised *Norms on minimum standards*, which are not yet adopted. The new norms have been subject to public and stakeholder consultation and are now predicted to be adopted in one of the future SB meetings. The new norms predict a more decisive role of the evaluation coordinator. The coordinator is HEA member of staff, who would accompany the expert panels, support the panels in organisational and technical matters and help with interpretation of rules and criteria.

#### **Panel commendations**

HEA is to be commended for developing and updating the ‘*Methodology for writing reports*’ document which is aimed at fostering the consistency of expert panel judgements and interpretation of criteria.

#### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel suggests that HEA further considers and implements mechanisms for (i) consistency of accreditation criteria interpretation by expert committees and (ii) consistency of judgements of expert committees.

Moreover, the panel suggest that HEA considers how to make accreditation criteria more explicit.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### **ESG 2.6 REPORTING**

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

The norms on minimum standards prescribe the structure and format of the external evaluation reports:

##### *1. Introduction*

*1.1. History and organisation of higher education institution*

*1.2. Implementation of the Bologna Process at higher education institution*

- 1.3. *Research and scientific-research and/or artistic work*
- 1.4. *Relations with the environment, economy and social partners*
- 1.5. *Financial resources of higher education institution*
- 1.6. *Statistical data*
2. *Self-evaluation process*
  - 2.1. *Self-evaluation team*
  - 2.2. *Self-evaluation procedures*
3. *Standards and criteria*
  - 3.1. *Development and strategy of higher education institution*
  - 3.2. *Management, internal quality assurance and quality culture*
  - 3.3. *Procedures for quality assurance of study programmes*
  - 3.4. *Student assessment procedures*
  - 3.5. *Human resources*
  - 3.6. *Quality of physical resources*
  - 3.7. *Information systems*
  - 3.8. *Public information*
  - 3.9. *International relations*
4. *Conclusions with suggested activities for improvement*
5. *Appendices*

Not all external reports follow completely this structure and format; and there is a difference between HEA and HEAARS coordinated reports. However, all reports provide: the basic contextual information, information on the site visit and the expert committee, evaluation of standards and criteria with recommendations and conclusions. The reports are transparent in their structure; however, it is noticeable that they vary between each other. HEIs have opportunity to comment on the expert reports before they are finalised. The comments can be about factual errors.

For each HEI that has undergone accreditation, HEA publishes the following documents: the composition of the committee of experts, the external report, recommendation for the accreditation of the HEI, the decision for listing into the state register. It does not publish the accreditation decision as CEAs are responsible to issue those.

Although all reports are published in BiH languages, not all are published in English even though they should be prepared in English based on the HEA rules. Moreover, sometimes the reports are scanned and there are pages missing in the scanned versions in cases.

### **Analysis**

Reports are produced by the review committees. In case of RS, a HEAARS's staff member acts as a secretary to write a report, to which all members of the committee contribute in the form of comments and final consent. In case of other CEAs, the committee members appoint the secretary among themselves. The secretary is responsible for writing the report, to which all members contribute in the form of writing passages of the report, making comments, and giving final consent for the report. In this respect the final reports are agreed by all the experts.

While reports are published, easy to find on the internet and transparent enough, they could be more informative and analytic. Experts often make claims like 'the committee got evidence on good

governance of HEI', but then no information is given on what is this governance, or critical examination of why it is good or what might be improved. Some reports are more informative than others.

#### **Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel advises HEA to ensure all reports have the same format and reach the level of consistency in information and critical examination. Moreover, it advises HEA to publish all reports in English on the internet and to make sure that all pages of reports are scanned and published.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### **ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**

Standard:

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

#### **Evidence**

In the current accreditation system, HEIs have only the opportunity to comment on experts report for factual errors.

With other decisions, HEIs can appeal against decisions under the general administrative appeals law of the state (Administrative Procedure Act). This is because HEA is a public institution having to comply with the overall state legislation covering the work of public institutions.

HEIs can appeal against all decisions that HEA and CEA issue under the general administrative act. These decisions are: the decision on the composition of the expert panel, accreditation decision, and the decision to enlist the HEI to the state register of accredited institutions. The decisions take the form of official documents which include the decision, explanation and legal disclaimer.

