

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Introduction

Since before joining the Bologna process¹ in 2003, the universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) have been working towards the introduction of quality assurance policies and practices. This work has taken on a new importance since joining the Bologna process at the Berlin ministerial conference in 2003, and during the academic year 2003-04 all public universities in BiH underwent institutional evaluations by the European University Association² in order to identify the challenges faced by the universities in meeting the requirements for inclusion in the European Higher Education Area by 2010.

The EUA evaluations identified an important number of major issues which needed to be addressed through systematic and rigorous quality assurance procedures. These issues covered strategic, academic, governance and administrative areas. Work in these areas is essential for the modernization and reform of higher education in BiH.

At European level, quality assurance was likewise one of the three priority areas examined in the Bologna process stocktaking exercise leading up to the 2005 Bergen Ministerial conference, and the score card for BiH reflected the relative lack of activity and progress in this field, compared to most other Bologna countries.

This European focus has been taken one stage further since the adoption by all Bologna process countries in 2005 of European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in higher education (ESG)³. The ESG were prepared by ENQA in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, and accepted by all Ministers at the conference in Bergen in 2005. The ESG cover three main areas:

1. internal quality assurance organised within higher education institutions, related to the design, application and monitoring of quality processes and structures;
2. external quality assurance activities looking in generic terms at what should be examined in higher education institutions and how such external quality assurance activities should be conducted;
3. the work of external quality assurance agencies, covering their establishment, organisation and recognition.

The implementation of the ESG for quality assurance in higher education has been one of the three priority areas for action in the period 2005-2007, and likewise one focus of the

¹ The Bologna process is the most important and wide ranging reform of higher education in Europe. The ultimate aim of the process is to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010 in which staff and students can move with ease and have fair recognition of their qualifications. The Bologna Declaration was signed by ministers of education from 29 European countries in 1999. The process was opened up to other countries, and further governmental meetings have been held in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), and Bergen (2005); the next meeting will take place in London in May (2007). BiH joined the process in 2003.

² Council of Europe, European Commission (2004): *Institutional Evaluations of seven universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina: summary report prepared by the European University Association*, prepared under the joint project of the European Commission and the Council of Europe "Modernising the Management and Governance Capacities of Universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina", Sarajevo.

³ ENQA (2005): *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, <http://www.enqa.eu/files/BergenReport210205.pdf> .

stocktaking exercise leading to the May 2007 Ministerial conference in London. As part of this implementation, each country should show how its own quality assurance system(s), both internal and external, are in line with the European Standards and Guidelines.

In BiH it was therefore decided by the relevant Ministries at Entity and State level and the public universities that, through the joint EC-CoE project “Strengthening Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, it was necessary to develop standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education in BiH. A working group was brought together to develop these, composed of representatives of the relevant Ministries at Entity and State levels, of responsible officers within the eight universities, and of student representatives. Two international experts supported the working group in developing these standards and guidelines for quality assurance: Dr. Patricia Georgieva, Secretary General of the [National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency in Bulgaria](#) and Lewis Purser, Assistant Director of the [Irish Universities Association](#).

The work of this group is therefore directly linked to BiH’s obligations and commitments as a full member of the Bologna process. BiH reported on its progress in this area and in the other priority areas in its country report submitted to the Bologna process follow-up group at the end of 2006. The 2007 stocktaking report to Ministers in London 2007 has been written on the basis of these reports from every participating country, and the improved score-card for BiH already reflects advances made in the field of quality assurance.

Objectives

The development of quality assurance systems are in the best interests of the higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Quality assurance generates quality-related information on education and degrees, which benefits employers, society at large, as well as academics, students and applicants. The analytical description and systematic evaluation of quality and its assurance make it easier for higher education institutions to convince their national and international partners of the quality of their education provision and to make higher education in BiH more attractive for students.

The purpose of this work is to provide explicit standards and guidelines – both internal and external - for quality assurance in higher education in BiH, for the use by universities, ministries and quality assurance agencies in their work to support the fundamental reform processes which are taking place in higher education. These BiH standards and guidelines are designed to meet the requirements of the ESG.

The main objectives of the proposed set of standards and guidelines for quality assurance are

- Promoting and supporting continuous improvement in the quality and standards for the provision of higher education programmes;
- Ensuring that clear and accurate information is made publicly available about the quality and standards of higher education and training provision;
- Applying international best practice in evaluation and reviews of higher education and training.

