



# Republic of Serbia

*Self-assessment report  
of  
National Entity for Accreditation and Quality  
Assurance in Higher Education*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CAQA – Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance formed according to the LoHE from 2005

CAQA 2018 – Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance, expert body of NEAQA legal successor of previous CAQA

CAASS – Conference of Academies for Applied Studies Serbia

CONUS – Conference of Universities of Serbia

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

ESG – European Standards and Guidelines

HEI – Higher Education Institution

LoHE – Law on Higher Education

MoESTD – Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development

NEAQA – National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance

NCHE – National Council for Higher Education

RCDUE - Republic Council for Development of University Education

RS – Republic of Serbia

SCONUS – Student Conference of Universities of Serbia

SCAAS – Student Conference of Academies for Applied Studies Serbia

SP – study programme

## Introduction

The National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance NEAQA of the Republic of Serbia is the national institution in Serbia in charge of external quality evaluation of higher education institutions. It is established by new Law on Higher Education as a legal successor of Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance CAQA after more than decade of conducting of quality assessment processes in the Republic of Serbia.

Commitment of Serbia to the European principles and its active participation in the European Higher Education Area asks for continuous improvement of the quality of higher education. Therefore, the QA system is regularly reviewed and changed in accordance with the development demands. As a result of numerous qualitative analysis made in the past and ENQA recommendations, the Law on Higher Education, enacted in 2017 provided a legal framework for the improvement of procedures for quality assessments based on European Standards Guideline (ESG), good practices from European Area of Higher Education (EHEA) and feedbacks from stakeholders.

According to LoHE, NEAQA was established as an independent body and procedures were improved in order to foster institutional development of accreditation and quality assurance of higher education. In 2002 Serbian journey in the area of quality was mainly organized as a quality control. During the implementation of the defined QA processes the approach was significantly changed to a quality assurance and developing of quality assurance in higher education in compliance with the ESG. This goal was realized, among other aspects, through the membership in ENQA, and registration in EQAR.

Nowadays our goal is to improve the quality assurance by outgrowing of quality culture with higher education institutions being able to cooperate with others in EHEA and wider, taking into consideration flexibility and rules established in other countries.

## Development of the self-assessment report (SAR)

The preparation for the development and production of SAR started almost immediately after the establishment of the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance – CAQA 2018. The experience which CAQA 2018 was gaining through the evaluation of the accreditation requests, inherited from the previous CAQA and received during the technical period in which NEAQA was in the process of establishment provided a solid ground for the analysis of current situation regarding the accreditation.

The process of preparation and adoption of the new set of regulations was completed in March 2019 and in April 2019 the team for preparation of SAR was appointed by the Director, whose members were nominated by the Managing Board. The team consists of the Director, Secretary General, four members of CAQA 2018, three Managing Board members of which two are the labour market representatives, and of three students' representatives. The first draft version of the report, made on the basis of the previous CAQA and ENQA reports, was made and sent to the team for further improvements. The report includes analysis made based on the answers of higher education institutions and peer-reviewers to the questions regarding the establishments of NEAQA and new system, which were collected during the meetings and trainings conducted by CAQA 2018 members.

Finally, in May SAR was adopted by the Board and sent to ENQA on 30 May 2019. The main goal of SAR is to present NEAQA's results on the Serbian road of quality culture. With this analysis we are trying to recognize challenges in development according to the needs of our society.

## Higher education and QA of higher education in the context of the agency

Higher education in Serbia is a part of the national educational system of the classical type: pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher education. The length of the primary school programme is eight, and secondary (grammar, vocational and art schools) is four years. From 2000 onwards, higher education institutions in Serbia have become involved in the European trends of reforms and harmonization in the field of higher education – the Bologna process. In September 2003, Serbia officially signed the Bologna Declaration and the main principles of it were incorporated in the Law on Higher Education (LoHE) (Annex 1) that came into the force two years later, in September 2005. That law which introduced a QA system in Serbia, was amended several times, with the last changes regarding QA made in 2015 as explained in section 5.2.