Since all accreditation decisions so far were positive, there were no appeals yet.

#### **Analysis**

Although there were only positive accreditation decisions so far, the system as such lacks an appeals procedure for all of decisions and a complaints procedure for all procedural issues. HEIs have a chance to comment on experts reports. In addition, they have a chance to appeal in the context of the general administrative law. But the accreditation system as such does not include appeals procedure. This needs to be understood in the context of the particular national and legal setting. As HEA is not responsible for accreditation decisions, the appeals procedure for accreditation is out of its remit. However, it could consider setting up the appeals and complaints procedures for the processes it is responsible for.

HEA stated that the new norms on minimum standards, which are soon to be adopted, introduce the appeals procedure. However, there it is predicted that HEIs can complain to HEA about unprofessional conduct of expert committee members and that experts have a chance to report on unprofessional behaviour of HEIs. To be fair, this option already exists now and is regulated with the rules on expert nominations as well as their contracts. Therefore, the lack of the appeals and

procedural complaints procedures will stay pertinent, albeit the appeals for accreditation is out of HEA's remit.

**Panel compliance related recommendations**

The panel recommends to HEA to consider how it can establish a complaints and an appeals process for the QA procedures that it is responsible for. The appeals and complaints would include more than a possibility to comment a draft external review report and the general possibility for appeals in the administrative court.

**Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

# ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

## THE NATIONAL QA SYSTEM AND AGENCY RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER ACTORS

Due to the complex state administration and HE system of BiH, the ESG compliance of the HEA cannot be discussed (and improved) without touching (and developing) the national system issues. The panel is really impressed by the efforts of all interested parties, authorities, higher education institutions, and the two quality assurance agencies; and the subtle – albeit, rather complicated – mechanisms created for maintaining a delicate balance of national, regional, ethnic, and professional considerations. Nevertheless, beyond the obvious task of assessing HEA's ESG compliance, the panel, acting as a 'critical friend', took the courage of making some – perhaps even substantial – suggestions for the enhancement of the whole higher education quality assurance system of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On an overarching note, the panel is of the opinion that in order to most effectively serve the double purpose of accountability and improvement, the overall external QA system of BiH needs to be revisited by HEA together with the relevant national, entity, and cantonal authorities, higher education and stakeholder representatives, having in mind the possible derogation of the complexity of the system. Key recommendations of the IPA Twinning project from 2014 and 2015 are still also to be considered and acted upon.

The panel understands the multi-level governance in the country with distributed HE authority over 12 CEAs; and distributed responsibility for QA between CEAs and HEA and HEAARS. But this sort of QA system governance does have its negative side, which is seen in the complexity of the system, scattered responsibility resulting in hard or impossible decision making, and long time for decisions or changes. It is not the panel's task to suggest in detail national reforms which might have political consequences, but the panel would like to strongly indicate the identified problems which are a consequence of such system.

The QA system is complex and heavy on rules and procedures, which is causing some confusion among stakeholders. Particularly this is the case with FLHE prescribing particular rules and documents that HEA has to prepare and adopt which are then sometimes not understood and followed by all stakeholders.

Second, the multilevel governance results in different rules and conditions for HEIs depending on where they are based in the state and which of the 12 CEAs is responsible for them. This is at best unusual and at worst discriminatory. Sometimes the scattered responsibility results in different authorities avoiding their responsibility and pointing to others. It is also causing delays in decision making. The panel found it confusing who can claim ownership for QA as a whole. Although formally it is the CEAs that are making accreditation decisions, the role of HEA (and of HEAARS in RS) is crucial. On the other hand, it could not be claimed that it is HEA that is mainly responsible for the system as a whole. When things do not happen or go wrong, it is hard to change them or find who is responsible.

Regarding HEA's independence, the back and forth responsibility in the QA system, which is divided between HEA, HEAARS and CEAs is problematic. The most obvious problem is CEAs' interference in choosing experts for panels by giving consents for the national list and then suggestions for (or, in the case of RS, decisions by HEAARS on) particular panels. More generally, the subtle political influence on HEA was noticed, but understood.