The long term objectives for a quality assurance system are

- Promoting mobility of students, graduates and citizens within BiH and internationally;
- Promoting equal social opportunities for all learners in BiH
- Responding to stakeholder and user needs in higher education;
- Promoting research and knowledge transfer in BiH;

- Ensuring comparability with the European Union across a wide range of areas (student learning support; graduates and employers' feedback systems, etc.);
- Improving the public accountability of higher education to wider society.

It was stressed that these long-term objectives should be kept in mind when establishing standards and guidelines for quality assurance in BiH higher education, so that the processes being put in place are capable of addressing them. The lack of coherent higher education legislation throughout the country is currently an obstacle to addressing these long-term objectives.

Structure of the BiH Standards and Guidelines

The BiH standards and guidelines are structured in two parts.

1. Guidelines for internal quality assurance, i.e. for quality assurance activities undertaken within the university under its own responsibility.
This first part comprises 8 standards for internal quality assurance of higher education institutions in BiH. It follows the logic of the first part of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions, but includes one additional standard setting a requirement for institutions to prepare for external review of its quality procedures.
2. Standards and guidelines for external quality assurance, i.e. for quality assurance activities undertaken by an external body/external bodies (agency, ministry, commission, etc.) which examines/examine the work that has taken place within a university or a unit within the university.
This second part sets arrangements for external quality assurance and contains 5 standards for external quality assurance of higher education and two standards for the body/bodies or agency/agencies that undertakes/undertake external quality assurance activities in BiH.

In addition to each standard and the associated guidelines explaining the requirements to it, there are “indicators”, illustrating documented evidences or measures of performance to indicate how the achieved standard is expected to be demonstrated.

3. Given the lack of a BiH quality assurance agency/BiH quality assurance agencies, the third part – standards and guidelines for the quality assurance of agencies – has been limited to the requirements for recognition and independence of the body/bodies or agency/agencies that undertakes/undertake external quality assurance activities in BiH.

This structure is based on the ESG structure. By May 2007, the BiH standards and guidelines for both internal and external quality assurance have been developed to the point where they can be piloted and tested.

The relationship of the Standards and Guidelines with recognition and the Qualifications Framework

The proposed BiH standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education are just one aspect of the higher education reform agenda that must be taken in conjunction with other initiatives, which are collectively designed to transform the higher education system to make it fully compatible the European Higher Education Area. The Council of Europe and the European Commission Joint Project '*Strengthening Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina*' addresses three of these elements:

- (1) creating a higher education qualifications framework,
- (2) developing a work plan to introduce modern procedures and structures for the recognition of qualifications and,
- (3) establishing quality assurance standards and guidelines for higher education.

Since the main action lines of the Bologna process are closely inter-related, the three elements of this project are also inter-connected. For example, quality assurance must underpin the reliability and quality of qualifications on the qualifications framework, as well as providing the underlying trust needed for the effective recognition of these qualifications in the work place and in other academic institutions both in BiH and abroad. Recognition of qualifications is essential in ensuring progression and transfer for learners up the various levels of the qualifications framework, and an assessment of individual qualifications (i.e. recognition) is only possible if credentials evaluators have reliable information of the quality of the institution or provider of the study program leading to the qualification. A qualifications framework means that quality assurance standards and guidelines can use common level descriptors and an agreed learning outcomes approach when examining the quality of teaching and learning across different institutions.

All three elements are central in promoting the European dimension in higher education, in lifelong learning, and in promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA. Together they can foster closer links between qualifications and employability, and between business and universities. Without confidence in quality assurance systems, qualifications and institutions will not be trusted or recognised. This is a crucial issue for BiH higher education at the present time.

These three elements are therefore connected and their simultaneous implementation is essential for any successful outcome. Furthermore, it is recognised that successful reform will require bottom-up as well as top-down developments. All three elements are closely linked to previous initiatives for university reform in BiH as well to the necessity of adopting a State-level framework law for higher education.

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education in BiH

1. Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions in BiH

Standard 1.1

A higher education institution should have a clearly defined quality assurance policy and procedures derived from its documented vision, mission and strategy. Together with all relevant regulations, they should be published and made available to staff, students and all stakeholders. Vision, mission, strategy, quality assurance policy and procedures should have a formal status and be available to public.