### Degree structure

Higher education activities are carried out through academic and applied study courses based on accredited study programmes for acquiring higher education degrees. There are 3 levels of studies (degrees) in our HE system (presented in scheme 1):

1. **The first level includes:** basic academic, basic and specialist applied studies.
2. **The second level includes:** master academic and master applied studies and specialistic academic studies.
3. **The third level includes** doctoral academic studies.

Each course within a study programme is assigned a number of ECTS credits, and the scope of the studies as a whole is expressed as the aggregate ECTS credits. A total of 60 ECTS credits should correspond to an average of 40 h per student for the work done each week during an academic year. ECTS credits may be transferred between study programmes, but only for courses of the same type. The criteria and conditions for the transfer of ECTS credits are determined in the general act of an independent HEI or in an agreement reached between HEIs. LoHE offers the possibility of acquiring a joined diploma or degree organized and implemented by several HEIs. (Annex 1)

**Bachelor - Basic studies** are organized by all HEIs and last three to four years. The total number of credits earned in this cycle can be 180 to 240 depending on the length of the study programme (3 or 4 years). The degree for basic professional studies should be completed in three years. The study programme of basic studies can include a final paper. A person who finishes the basic academic studies and earns 180 credits acquires the professional title that includes the name of the profession of the first-degree academic studies in the corresponding area - bachelor. If a person earns 240 credits, he or she acquires the title bachelor with honours. A person who finishes the basic professional studies acquires the professional title that includes the name of the profession of the first degree of the professional studies in the corresponding area - bachelor appl.

Specialist applied studies can be organised by a university, faculty, higher school of academic studies or higher school of applied studies. The number of ECTS that could be earned is 60.

**Master studies** - Master and specialist academic studies can be organized by a university, faculty or higher school (college and polytechnic). Master degree academic studies last one or two years depending on the duration of the basic studies. Study programmes of master academic studies contain an obligation to create a master thesis. A person who finishes master academic studies acquires the academic title - master, with the name of the profession of the second degree of academic studies in a corresponding area. The number of ECTS that can be earned in this cycle is 60 to 120.

Master applied studies last 2 years with minimum 120 ECTS. A person who finishes master applied studies acquires the academic title - master (appl), with the name of the profession of the second degree of academic studies in a corresponding area.

Specialist academic studies last one year with 60 ECTS.

**Integrated studies (one cycle programme)** - Academic study programmes can be organized and integrated within basic and master academic studies with 300 ECTS. One-cycle study programmes in the field of medicine can be organized with 360 ECTS.

**PhD studies** - PhD studies can be organized by universities and faculties. PhD studies are carried out for at least three years with previous basic and master academic studies. Serbia has adopted the ECTS system for PhD studies. The number of ECTS that should be earned is 180, if the candidate has at least 300 ECTS collected in previous levels of education. A PhD dissertation is the final part of the study programme of PhD studies, with the exception of a PhD in the Arts which is an artistic project.

### Grading system

A student's achievement in a specific subject is continuously assessed during the teaching process as well as at the end of the course (final exam) and it is expressed in points. By fulfilling the duties preceding an exam and passing the exams, a student can achieve a maximum of 100 points. Every course establishes the proportion of points earned for the pre-exam duties and for the exam, the pre-exam duties being worth a minimum of 30 and maximum of 70 points. A student's success is assessed by grades from 5 (failed) to 10 (excellent). An institution of higher education can establish a different, non-numeric method of grading, by establishing the relation between these grades and those from 5 to 10. A general act of an institution of higher education defines more closely the way in which exams are taken and grading.

### Institutional structure of Higher Education in Serbia

#### **Higher education institutions**

According to the LoHE, activities in the area of higher education are carried out by both: state and private higher education institutions that are equally treated. The total number of accredited HEIs in the Republic of Serbia is 190.

*Universities* – are carrying out activities combining educational and scientific-research, professional and/or artistic work. According to the LoHE, a university has to have accredited academic study programmes in at least 3 scientific/artistic fields at all 3 levels. The LoHE gives certain integrative functions to the universities. There are 18 accredited universities in Serbia, of which 9 are founded by state and 9 are private universities. State universities enrol 83% of the student population.

