Higher education in BiH has been identified as a priority area of special public interest. Care about the quality of education and its development is becoming a priority in BiH education policies at all levels. Public universities in BiH had started reforms and introduction of policies and practices of quality assurance prior to inclusion of BiH in the Bologna process in 2003. During the 2003/2004 academic year all existing public universities in BiH have been included in the institutional assessment of the European University Association (EUA).


BiH signed the Bologna Declaration in 2003 at the Conference of Ministers in Berlin, but only the adoption of the Framework Law on Higher Education in BiH has been progress in terms of establishing a common legal framework for the whole country, and the decisive turning point in supporting higher education reforms in BiH in line with the principles and standards of the reform process in the European higher Education Area.

Framework Law sets up the organization of higher education in BiH and the responsibility of the competent authorities. The bodies for enforcement of laws and international obligations of BiH have been established including Agency for Higher Education Development and Quality Assurance, and BiH Rectors' Conference. With the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Conference of Ministers of Education, BiH has established institutional network with clearly defined competences, responsibilities and tasks that provide favorable conditions for the construction and development of higher education on the basis of accepted strategic objectives, European standards and the Bologna principles.


Decision on Amendments to the Decision on the Criteria for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina [3]("Official Gazette of BiH", No. 44/13) and the document entitled "Decision on Minimal Standards in Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina" [4]("Official Gazette of BiH", No. 100/11).

The documents are fully compliant with the document "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" - ESG adopted by the Conference of European
Ministers of Education in Bergen in 2005, which was recommended by the decision of the European Parliament and of the Council No 2006/143/EC of 15 February 2006 as the basic document for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the European Union.

From December 2009, the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance became a full member of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). In February 2010, the Agency received the status of an associate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) and, since May 2010, the HEA is a full member of the Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe (CEEN).

**Legislation in Higher Education**

BiH has a complex political and administrative structure that contributes to the creation of a specific environment for higher education. Education in BiH, including higher education, is in complete and undivided jurisdiction of the Republic of Srpska entity, ten cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Brčko District of BiH. Each of 12 administrative units has its own Ministry of Education/Department of Education, the laws and budgets for education. They decide on educational policy and have all other rights and obligations arising from the mandate of the relevant education authorities responsible for the organization and functioning of education in their areas of responsibility.

In addition to the Framework Law on Higher Education in BiH, the legislative framework in BiH includes laws on higher education in RS entity, cantons in the Federation of BiH and Brcko District of BiH. [Laws](#) are available.


**Responsible Bodies**

The FLHE sets the organisation of higher education in BiH, defines the responsibility of CEAs in this area, established bodies for implementation of FLHE and international commitments of BiH and as
well as the methods of QA in the area of higher education. Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance (HEA) has been established by FLHE as an independent public organization. The FLHE provided for the competences and the basis for HEA operations in Articles 47 to 52.

Article 48 of the FLHE provides the following competences of HEA:

• setting clear, transparent and accessible criteria for accreditation of HEIs and adopting norms that set minimum standards in higher education;

• determining criteria for the selection of national and international experts to provide assessment and conduct quality review and give recommendations on accreditation of HEIs;

• giving recommendations on criteria and standards to the CEAs, for establishment and termination of HEIs and for restructuring of the study programmes;

• giving recommendations on criteria for licensing of HEIs and study programmes;

• giving recommendations on the lowest tuition fees for all students of accredited HEIs, with a view to harmonising the lowest tuition fees throughout BiH;

• providing advice on work and development policy to the CEAs;

• providing advice and information on issues within its competence to stakeholders;

• setting quality standards, analysing quality, giving recommendations for eliminating deficiencies in the quality of studies and HEIs;

• representing BiH in international organisation for quality in higher education;

• proposing general guidelines and criteria based on which funds from the budget of the institutions of BiH may be allocated to HEIs for the purpose of scientific research;

• adopting rulebooks (secondary legislation presenting a special category of general acts, of a lower legal power than the laws, different in their titles and legal nature) and other documents that fall within its competence.