Guidelines to this standard

The quality assurance policy should reflect the provider's mission and values and relate closely to the relevant strategic management plans and operations. It should clearly set measurable quality objectives, at various functions and levels within the organisation. The procedures should provide opportunities for analysis and development of the mission statement, values and plans and in the long term contribute to the creation and maintenance of an institutional quality culture.

The quality assurance policy should focus on how well the institution is achieving the goals derived from the mission statement. Students' attainments of intended learning outcomes should be a major consideration. Further enhancement of programme quality should also be a major policy objective.

The quality assurance policy should include a commitment to the provision of adequate resources to enable the quality assurance procedures to be implemented satisfactorily.

The institution should clearly identify a body or person responsible for the design and implementation of the quality assurance policy and procedures, to whom responsibility for implementation is delegated. That body or person should report directly to the governing body on quality matters and should be at an appropriate level in the structure of the organisation, to ensure adequate authority for implementation of the quality assurance policy and procedures.

Institutions should clearly define the role of students, and other interested parties, in processes of quality assurance and continuous improvement.

Indicators to this standard

- documented university strategy
- documented quality policy including the role of students
- a formally established body with specified responsibilities for internal quality assurance of the university

Standard 1.2

Procedures for the design and approval of study programmes should include clear and thorough provision for the presentation of evidence that the following issues have been satisfactorily addressed:

- **the objectives of the programme/award are clearly stated,**
- **documented evidence that the programme/award⁴ is meeting its objectives,**
- **the effectiveness of procedures for correcting deficiencies and making improvements.**

⁴ Award: a degree, qualification, title or certificate describing a bachelor, master or doctor, or any other award, if the course of study relating to it is classified as higher education.

Guidelines to this standard

Under this standard, higher education institutions in BiH are required to produce evidence of their capacity to provide degree programmes at an acceptable level of quality and that quality assurance procedures are in place to preserve and enhance academic standards to meet expectations of BiH society and the international community.

Each institution is expected to establish and make public its own process for the alignment of delivered programmes and awards with the BiH Higher Education Qualifications Framework.

For each programme of study documented evidence should be produced that the following issues are properly addressed:

- ❖ Stated programme aims and objectives
- ❖ Description of expected learning outcomes to be achieved by a successful student
- ❖ Relevance of the programme structure and content to the mission and strategic plan of the institution
- ❖ How the programme meets its stated objectives, particularly as regards intended learning outcomes
- ❖ Mode of delivery
- ❖ Relevance of staff qualification and resources
- ❖ Resources needed for the programme
- ❖ Impact of the programme on the learning resources and support facilities of the institution
- ❖ Programme management arrangements (e.g., Formal procedures for approval of programmes; Procedures for monitoring success of programme and defined responsibility for undertaking activities regarding their improvement; Regular and periodic revision of programmes, including external review)
- ❖ A role for students in quality assurance of study programmes
- ❖ Relevance of the program for the labour market (local, national, international)
- ❖ Satisfactory provision for learner access, transfer and progression in the context of the BiH framework of qualifications

Indicators to this standard

- Industrial or other links, including possible work placement
- Learner demand for this programme compared to previous years and with other providers
- graduation rate and average duration of studies
- total number of graduated against enrolled students
- number of employed against total number of graduated students
- information packages

Standard 1.3

Procedures for the assessment of students are clearly defined, transparent and impartially and consistently applied across the institution. Arrangements are in place for evaluating the effectiveness of assessment procedures, to ensure that they are in practice fair and consistent.

Guidelines to this standard

Criteria and grading methods must be defined in advance, published and harmonised with regulations of the higher education institution.

Procedures on assessment of student achievements should ensure

- ❖ clear relation between assessment methods and objectives set with regard to the intended learning outcomes, and
- ❖ validity, consistency, transparency and public availability of the assessment process and proper certification of student achievements.

Indicators to this standard

Clearly defined, documented and transparent

- criteria for assessment of student progress and achievement,
- assessment methods,
- time and location of student assessment,
- appeal procedure and possibility for re-assessment.

Standard 1.4

The institution must ensure that teaching is performed by qualified and competent teaching staff. The institution should review the effectiveness of its human resources policy and procedures regularly. This will in particular relate to the procedures for selection, appointment, appraisal, development and promotion of staff involved at any level in the delivery or support of a programme. A programme for staff development, with appropriate resources allocated to it, should be a priority.

Guidelines to this standard

- ❖ The institution must have defined criteria for hiring and promoting teaching staff.
- ❖ The institution shall publicly announce criteria for the confirmation of teaching staff competence.
- ❖ Quality and competence of teaching staff must be regularly monitored and evaluated.
- ❖ The institution provides opportunities for professional development of staff.