*Faculties or Academies of arts within universities* - are higher education units within a university carrying out academic study programmes and developing scientific-research, professional and/or artistic work in one or more areas. The Law provides the possibility for individual faculties/academies to act as legal bodies if they have at least 3 accredited study programmes. All faculties and academies of arts which are legal entities count as HEIs and are subjects of institutional accreditation. The total number of accredited faculties is 124 (86 state and 38 private), of which 70% are state-owned faculties.

*Academies of applied studies* - are carrying out their activities combining educational, research, applied and artistic work. According to the LoHE, an academy has to have 5 accredited applied study programmes in at least 3 scientific/artistic fields. Recently based on the decision of the Government, public higher schools for applied studies are grouped into academies with temporary operating licences which in the coming year should undergo the process of accreditation according to the standards. The standards are currently in the process of preparation.

*Higher schools of academic studies (Colleges of academic studies)* - have basic academic, specialist and master degree courses in one or more areas within scientific/artistic fields defined by the LoHE. There are 5 accredited such HEIs in Serbia.

*Higher schools for applied studies (Colleges of applied studies)* – offer basic applied and specialist applied courses in one or more areas within scientific/artistic fields defined by the Law. There are 61 accredited such HEIs in Serbia, of which 70% are state-owned.

#### National Council for Higher Education

It is appointed by the Government to ensure the development and promotion of quality of higher education in Serbia, particularly in the creation of strategy and policies concerning higher education and its harmonization with European and international standards (Articles 10-13, LoHE). The Council has 17 members who are elected by the Government of the Republic of Serbia (six proposed by CONUS, two proposed by CAASS, seven proposed by MoES, two proposed by the Chamber of Commerce). Based on the public call NCHE nominates members of CAQA to the Managing Board of NEAQA. The NCHE approves QA standards, rules and regulations defined by CAQA 2018.

#### Conference of Universities (CONUS) and Conference of Academies of Applied Studies and Colleges of Academic Studies (CAASS)

These bodies are established for the purpose of coordinating work, formulation of common policies, realization of shared interests and for carrying out the tasks defined by the LoHE (Articles 26 and 27 for CONUS and 28 and 29 for CAASS).

All rectors of Serbian universities are members of CONUS and all higher school principals are members of CAASS. CONUS and CAASS recommend the members of NEAQA Managing Board.



### Student Conference of Universities (SCONUS) and Student Conference of Academies of Applied Studies and Colleges of Academic Studies (SCAASS)

These bodies are established to pursue the common interests of students as partners in the process of developing higher education as defined by the LoHE (Article 30). SCONUS and SCAAS provide lists of student evaluators taking part in the site visits of HEIs for the purpose of accreditation and external QA.

### Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoES)

The Ministry is responsible for overseeing the development of higher education by recommending higher education policies to the Government, issuing operating licences, administrative supervision of higher education, keeping records on the register of professors. On the basis of the certificate for accreditation of an HEI given by NEAQA, the Ministry automatically issues the operating licence and performs administrative supervision. The Ministry does not have the right to change accreditation decisions made by CAQA 2018.

### National Assembly (Parliament)

The Parliament adopts the document that defines the system of higher education - LoHE.

### Status of higher education institutions in relation to the government

The status of state and private HEIs in relation to the government differs as the government is the founder of state HEIs and it covers the material costs of their activities (including salaries to the staff), enables free of charge studies for a certain number of students, provides finances for improving teaching activities, etc. Regarding QA, the Government has the same responsibility towards all HEIs – giving the operating licence after the decision of accreditation is made, performing inspections of the financial and material management of HEIs, etc. All HEIs undergo the same accreditation procedures.

### Procedures and involved parties in establishing new institutions, programmes and subjects

Founding a new HEI requires the fulfilment of a number of conditions defined by the LoHE and Rules on standards for initial accreditation regarding the number of permanent teaching staff, number and area of study programmes, infrastructure etc. The founder then prepares the documentation defined by NEAQA rules and regulations, and after the accreditation procedure performed by CAQA 2018, including a site visit, a decision on initial accreditation or refusal of the request is brought by CAQA 2018. A positive decision on initial accreditation of the HEI is sent to the MoES for issuing an operating licence to the HEI that is valid only one year. After that HEI has to undergo regular accreditation procedure.