The QA system as such is not complete in that there are substantial elements missing. There is no clarity about the follow-up procedures and the responsibility for that. Moreover, the appeals procedure for accreditation in the system is apparently non-existent besides the general administrative law and court.

Making of a more detailed and precise national regulation in relation to QA is to be considered for remedying all these problems. The relationships, roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, CEAs, HEA and HEAARS are especially important to reconsider and clarify. International good practice shows the benefits of one actor being responsible for a procedure from beginning to the end even if various actors take part in particular activities within that procedure. At the moment, this is not so in BiH. Moreover, if there is more than one agency in a particular territory, there is normally clear division of tasks between them, possibly determined by legal regulations. This is also not the case in BiH.

The panel found strange that all the accreditation decisions made so far were positive. As explained above, HEA believes this to be the case with first accreditations and that this would change in the future. The panel would like to remind HEA and the authorities to make sure that the QA procedures are sensitive enough to be fit for purpose.

Finally, the panel would like to encourage state authorities to allow HEA to employ more staff so that it can handle accreditation of study programmes, which is predicted by law; and also that HEA can professionally support experts' panels and accompany them at site visits like predicted in the new norms on minimum standards.

# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

HEA is to be commended for:

### Standards 2.1

HEA is to be commended for its efforts in revising the accreditation criteria and relevant documents in order to be in harmony with ESG 2015.

### Standard 2.2:

The panel commends HEA for carefully making all the documents prescribed for it by the FLHE and involving stakeholders in the processes of creation.

### Standard 2.3

The panel found HEA to be dedicated to improving its own work and QA processes. Based on feedback it has received from experts, HEA has prepared further documents on interpreting standards and norms on minimum criteria so that it is trying to support expert panels in their interpretation and decision making.

Moreover, in the draft new norms on minimum standards it is predicted that HEA coordinator will have even more consultative role at the site visit and will even better support the experts.

### Standard 2.5

HEA is to be commended for developing and updating the 'Methodology for writing reports' document which is aimed at fostering the consistency of expert panel judgements and interpretation of criteria.

### Standard 3.1

HEA is to be commended in its efforts for implementing a relatively systematic external QA system in BiH despite many challenges. Moreover, HEA is working hard to include stakeholders and keep the relationships alive. Finally, HEA is highly internationally active, which contributes to its capacity.

### Standard 3.2

HEA is trying to be a proactive HE actor in its complex environment. It is proving to be a hard task in itself; however, HEA is trying to balance the complex juridical and political relations in the country by issuing particular documents and recommendations and by particular initiatives such as meetings, briefings, working groups and projects.

### Standard 3.3

The panel appreciates that HEA recognised the recommendation of the international projects, which stated that naming the expert committees are not in line with the ESG. This was when the authorities would suggest the five experts that HEA would only confirm. Therefore HEA asked the authorities to now suggest more people out of whom it can choose five. This practice is still problematic, but better than before.

#### Standard 3.4

In spite of the fact that the agency is relatively new and it has not even finished the first round of institutional evaluations, several thematic analyses have been produced by both the HE Development, and the QA departments, respectively.

#### Standard 3.5

The panel would like to commend the commitment and dedication of the HEA staff.

#### Standard 3.6

The panel would like to commend HEA for its large collaboration with the different stakeholders involved in its activities and the attention paid to their opinions which are listened and transferred into adequate action.

### OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, HEA is in substantial compliance with the ESG.

The panel considers HEA to be in full compliance with the following standards: 2.4, 3.2, 3.4, and 3.7.

The panel also considers HEA to substantially comply with the following standards: 2.1, 2.5, 2.6, 3.1, 3.5, and 3.6.

Finally, the panel considers the HEA to be partially compliant with the following standards: 2.2, 2.3, 2.7, and 3.3.

The panel recommends HEA to:

#### Standard 2.1

The panel recommends HEA to make interpretation of particular criteria more explicit and to include all aspects of the ESG Part 1.

#### Standard 2.2

The panel recommends a thorough review of the different documents related to the methodology of external QA in BiH, with special regard to multiplication and overlapping; number, content and interpretation of criteria; level of generalisation; and sensitivity to substandard operations.