Article 49 of the FLHE, in the area of accreditation, HEA is competent for:

• announcing open calls for the selection of national and international experts to provide quality assessment and conduct quality reviews and to give recommendations on accreditation of HEIs or their study programmes (experts);

• establishing the commission for setting up the list of experts meeting the criteria referred to in Article 48, of the FLHE. The commission shall have five members, comprising one representative from each of the following institutions: the Rectors’ Conference, one cantonal ministry, the Ministry of the RS, the BD of BiH, and HEA;

• submitting the set list of experts for adoption to all ministries of education in BiH and the competent department of the BD of BiH; • appointing expert panels on the basis of the proposals by the CEAs for the selection of experts from the set list of experts;

• giving recommendations to the CEAs on the accreditation of a HEI or study programme, on the basis of the opinion of the expert panel; • procedure and decision on accreditation and licensing of HEIs
issued by the CEAs, pursuant to Article 48, of the FLHE;

• assessing the compliance of accreditation decisions with the norms and criteria referred to in Article 48, of the FLHE and, in case of identified instances of non-compliance, giving recommendations to the Steering Board to take further measures, including the measure of annulling the accreditation decision. The CEAs shall appeal against the decision on the annulment of the accreditation decision to the HEA Steering Board;

• maintaining a National Register of Accredited HEIs;

• permanent access, on its website, to the list of accredited HEIs in BiH and its publication in “The Official Gazette of BiH” minimum once a year and in three widely circulated daily newspapers minimum two times a year.

Article 50 of the FLHE authorises HEA to issue an instruction on the form and content of the diploma and diploma supplement issued by accredited HEIs. Acting in accordance with the goals set in connection with improvement of international credibility, the HEA has been a full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) since December 2009. In February 2010, the HEA became an associate member of the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) and in May 2010 HEA become a full member of Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN).

As the higher education in the original constitutional competences in BiH belongs to the RS entity, cantons in the FBiH and BiH BD, the legal framework for the work of HEA consists of the laws on higher education of the RS, cantons of the FBiH and BD of BiH, as well as the law regulations adopted by the CEAs. Regarding carrying out internal QA, the FLHE, in Article 48, defines that HEA is competent for establishing clear, transparent and accessible criteria for the accreditation of HEIs and adoption of the norms setting minimum standards in the area of higher education. In its performance of this legal provision, HEA adopted, in consultations with the colleagues from foreign agencies and after a public debate with all the HEIs and CEAs in BiH, the following:

1. Decision on Criteria for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions [6],

2. Decision on Norms Setting Minimum Standards in Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina [7], hereinafter: the Decision on Norms.

In addition to the Ministry of Education and Culture of RS, there is also the Higher Education Accreditation Agency of the RS (HEAARS) in this entity. According to the Law on Higher Education of the RS (The Official Gazette of RS, No. 73/10, Article 27), the accreditation procedure for existing HEIs and study programmes in Republic of Srpska x, with the view to evaluating the quality level reached in accordance with existing standards and criteria in the area of quality assurance, is conducted by HEAARS and in cooperation with HEA. Also, HEAARS keeps a register of accredited HEIs and study programs in the Republic of Srpska, collects and processes data on the higher education system RS with the purpose of providing relevant information and statistical indicators to stakeholders, organizes trainings and certification of staff in the area of quality assurance x. HEAARS became a full member of International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) in 2015. It established the Accreditation Forum of RS as an expert body, which has a significant role in the realization of Agency’s mission to enhance the quality of higher education in RS. In order to develop the higher education system and professional and advisory assistance to HEIs and relevant authorities, the Council for the Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of the RS was founded. The Council shall review reports of the Commission for licensing and elaborates for
justification of establishing new HEIs in the RS. Also, it considers the self-evaluation reports of HEIs in the RS and provides recommendations for improvement of HEIs’ quality system.

CEAs in the cantons and the BD have similar responsibilities to those of HEAARS and they are defined by the relevant laws.

The body for internal QA in BiH (for example Committee for Quality Assurance) composed of institutional experts in the field of quality in higher education was established at the level of HEIs. These bodies are responsible, among other things, for drafting the proposal of quality policy and quality strategy, necessary procedures and guidelines for quality assurance at the institutional level and the implementation of quality system on HEI. Offices for QA responsible for the technical support to quality assurance are established at universities and colleges. Some universities have appointed vice-rectors responsible for quality assurance and coordinators for quality assurance in their organizational units (faculties).

**Approaches and Methods for Quality Assurance**

In BiH, two separate processes are implemented: the process of licensing and the process of accreditation.