A new study programme has to undergo the whole accreditation procedure. Once given accreditation, followed by operating licence by MoES, a HEI can enrol students in the study programme.

Accredited HEIs and study programmes are subject to re-accreditation every 7 years. In between two accreditation cycles HEIs have to undergo external quality assessment by CAQA 2018, in a form of

auditing with the developed follow-up procedure. The usual procedure for establishing new courses in already-existing and accredited study programmes is that the decision bodies of the HEI (council of faculty and university senate, or college council) approve the establishment of new courses.

#### Internal quality assurance in HEIs

LoHE Article 25 established an obligation of self-evaluation upon HE institutions. According to accreditation standards, every HEI has to have a body for QA called “Commission for Quality Assurance and Self-evaluation”. The composition of that body, also defined by the above-mentioned document, consists of teaching staff, non-teaching staff and students. The role of students in the self-evaluation report is additionally strengthened by the requirement of the LoHE (Article 25) for their compulsory input in evaluating the quality of an HEI as a result of student surveys. Its activities are regulated by HEI statutes. A regular activity of this body is to run and analyse student questionnaires at the end of every term for every subject. The HEI also does its own SWOT analysis for a self-evaluation report. This body is the team for preparation of the self-evaluation report.

Self-evaluation of an HEI is an obligatory process according to the LoHE, article 25 and is performed periodically every three years according to self-evaluation standards. The self-evaluation report is made to control the quality of study programmes, teaching and working conditions. Internal assessment should be carried out at intervals of three years maximum and should include student’s comments and opinions. As a part of the processes of external quality control and accreditation of an institution, an HEI has to submit self-evaluation report to CAQA 2018 together with other necessary documentation.

## History, profile and activities of the agency

External quality assessment in Serbia goes back to 2002 when procedures were established for the accreditation of newly founded private higher education institutions. The Law on Universities from 2002 has established the Republic Council for Development of University Education (RCDUE) which, among the other competencies, had determination of the proposition of conditions which should be fulfilled by the universities/faculties in order to be founded and to work in the field of higher education.

In order to exercise its competency RCDUE has established the Commission for Accreditation, a body whose task was to evaluate requests of potential HEIs and recommend to RCDUE decisions. The final decision on certain request has been made by the RCDUE. Based on the positive decision of RCDUE, the Ministry was issuing an operating licence.

In 2005 the new Law on Higher Education was enacted. This Law incorporated Bologna principles: three cycle system, ECTS, mobility and QA, as the key pillars of higher education in Serbia. According to that Law National Council for Higher Education and Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance were established. Based on the Law and ESG from 2005, CAQA has developed its standards in 2006. Revisions were made between 2005 and 2017 and they integrated amendments in LoHE, the 2015 ESG and past experiences. The standards were defined for accreditation of HEIs, study programmes, initial accreditation of HEIs and programmes and external quality control – audit. The procedure for these external quality assessments was the following: a pre-screening of documentation was done by a CAQA sub-commission; an analysis of documentation by academic experts who produce individual reports and who were anonymous; and a site visit undertaken by a CAQA sub-commission together with student and labour market representative. The sub-commission prepared an overall report, integrating experts' assessments and proposing to the Commission a final decision. National Council for Higher Education was an appellate body in cases when CAQA rejected accreditation request.

In October 2017 new LoHE established new body for accreditation National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education – NEAQA with Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance as the expert body (CAQA), and the previous CAQA was put in technical mandate in February 2018. NEAQA was established on 9 February 2018 by the decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, in accordance with the Law on Higher Education<sup>1</sup> from October 2017. The decision states that NEAQA is an independent legal entity established for the purpose of performing accreditation and quality assessment of HEIs and their units, study programmes and quality assurance in HE. NEAQA is the successor of Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance, established in accordance with the LoHE from 2005. All rights and obligations, documentation, accreditation requests, equipment and archives are transferred to NEAQA. The detailed organisation of NEAQA and CAQA 2018 are described in this Chapter.