#### Standard 2.3

The panel recommends that with the stronger consultative and supporting role of the coordinating staff member the consistency of accreditation procedures be further improved.

Although this is not a direct responsibility of HEA, the panel finds it necessary that BiH authorities consider updating the FLHE and corresponding rules to at least give the responsibility to HEA of monitoring the follow-up procedures and reacting if needed with consequences for HEIs.

#### Standard 2.4

The panel recommends HEA to make the call for application to the experts list on an annual basis.

The panel recommends HEA to organise trainings regularly and to practice refreshment trainings for experts that are in the pool for years, but have attended training only once a while ago.

#### Standard 2.5

The panel suggests that HEA further considers and implements mechanisms for (i) consistency of accreditation criteria interpretation by expert committees and (ii) consistency of judgements of expert committees.

Moreover, the panel suggest that HEA considers how to make accreditation criteria more explicit.

#### Standard 2.6

The panel advises HEA to ensure all reports have the same format and reach the level of consistency in information and critical examination. Moreover, it advises HEA to publish all reports in English on the internet and to make sure that all pages of reports are scanned and published.

#### Standard 2.7

The panel recommends to HEA to consider how it can establish a complaints and an appeals process for the QA procedures that it is responsible for. The appeals and complaints would include more than a possibility to comment a draft external review report and the general possibility for appeals in the administrative court.

#### Standard 3.1

The panel recommends including stakeholders in all levels of the agency work – spanning from formal decision making bodies, to expert groups and to wider consultation processes. Specifically, we suggest naming stakeholders in the SB in next nomination of members.

The panel recommends making further efforts in completing the first institutional accreditation for all existing HEIs and commencing programme accreditation procedures.

The clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of the different actors in the QA process could be agreed and published.

#### Standard 3.3

The composition of the SB should be more balanced, not have only members coming from HEIs (public universities), and especially them not having any leadership positions at their HEI.

The panel suggests that HEA takes over the whole responsibility for creating the national list of experts and then appointing expert committees in the accreditation procedures.

The panel recommends the accreditation decisions to be made by the SB of HEA.

#### Standard 3.4

The panel recommends HEA to use the review reports and other available information to analyse the actual findings of evaluations and the state of the BiH HE system more systematically and generally. Moreover, the analysis of the accreditation documents for their fitness of purpose would be useful.

The thematic analyses could be more than satisfaction surveys and could improve in the critical approach.

#### Standard 3.5

The panel is concerned about the human and other resources should HEA start with study programme accreditations and also with the new practice in which HEA staff member accompanies expert committees in the site visits. These two major changes will demand substantial additional resources that HEA will need. The panel recommends HEA to strengthen its human and financial resources to be able to fulfil the predicted tasks.

#### Standard 3.6

The panel advises HEA and the Quality Committee to implement a coherent annual self-evaluation process as planned according to the SAR (p.6).

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The panel would like to reiterate its appreciation of HEA's conditions in which it is working. Many times the regulatory framework and the actual operation of the system make it impossible for HEA to improve the QA system. However, the panel does see some room for improvement and would like to summarise its suggestions as follows.

Regarding the HEA capacity, the panel was impressed with the intensity and magnitude of international projects and support that HEA has received to build the QA system. This was crucial in the initial phases when the QA system more generally and HEA more specifically were being set up. Now HEA has reached the moment in which it needs to take its professional autonomy and drive forward its own development and growth. The panel suggests HEA to be confident in this endeavour and at the same time keep fostering its international engagement.

The panel would like to encourage HEA to continue striving for dialogue between various parties in the country and for coordination of the system.

Regarding streamlining the system, the panel would like to recommend HEA to consider merging particular rules and make them more explicit. Particularly key is that HEA finds ways that everybody can easily and consistently understand HEA's procedures and documents.

The panel suggests to consider removing some of prescribed rules from the FLHE and allowing HEA to decide on its own which exact rules are needed (at the moment there seem to be misunderstandings why accreditation criteria as well as norms on minimum standards are needed).

