

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING
QUALITY ASSURANCE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION
IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

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the European Commission and the Council of Europe
"Strengthening Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina"
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Recommendations for the Implementation of Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Since before joining the Bologna process¹, 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, to be overcome for an inclusion of BiH in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and for the modernisation and reform of higher education in BiH.

At European level, quality assurance is likewise one of the priority areas examined in the Bologna process stocktaking exercise leading up to the 2007 London Ministerial conference, and the score card for BiH reflects the relative lack of activity and progress in this field, compared to most other Bologna countries.

It was therefore decided by the BiH universities and ministries at state and entity level 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 BiH working group was established in July 2006, which finalised a proposal for these in May 2007 with the assistance of international experts.

In view of the insufficient structures to implement coherent and efficient quality assurance policies and practices in BiH and based on the round table discussion of the BiH working group, these recommendations outline the major elements and steps towards the introduction of quality assurance policies and practices in higher education in BiH.

The recommendations in this document are issued to complement the standards and guidelines for quality assurance which have already been developed, and to provide orientation for higher education institutions and relevant authorities as well as for future international assistance for higher education reforms in BiH. The outlined elements and steps include the opinions and recommendations of the international experts of the CoE involved in the drafting process of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education in BiH.

Completing the proposed cycle of activities could take 2 to 4 years.

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.

1. Raise awareness on quality issues and the use of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education in BiH.

This phase should include an information campaign to address not just academic and administrative staff in the universities, but also students and future students and their families.

A possible extension of the joint EC-CoE project "Strengthening Higher Education in BiH" beyond June 2007 could be used to assist the relevant institutions in this matter.

2. Enhance capacities for self-evaluation, quality assurance and improvement activities within higher education institutions.

This should include students, academic and administrative staff, as well as the constitution of a competent internal quality assurance unit assigned with the required decision making powers and provided with the necessary technical resources.

This activity has already been addressed through projects by SUS BiH and WUS Austria. The opportunities offered by the proposed WUS Austria - Tempus project could provide further assistance with this activity.

Further objectives of this phase could be the establishment of a practitioner-oriented network of BiH experts on quality assurance, for example to regularly consult priority topics, identify and prioritize professional development training needs, design training modules, disseminate to various target groups, the establishment of a database and internet forum for quality assurance, implement a Quality Training Program.

3. Seek approval for the proposed BiH Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education from the relevant governmental authorities at various levels.

A proposed extension of the joint EC-CoE project "Strengthening Higher Education in BiH" could be used to assist the relevant institutions in this matter.

4. Pilot the BiH Standards and Guidelines for internal quality assurance across a number of similar Faculties or disciplines or administrative divisions/domains.

Quality assurance activities within a higher education institution are carried out under its own responsibility. Piloting common standards and guidelines across BiH will, however, require a certain amount of assistance and coordination to ensure a coherent approach of all involved institutions, and a comparable outcome.

This coordinating function would ideally be assumed by the BiH Rectors' Conference. Several initiatives could assist this process, such as a proposed WUS Austria - Tempus project and a follow up project of the CoE and the EC under IPA³ which is currently under preparation.

5. Develop a National Quality Assurance Framework.

A quality assurance framework determines common ground for internal and external quality assurance procedures, thus ensuring their focus on accountability and

³ IPA: the newly designed "Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance" of the European Commission

improvement. Further, a quality assurance framework sets out procedures to manage the quality of higher education in a country. It interlinks quality assurance processes of higher education institutions and governmental authorities and instruments of national policy. Its purpose is to ensure the effectiveness of the quality assurance system, i.e. quality assurance standards and mechanisms embedded across higher education institutions in a country.

A quality assurance framework in BiH could set the base for the licensing process and its relationship to the programme/subject accreditation. It could further set the ground for linking the programme accreditation with the BiH qualifications framework and the benchmarking process.

Such a framework document could also be instrumental in initiating the implementation of the BiH standards and guidelines for quality assurance and the qualifications framework in higher education and bridging the time gap until BiH adopts a higher education law at state level that provides a legal basis for a national quality assurance system in BiH.

A follow up project of the CoE and the EC under IPA is currently under preparation and could assist in this matter.

6. Conduct an external evaluation of BiH universities, carried out by an external quality assurance agency, on the basis of the BiH Standards and Guidelines for Quality assurance in Higher Education.

This should imply that the external evaluation focuses on the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance mechanisms and practices of the BiH universities (as outlined in step 4), in line with the BiH Standards and Guidelines for internal quality assurance.

A follow up project of the CoE and the EC under IPA is currently under preparation and could assist in this matter.

7. Revise the BiH Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

On the basis of the outcome and accumulated experience in steps 1 to 6, the BiH Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education should be revised according to the terms of reference of the national quality assurance framework.