According to the changes of LoHE, CAQA is no longer body of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) but became an expert body of an independent national body NEAQA. Some of the previous relations between the two bodies are kept in the LoHE: (1) NCHE adopts standards for accreditation of HEIs, programmes, initial accreditation and external quality control-audit upon the proposal of CAQA 2018 and adoption of final draft by the Managing Board of NEAQA; (2) NCHE acts as an

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<sup>1</sup> Law on Higher Education: <https://www.nat.rs/en/laws/>

appellate body in the procedures of accreditation of HEIs and programmes. New CAQA was formed on 30 August 2018, and all accreditation requests from the previous Commission and those received until 5 December 2018 are under review of new CAQA and according to the old accreditation procedure described above (more than 300 requests). For the new cycle of requests, received from 1 March 2019, the new rules and procedures apply and they will be described in the next section.

Regarding the relationship of NEAQA with the State, since NEAQA is the national body its Managing Board is appointed by the Government and three of its seven members are appointed at the proposal of the MoESTD. NEAQA is financed from the income generated by fees for the accreditation and the assessment of quality of HEIs and programmes, projects and other incomes in accordance with the law.

### Composition of NEAQA

According to the LoHE 2017, NEAQA is composed of managing body, the executive body, the professional body and professional services which perform the administrative-technical tasks.

The management body of NEAQA is the Managing Board consisted of seven members, appointed by the Government, with respect to gender equality principle. Government appoints members of the Board upon the proposal of the following institutions: one member by the Conference of Universities from full professors of the university, one member by the Conference of Academies of Applied Studies and Colleges of Academic Studies from professors of applied studies, two members by the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, and three members by the Ministry. The members of the Management Board are elected for a period of four years, with the possibility of another re-election. The student representative nominated by SCONUS is an associate member of the Board.

The Managing Board: 1) elects and dismisses the director of NEAQA; 2) elects and dismisses the members of CAQA 2018 professional body of NEAQA; 3) adopts the annual programme of work and the financial plan, upon the consent of the Government; 4) adopts the Statute and general acts; 5) directs and oversees the work of the Director; 6) adopts the ethical code and code of conduct of the persons employed by NEAQA, members of CAQA and reviewers; 7) determines the amount of accreditation fee, with the consent of the Government; 8) performs other tasks in conformity with the law, the Statute and the act on foundation of NEAQA. The Managing Board adopts the Statute upon prior consent of the Government.

The executive body of NEAQA is director. The Director is elected and dismissed in line with the law, based on a public competition, from a line of full professors of the university who have experience in managing and assuring quality in higher education. The Director is elected for a period of five years, with the possibility of re-election. The Director: 1) upholds and represents NEAQA; 2) manages work and operations of NEAQA; 3) manages work of the professional services of NEAQA; 4) decides on the rights, obligations and responsibilities of the employees of NEAQA; 5) adopts a rulebook on internal organisation and job classification; 6) implements the decisions of the Managing board; 7) appoints reviewers from the lists defined by NCHE, at the proposal of CAQA; 8) performs other tasks in line with the law, the Statute and Founding Act of NEAQA.

The professional body of NEAQA is Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA 2018). It conducts the procedure of accreditation of higher education institutions and the study

programmes, as well as the procedure of external evaluation of quality of higher education institutions - audits, in accordance with the law and prescribed procedure and standards for accreditation and for external evaluation of quality. CAQA has 17 members. The members of CAQA are elected through an open call by the Managing board of NEAQA, at the proposal of the National Council, respecting the gender equality and representation of the educational-scientific, i.e. educational-artistic domains. They are elected every five years. The Managing Board will dismiss the member of CAQA: 1) upon personal request; 2) if fails to perform his duties in CAQA 2018 conscientiously or if his misconduct harms the reputation of the duties he performs; 3) if he becomes an elected or appointed person to any of the positions listed above; 4) due to violation of the code of ethics. CAQA elects the President and Vice-President from among its members and establishes sub-commissions to perform its tasks.