Finally, the panel would like to state how impressed it was with HEA, its hard work and the accomplishments that it has made since its establishment, especially working in such a complex and complicated system as is BiH. The panel understands why all stakeholders consistently commended HEA and saw it as an important positive development in the country's HE system.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

Sunday, 07.05.2017		
As necessary	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for day 1 A pre-visit meeting with the agency contact person to clarify elements related to the overall system and context (if requested)	
Monday, 08.05.2017		
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
8.30 - 9.00	Review panel's private meeting	
9.00 -10.00	Meeting with CEO and the president of the Steering Board	Prof. dr. Enver Halilović, director of the Agency Irena Šiško, deputy of director of the Agency Slobodan Stanić, deputy of director of the Agency Prof. dr. Branko Krsmanović, president of the Steering Board
10.00 – 10.15	Review panel's private discussion	
10.15– 11.15	Meeting with the Steering Board of the Agency	Prof. dr. Branko Krsmanović, president of the Steering Board Prof.dr. Vlado Majstorović, deputy of president of SB Prof.dr. Dževad Zečić, deputy of president of SB Ammar Miraščija, member Prof.dr. Lamija Tanović, member
11.15-11.30	Review panel's private discussion	
11.30 - 12.15	Meeting with the Committee for Quality Assurance of the Agency	Benjamin Muhamedbegović, president Sanela Pašić Delahmetović, member Bojan Stevandić, member Slavica Škoro, member
12.15 -12.30	Review panel's private discussion	
12.30 -13.15	Meeting with head of Sector for quality assurance	Benjamin Muhamedbegović
13.15 - 14.15	Lunch	
14.15 – 15.00	Meeting with representatives of Sector for quality assurance	Marina Cicović, Senior adviser for QA Maja Macan, Higher official for QA Dalibor Ateljević, Higher official for QA
15.00-15.15	Review panel's private discussion	
15.15-16.00	Meeting with representatives of Sector for development of HE	Sanela Pašić Delahmetović, Senior adviser for for Science and Higher Education Aida Savić, Higher official for Higher Education Jelena Šantić, Higher official for Higher Education
16.00	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparation for day 2	
	Dinner (panel only)	
Tuesday, 09.05.2017		
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
8.30 - 9.00	Review panel's private discussion	
9.00 - 9.45	Meeting with representatives Management of Cabinet, Department for Financial - Material Affairs	Slavica Škoro, Cabinet of Management Bojan Stevandić, Department for Financial - Material Affairs Jasmina Muminović, Department for Legal, Personnel General Affairs

9.45 -10.00	Review panel's private discussion	
10.00 – 11.00	Meeting with ministry representatives	Daria Dulović, Head of Department of coordination of education policy in Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH Sifet Kukuruz, assistant minister for HE in Ministry of Education of Sarajevo Canton Rašid Hadžović, minister, Ministry of Education of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton Maid Pračić, secretary of the Ministry of Education of Zenica-Doboj Canton
11.00 -11.15	Review panel's private discussion	
11.15.-11.45	Meeting with representatives of Department for HE of Brčko District BiH	Senad Osmanović Head of Department for HE of Brčko District BiH
11.45 – 12.00	Review panel's private discussion	
12.00 -12.45	Meeting with representatives of HEAARS	Prof. dr. Miroslav Bobrek, director of HEAARS Tatjana Radaković, head of department
12.45-13.00	Review panel's private discussion	
13.00-14.00	Meeting with representatives of accredited HEIs	Prof. dr. Maida Čohodar- Husić, vice-rector for quality of University of Sarajevo Prof. dr. Milan Mataruga, rector of University of Banja Luka), Prof. dr. Izabela Dankić, vice-rector for international cooperation of University of Mostar Prof. dr. Damir Marjanović, rector of International Burch University Sarajevo Prof.dr. Sanel Jakupović, dean of Faculty of Economy, University of Apeiron Banja Luka Mr.sc. Muhđin Mujačić, director of College of Computer Science and Business Communications eMPIRICA Brčko District BiH
14.00-14.20	Meeting (Skype) with the former director of the Agency	Dr. sc. Husein Nanić
14.20-15.00	Lunch	
15.00 - 15.45	Meeting with QA officers of HEIs	Nenad Marković, University of East Sarajevo Enes Dedić, University of Bihać Monia Malešević, University of Mostar Alim Abazović, University of Džemal Bijedić Mostar Amra Tuzović, University of Travnik
15.45- 16.00	Review panel's private discussion	
16.00 - 16.45	Meeting with the representatives from the reviewers' pool	Prof. dr. Dejan Bokonjić (Experts - representatives of the academic community in BiH ), Prof. dr. Dražena Gašpar (Experts - representatives of the academic community in BiH ), Prof. dr. Aleksandar Božić (International expert, Serbia) Esad Bajramović (Expert – representative of the economy and practice) Amila Ćiber (student) Mladen Bubonjić (student)
16.45	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparation for day 3 and provisional conclusion	
	Dinner (panel only)	
<b>Wednesday, 10.05.2017</b>		
<b>TIMING</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW</b>
8.00 -8.30	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify	
8.30 - 9.30	Meeting with stakeholders, such as employer representatives, local community	Ante Jurić Marjanović (NGO Akademac Banja Luka) Nedret Kikanović (President of Chamber of commerce of Tuzla Canton)
9.30 – 9.45	Review panel's private discussion	
9.45– 10.45	Meeting with students	Harun Kurtović (Student Parliament of University of Džemal Bijedić Mostar) Merim Serdarević (Student Parliament of University of Sarajevo) Denis Vejzović, (Student Parliament of University of Zenica)