Indicators to this standard

- Staff records
- Student surveys
- Publications and other documented research activity
- University staff development plan and activities
- Needs analysis for teaching staff

Standard 1.5

The higher education institution should regularly review the efficient use of its premises, equipment and facilities, to ensure their adequacy and efficiency in relation to the programmes of higher education and training provided.

Guidelines to this standard:

This periodic review should focus on their contribution (*i.e. premises, equipment and facilities*) to successful learning by students of the respective programmes. Its purpose is to inform decisions regarding the continuous provision of adequate teaching and learning resources and other means that are in accordance with study programs on offer at the institution. For programs on offer, institutions shall determine minimum, achieved and projected standards for facilities and equipment. Where improvements are needed the institution shall establish an action plan in order to address these needs.

Indicators to this standard

- Review of resources records
- Resources investment plans
- Action plans for improvement
- Opinion of staff and students

Standard 1.6

Institutions shall have in place mechanisms for collection, analysis and use of information relevant for an efficient management of study programmes and other activities.

Guidelines to this standard

Ongoing monitoring of programmes is essential to ensure that quality and standards are being maintained. The quality management information system shall complement the programme monitoring efforts of the institution, namely to ensure an ongoing monitoring process.

Indicators would typically include

- staff and students ratio
- profile of student population
- student progression and achievement (individual)
- final graduation rates
- time to graduation compared to formal length of program
- students satisfaction with their studies
- success rates of students per academic year
- graduates' employment rates

Standard 1.7

The institution should regularly make public impartial and objective information on all programmes and awards offered, both qualitative and quantitative.

Guidelines to this standard

Due to its public role, a higher education institution should provide information on

- ❖ programmes offered, the learning outcomes anticipated within the programmes, qualifications awarded,
- ❖ teaching, learning and assessment procedures,
- ❖ learning opportunities available to students,
- ❖ employment opportunities after graduation.

The institution should develop and implement an efficient public information provision system. Apart from that, information on study programmes should satisfy stakeholder expectations with regard to impartiality and objectiveness.

Indicators to this standard

- Presentations for future students
- Printed material available to public (e.g., study schedule, guide for future students, information packages)
- Web-sites with regularly updated data
- Number of web visitors
- Media contacts,

- Contacts with stakeholders
- Alumni registry
- Transparent enrolment rules and regulations

Standard 1.8

Standards for internal quality assurance provide a reliable basis for external quality assurance processes. Internal quality assurance procedures should be open for regular external evaluation processes, in order to determine to what extent standards have been met.

Guidelines to this standard

A higher education institution should be able to demonstrate how effectively their quality assurance procedures are applied and implemented across the entire institution, in particular regarding the development and delivery of degree programmes.

Indicators to this standard

- Formal status of institutional arrangements for the preparation of self-evaluation reports at different levels and for different types of external quality assurance;
- A standard set of procedures for conducting internal quality monitoring of an agreed set of performance indicators;
- A standard set of procedures for preparing for site visits by external review panels;
- Regular reports to the university senates.

2. Standards and Guidelines for External Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions in BiH

The standards and guidelines for external quality assurance should apply, whatever the external structures are carrying out external evaluations of higher education institutions in BiH.

The standards and guidelines for external quality assurance could apply to

- A body/Bodies or agency/agencies from within BiH,
- international agencies/bodies.

In both scenarios such agencies should work under the authorisation of the relevant BiH authorities.

Standard 2.1

Higher education authorities in BiH shall arrange for:

- a) a review of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance procedures,**
- b) a validation process of degree programmes, that are leading to the kinds of awards set in the National Qualifications Framework.**

Guidelines to this standard

The purpose of external Quality assurance processes and procedures should be to ensure that the following questions have been properly addressed by the institution under review:

- ❖ Does the institution embed quality procedures throughout its units and in the programmes that it provides?

- ❖ Does the institution systematically monitor its progress towards its quality goals and in particular to improving the quality of the educational provision?
- ❖ Are the findings from the quality assurance procedures used to improve the quality of the education and training provision and to meet student needs?
- ❖ Is corrective action taken to remedy shortcomings and deficiencies identified by the quality monitoring procedures?
- ❖ Is relevant information on institutional and programme quality given to stakeholders?