Licensing is the process of reviewing fulfilment of the minimal standards for beginning of work and performance of higher education activity and it presents the permits for work that are awarded by CEA. Quantitative-normative requirements related to the human, spatial and material and technical resources of the HEI (the necessary space in m2/student, number of library units, number of computers/student, number of academic staff/size of educational groups, etc.) and these standards are not uniform in the area of the whole BiH. Each CEA adopts its own minimal standards and evaluation is done by independent expert panels for licensing, appointed by CEA. Accountability for the processes of establishing fulfilment of the applicable laws, standards and norms, as well as, continuous monitoring and control of work is also on the 12 CEAs in BiH. HEA does not have a role in the implementation of the licensing process of HEI in BiH, but it has, in line with the obligation from the FLHE, developed the criteria for licensing of HEIs and study programs in BiH. Criteria for licensing are not equal for all parts of BiH. According to the relevant laws, CEAs are responsible for the licensing of HEIs.

Accreditation is the process by which, on the basis of external review and quality assessment, it is confirmed that the HEI has fulfilled the set standards and criteria in its work, which correspond to the quality norm. The accreditation criteria were adopted by HEA and they are uniform and mandatory for all the HEIs in BiH, both public and private and they are applied throughout the BiH territory. The aforementioned criteria present the basis for the HEI for the preparation of the self-evaluation report and their fulfilment is checked by an independent expert panel appointed by HEA in the process of external evaluation. Criteria for Accreditation of HEIs in BiH are as follows: development and strategy of HEI; management, internal QA and quality culture; procedures for QA of study programmes; student assessment procedures; human resources; quality of physical resources; the information systems; public information; international relations.

The FLHE sets out that the CEA will, as well as other authorities and organisations in BiH and for the purpose of employment or a public capacity, recognise only those academic degrees and diplomas that are issued by HEIs. The participants in the process of external QA in higher education are: HEI, CEA, HEA and panel of domestic and international experts (their role is to provide assessment and conduct quality reviews and give recommendations on accreditation of HEIs and study programmes in BiH). There are four categories of experts: representative of the academic community, representative of economy and practice, an international expert and a student. The panel for each accreditation
procedure for HEI should comprise a minimum of each of the four categories of experts. External QA processes in BiH are structured in a four-step model:

1) a self-evaluation report drafted by the HEI,

2) a site visit by the panel to the HEI,

3) external review report published by the CEAs,

4) follow-up activities undertaken by the HEI to address the recommendations of the panel outlined in the external evaluation report.

In accordance with the constitutional structure of BiH, there are several regulations in BiH for external QA which are combined for each accreditation procedure, and they are as follows: FLHE, Criteria for Accreditation of HEIs in BiH, Criteria for Accreditation of Study Programmes (Decision on Amendments to the Decision on Criteria for Accreditation of HEIs in BiH (Official Gazette BiH, No. 44/13), Decision on Norms Setting Minimum Standards in Higher Education in BiH and Regulations on accreditation procedures of CEAs: 7 cantonal accreditation procedures and HEAARS Procedure for the Accreditation of HEIs.

The HEI prepares a Self-evaluation report (it is prepared by the self-evaluation team established at each HEI, composed of management, QA staff, administrative staff and students), and in line with the provisions of the cantonal laws on higher education, the Law on Higher Education of the RS and Law on Higher Education in the BD request for accreditation (together with the SER) is submitted to the CEA of the cantons, RS (HEAARS) and competent department of the BD. Upon receipt of the request of HEI for accreditation and establishing of the timeliness of such a request, the aforementioned CEAs submit, to HEA, a proposal for appointment of an expert panel for assessment and review of quality of a certain HEI, i.e. study programme (SP). HEA appoints an expert panel on the basis of the proposal of the CEA with a previous check whether the proposed members of the expert panel are on the established List of Experts of HEA. Panel of experts agrees on the date to carry out a site-visit. On the basis of opinion of the expert panel, performing the assessment and review of quality of HEI, i.e. each SP studied at the HEI, HEA gives recommendation on accreditation of the HEI, which is submitted to the CEA that brings a decision on accreditation. Furthermore, the CEA provides HEA with the decision on accreditation for the purpose of entry of the HEI into the National Registry of Accredited Higher Education Institutions in BiH which is managed by HEA in accordance to the FLHE. The List of Accredited HEIs in BiH is available at the following link:

Source URL:
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/quality-assurance-higher-education-8_en#comment-0

Links