		Azra Pezerović (Representative of students of College of Computer Science and Business Communications eMPIRICA Brčko District BiH)
10.45 – 11.00	Review panel's private discussion	
11.00 -11.45	Meeting with CEO to clarify any pending issues	Prof. dr. Enver Halilović,
11.45 -12.00	Review panel's private discussion	
12.00 – 13.15	Working lunch - Review panel's private discussion	
13.15 – 13.45	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and council/board members of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	Prof. dr. Enver Halilović, director of the Agency Prof.dr. Branko Krsmanović, president of SB of Agency Prof.dr. Vlado Majstorović, deputy of president of SB of Agency Prof.dr. Dževad Zečić, deputy of president of SB of Agency Irena Šiško, deputy of director of the Agency Slobodan Stanić, deputy of director of the Agency Benjamin Muhamedbegović, head of Sector for quality assurance

## ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

### External review of the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HEA) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

#### Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

July 2016

#### 1. Background and Context

Higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina in line with the Constitution belongs to the entity of the Republika Srpska (RS), cantons in the Federation of BiH (FBiH) and the Brčko District of BiH (BD BiH). The institutional structure in the area of higher education consists of ten cantonal ministries of education, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republika Srpska and the Department of Education in the Government of the Brčko District of BiH, which present the competent education authorities adopted laws in the area of education, education budgets, establish education policy and have all other rights and obligations in its area of responsibility.

The Framework Law on Higher Education sets out organisation of higher education in BiH, accountability of competent education authorities in the area of higher education; establishes the bodies for implementation of the laws and international obligations of BiH, as well as the manner of quality assurance in the area of higher education.

HEA was established by the Framework Law as an independent administrative organisation. Decision of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina sets out that the seat of HEA is in Banja Luka and that work should commence on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2008. After the creation of organisational, technical and other requirements for the performance and tasks entrusted to HEA by the Framework Law, HEA has become fully operational since July 2009. The HEA organisational structure is provided for by the Rulebook on Internal Organisation. The operations of HEA are organised within four core organisational units and these are as follows:

Management Cabinet  
Sector for Development of Higher Education  
Sector for Quality Assurance  
Sector for Legal, Personnel, Financial and General Affairs

The Framework Law provided for the competences and the basis for HEA operations in Articles 47 to 52. However, the operations of HEA are to a significant extent determined by laws and bylaws at BiH level which regulate the organisation, competences and work of the institutions of BiH. As the higher education in the original constitutional competences in BiH belongs to the RS entity, cantons in the FBiH and Brčko District of BiH, the legal framework for the work of HEA consists of the laws on higher education of the RS, cantons of the FBiH and BiH Brčko District, as well as the accompanying bylaw regulations adopted by the competent education authorities.