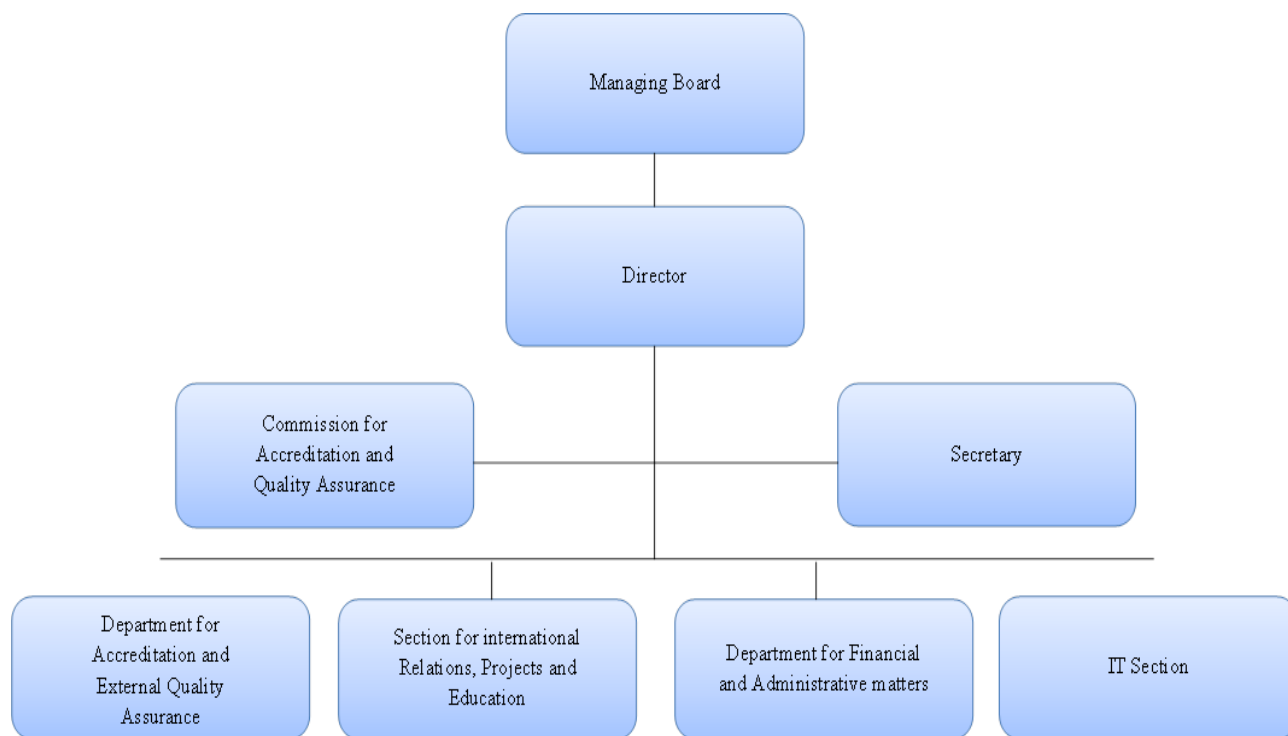
According to NEAQA's Statute, the Secretariat (internal organizational unit which performs administrative and professional support activities) of NEAQA is managed by the Secretary, in accordance with the Regulations of organization and job classification. The Secretary coordinates and manages the work of the administrative and professional service, takes care of the preparation of the materials for the sessions of the bodies of NEAQA, monitors their work and formulation of decisions, coordinates their work in accordance to the instructions of the Director, execute decisions of the bodies that are in the competence of the administrative and professional service and acts upon the decisions of the Director, takes care of the protection of the assets of NEAQA, keeps the seals of NEAQA and performs other tasks determined by the law, this Statute and other general acts of NEAQA.

For the accreditation and audit processes NEAQA employs external experts from the three categories: (1) academics elected by the NCHE; (2) students' representatives appointed by the student conferences and (3) labour market representatives appointed by the chamber of commerce and various professional associations. Academics are elected by the NCHE on the basis of public call among the professors of higher education institutions in the Republic, and professors of appropriate qualifications from the higher education institutions outside the territory of the Republic. The list of elected academics is published on NCHE and NEAQA<sup>2</sup> websites and contains the following data: 1) name and last name of the reviewer; 2) state, place and institution at which he/she acquired the highest level of education; 3) current teaching-scientific qualification and the year and institution in which he/she was elected for the teaching-scientific position; 4) educational-scientific, i.e. educational-artistic field and domain within which he/she was chosen for the teaching-scientific position.