Indicators to this standard

- Agreed and published criteria and procedures for external quality assurance;
- Concise description of procedures with appropriate time-scale and documentation required.

Standard 2.2

External quality assurance processes shall be structured in a 4-steps model, which includes: a) a self-review report, b) a site visit, c) a published evaluation report, and d) a follow-up.

Guidelines to this standard

- ❖ a self-review report should be submitted by the institution under review in order to provide its own analytical view, supported by evidences, that internal quality assurance procedures are in place and their effectiveness is secured;
- ❖ an appointment of external review panel should comprise three to five persons
 - of high academic standing and repute,
 - competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level.
 - should possess high competencies in the field which is subject to external evaluation,
 - should be independent to the extent that they cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.
- ❖ the review team should visit the institution in order to verify the self-review report;
- ❖ the review team should submit in due time an evaluation report. This report, together with the conclusions and recommendations based on it, should be made publicly available;
- ❖ a predetermined follow up procedure should be implemented consistently in order to ensure that a subsequent action is taken by the institution to address recommendations of the review team.

Indicators to this standard

- implemented protocols for consistent use of the 4-steps review model
- reports on self-evaluation
- published and consistently applied criteria for nomination of external quality assurance experts
- provision of appropriate briefing or training of experts, programme and documentation on expert training, either planned or realised
- the use of international experts
- participation of students
- a code of conduct for a review expert

Standard 2.3

Evaluation reports should be made public and written in a style which is clear and readily accessible. Any decisions, commendations and recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find and understand the purposes of the review and the criteria used in making decisions.

Guidelines to this standard

Typically, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation of the type of the review, its purpose and consequences of the review decisions (e.g., approval or disapproval of the internal quality assurance system, accreditation of programmes of study, etc.), and the criteria used for the decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers.

Indicators to this standard

- published reports
- well structured, readable reports
- basic report drafting methodology published

Standard 2.4

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require subsequent drafting of an action plan should have predetermined follow-up procedures which are implemented consistently.

Guidelines to this standard

Quality assurance is a continuous process of improvement. After the publication of an external evaluation report and its recommendations the institution under review should develop an action plan. The follow up processes should see to which extent these recommendations have been implemented.

Indicators to this standard

- Defined follow-up procedures acting on reports
- Defined deadlines for actions on the basis of experts' recommendation/s.
- Plans of action, tasks, timeframe and responsibilities.

Standard 2.5

External quality assurance of an institution's internal quality assurance system and its study programmes should be undertaken periodically. The length of the cycle should be pre-defined and published.

Guidelines to this standard

All subsequent external reviews should take into account the progress that has been made since the previous evaluation.

Indicators to this standard

- Defined cycles of external quality and their regular implementation
- Timeframe for external evaluation.

Standard 2.6

The ***body/bodies*** with responsibilities for external quality assurance should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area and have an established legal basis. It/They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdiction within which it operates/they operate and with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Guidelines to this standard

Procedures for external quality assurance would be strengthened if it were transparent to what extent providers were themselves quality assured by recognised agencies. Public, private, and thematic agencies, operating or planning to operate in Europe should be recognised as professional and credible quality assurance agencies.

Indicators to this standard

The implementation of this standard requires transitional provisions:

During a transitional phase of 2 years after the adoption of this document by the governmental authorities in BiH,

- an agency/agencies authorised to carrying out external quality assurance should comply with standard 2.7 of this document and the related legislative requirements in BiH.
- foreign/International agencies commissioned to carry out an external evaluation in BiH should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area.

Indicators to this standard ***after a transitional phase of 2 years***

- The agency's/The agencies' full ENQA membership;
- Reviewed European or extra-European agencies, operating in Europe and included in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies

Standard 2.7

An agency/the agencies' or a body/bodies, undertaking external quality assurance activities should be independent to the extent that it has/they have autonomous responsibility for its/their operations and the conclusions and recommendations made in its/their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

Guidelines to this standard

An agency/agencies or body/bodies responsible for external quality assurance will need to demonstrate its/their independence through measures, such as:

- ❖ Its/Their operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts).
- ❖ The definition and operation of its/their procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its/their quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence.

- ❖ While relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency/agencies.

Indicators to this standard

- Terms of reference of the agency/agencies and substantial compliance with the ESG
- Proven independence through
 - external independent review of the agency/agencies
 - an external review report of the agency/agencieswithin two years after the agency has/the agencies have carried out its/their first external review.

The BiH Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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