In 2014/2015 academic year in BiH, 47 licensed higher education institutions have the permit, i.e. the license for work. Out of this number, eight are public universities and two public colleges. In Bosnia and Herzegovina education is realised at 35 private higher education institutions, while two private licensed higher education institutions have not performed education in 2014/2015 academic year.

HEA has been an affiliate of ENQA since February 2010 and is applying for the first time for ENQA membership.

HEA is also applying for registration on EQAR.

## **2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent HEA fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of HEA should be granted and to EQAR to support HEA application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

### **2.1 Activities of HEA within the scope of the ESG**

In order for HEA to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of HEA that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of HEA have to be addressed in the external review:

- Accreditation of higher education institutions

HEA's self-evaluation and external review report should further address whether there might be any potential for conflict of interest in the agency's activities regarding the preparation of normative acts or providing advice on the work and policy development for the competent education authorities, and HEA's external quality assurance activities, and how such possible conflicts of interest are prevented.

## **3. The Review Process**

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by HEA including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to HEA;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

### **3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members**

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. Two of the reviewers are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the member national agencies. The third external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member comes from the European Students' Union (ESU).

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide HEA with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards HEA review.

### **3.2 Self-assessment by HEA, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

HEA is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which HEA fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

HEA will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to HEA at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by HEA in arriving in Banja Luka (Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and HEA.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to HEA for comment on factual accuracy. If HEA chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by HEA, finalise the document and submit it to HEA and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

HEA is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which HEA expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

## **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

HEA will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. HEA commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by HEA. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

## 5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether HEA has met the ESG and can be thus admitted as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to HEA and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by HEA, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. HEA may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

## 6. Budget

HEA shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 2 other panel members	4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for follow-up visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit	1,600 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, HEA will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to HEA if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget. The review fee will be paid by HEA in three instalments – first one at the signature of the contract and the next two before the site visit.

The fee of the follow-up visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

## 7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	By August 2016
Appointment of review panel members	February/March 2017
Self-assessment completed	By February 2017
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	February 2017
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	March 2017
Briefing of review panel members	April 2017
Review panel site visit	Early May 2017
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	June 2017
Draft of evaluation report to HEA	July 2017
Statement of HEA to review panel if necessary	July 2017
Submission of final report to ENQA	Mid-August 2017
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of HEA	September 2017
Publication of the report	September 2017

## ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

BD	Brcko District
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BP	Bologna Process
CEA	competent education authority
CEENQA	The Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
EACEA	European Commission: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
EU	European Union
FBIH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
FLHE	Framework Law of Higher Education
HE	higher education
HEA	Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance BiH
HEAARS	Agencija za akreditaciju visokoškolskih ustanova Republike Srpske
HEI	higher education institution
INQAAHE	The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
NGO	non-governmental organisation
QA	quality assurance
QF	qualification framework
QF-EHEA	Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area
RS	Republic of Srpska
SAR	self-assessment report

## ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

### DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY HEA

HEA initially provided the SAR. In addition, the panel accessed the following documents from HEA's web page:

- The Framework Law on Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Decision on the criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Decision on norms for determining minimal standards in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Rulebook on Keeping the State Register of Accredited Higher Education Institutions
- Instructions on the manner of conformity assessment accreditation decisions with minimal standards in the field of higher education and criteria for accreditation of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Decision on criteria for selection of national and international experts to provide assessment and conduct quality reviews and give recommendation on accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs
- Decision on the method of forming the Committee for the selection of national and international experts to provide assessment and conduct quality reviews and give recommendations on accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs
- Rulebook on the manner of conducting the public competition for the selection of national and international experts to provide assessment and conduct quality reviews and give recommendations on accreditation of higher education institutions and study programs
- Decision on manner of creating Commission for election of domestic and international experts To provide assessment and conduct quality reviews and Give recommendation on accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes
- Recommendations on criteria for licensing of higher education institutions and study programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Recommendations on criteria and standards to the Ministry of the Republic of Srpska, Cantonal Ministries and the Brčko District BiH for establishment and closure of higher education institutions and for re-structuring of study programs
- Instructions on the form and content of Diploma and Diploma Supplement issued by accredited institutions of higher education
- Statute of the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance
- Poslovnik o radu stručnog kolegija agencije za razvoj visokog obrazovanja i osiguranje kvaliteta
- The 2014-2018 Strategy of Development of the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assessment
- Memorandum of understanding better HEA and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), 2014
- Guide for internal and external evaluation of HEIs in BiH (in local language)
- Rulebook on internal organisation of HEA
- SB Handbook
- HEA Documents, 2013
- HEA Self-evaluation report, 2012
- Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Analysis of 2013 accreditation processes for higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Analysis of the accreditation process from the point of view of the higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2016 (in local language)
- Instruction on the consultation process for preparing HEA's rules
- Eight external review reports (four in English and four in the local language)
- 2014 work programme (<http://hea.gov.ba/Aktivnosti/progr/Default.aspx?id=5277>, p.12)

Before the site visit the panel asked for and received the following documents:

- Six minutes from SB meetings
- The 2016 revised Criteria of accreditation of HEIs
- HEA Quality Manual
- HEA Expert training manual
- Methodology of writing reports
- Priorities for 2016 – 2026 Higher Education Development in BiH
- HEA annual report 2016
- List of proposed experts from CEAs and appointed committees of experts
- Composition of different HEA internal committees and bodies

At the visit the panel asked and received:

- An example of the decision of HEA about the naming of the expert panel (in local language)
- An example of the decision of HEA about listing HEI to the state register (in local language)
- An example of the decision of one of the CEAs on accreditation (in local language)
- Four examples about the time needed from receiving the accreditation decision from RS to listing the HEI in the register
- Drafted new Norms for determining minimal standards in higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (in local language)

#### **OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL**

##### **Other documents**

- Tempus project: Self-certification to the QF-EHEA Draft report. 2017, Sarajevo. Available at (last accessed on 26.05.2017):  
<http://www.bhqfhe.eu/en/bhqfhe-project-team-has-published-two-new-publications-self-certification-report-to-the-qf-ehea-proceedings-of-the-bhqfhe-projects/>
- Tempus EACA report. Available at (last accessed on 26.05.2017):  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating\\_countries/overview/bosnia\\_and\\_herzegovina\\_country\\_fiche\\_final.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/overview/bosnia_and_herzegovina_country_fiche_final.pdf)
- Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (2012). Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Available at (last accessed on 26.05.2017):  
[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating\\_countries/overview/bosnia\\_and\\_herzegovina\\_country\\_fiche\\_final.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/overview/bosnia_and_herzegovina_country_fiche_final.pdf)
- HEAARS self-evaluation report, 2017. Available at (last accessed on 26.05.2017):  
[http://www.hears.com/dokumenti/self\\_assessment\\_report\\_of\\_rs\\_heaa.pdf](http://www.hears.com/dokumenti/self_assessment_report_of_rs_heaa.pdf)
- Education for All 2015 National Review, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Available at (last accessed on 26.05.2017):  
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002299/229929E.pdf>

- Strengthening Institutional Capacity for Quality Assurance. Twinning partnership between BiH and Austria. Key project recommendations, September 2015. Available at (last accessed on 30.05.2017):  
[http://www.heg.gov.ba/projekti/zavr\\_pro/ipa\\_twinning/Twinning%20klucne%20preporuke%20eng.pdf](http://www.heg.gov.ba/projekti/zavr_pro/ipa_twinning/Twinning%20klucne%20preporuke%20eng.pdf)

**Other webpages**

- CIP: <http://www.cip.gov.ba/bs/o-nama/o-nama>
- ENIC NARIC: <http://www.enic-naric.net/bosnia-and-herzegovina.aspx?srcval=bosnia>
- The Civil Service Agency: <http://www.adsfbih.gov.ba/index.php?lang=ba&sel=92>
- HEAARS: <http://www.hears.com/>



**THIS REPORT** presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HEA), undertaken in 2017.

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Agency for Development  
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