A person elected, designated or appointed to an office in a state authority, a body of the autonomous province or local self-government, a body of a political party or to the post of the executive body of a higher education institution, as well as the person being a member of NCHE, CAQA 2018 or employed by NEAQA may not be found on the list of reviewers.

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<sup>2</sup> Lists of reviewers: <https://www.nat.rs/en/list-of-reviewers/>



The accreditation decisions are made by the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance.

## NEAQA's MISSION AND KEY ACTIVITIES

### *Mission and Vision*

NEAQA's mission is to, in cooperation with the key stakeholders, maintain and enhance the quality of higher education in Serbia in accordance with the international standards and thereby increase its competitiveness.

NEAQA's vision is to become the main driving force for QA development in the Western Balkans and significant partner in EHEA.

### *Strategy*

NEAQA's strategy 2019 - 2022 defines its mission, vision, tasks and objectives. In its general objectives, NEAQA seeks to implement and develop a QA system and culture in Serbian higher education, and strengthen its position within the country and at international level (ENQA membership, EQAR registration, CEENQA membership, a leading position in the Western Balkans). These are further translated into specific objectives (e.g. to ensure NEAQA's standards in compliance with the ESG, its optimal performance and use of resources, etc.; to ensure that every HEI and programme meets NEAQA's

standards, etc.), together with activities, performance indicators and risk assessment mechanisms. An action plan was adopted for the Strategy. Strategy is available on NEAQA's website<sup>3</sup>.

*Core Values*

NEAQA's core values are independence, integrity, competence, transparency and openness.

*Stakeholders*

NEAQA's stakeholders are educational institutions, HEIs conferences, student organizations, ministries, professional associations and employer's organizations.

*Key activities:*

NEAQA's key activities in the domain of higher education are based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and LoHE.

*Core processes:*

NEAQA's core process is the external quality assessment of HEIs and it has following forms:

- Accreditation of HEIs;
- Accreditation of study programmes;
- Initial accreditation of HEI and study programmes;
- External quality control – audit.

The main principle on which NEAQA builds its quality assurance system, internal and external, is the Continuous Quality Improvement approach in order to increase efficiency and satisfaction. The main idea behind this principle is to permeate the culture of organisation and team work and to encourage accountability by creating an environment in which all stakeholders become personally invested in the system. This is particularly important for the emerging institution such as NEAQA. Therefore, the values and principles are the main leading force for improving the foundations of quality culture in Serbian HE.

<b>For year 2018</b>	
Accreditation of HEIs	6 positive
Accreditation of study programmes;	37 (35 positive and 2 negative)
Initial accreditation of HEI and study programmes;	3 (1 positive and 2 negative)
External quality control – audit.	0

<sup>3</sup> NEAQA's strategy: <https://www.nat.rs/en/neaqa-strategy/>

<b>For year 2019</b>	
<b>Old procedure</b>	
Accreditation of HEIs	12 (positive 11 and 1 negative)
Accreditation of study programmes;	107 (92 positive and 15 negative)
Initial accreditation of HEI and study programmes;	4 (1 positive and 3 negative)
External quality control – audit.	0
<b>New procedure<sup>4</sup> by 8 July 2019</b>	
Accreditation of HEIs	0
Accreditation of study programmes;	5
Initial accreditation of HEI and study programmes;	0
External quality control – audit.	0

## RESOURCES

NEAQA' resources could be divided on material and human. Regarding the material resources its main source are the accreditation and audit fees paid by HEIs and other sources according to the LoHE. The level of accreditation fees is determined by the Managing Board with the consent of the Government. Premises are provided by the MoESTD free of charge. NEAQA uses the premises from the previous CAQA and they include three offices and a room for the director (which could be also used as conference room) in a state building, with IT equipment and access to the Internet. NEAQA has its own website system and, currently, the IT system is under construction.

Until the establishment of NEAQA, CAQA's financial and administrative work was performed by the MoESTD. The financial account of CAQA was attached to the Ministry and its revenues and expenditure was attached to the budget of the Ministry. As an independent legal person NEAQA has its own account and financial report for 2018 and plan for 2019 are published on its website.<sup>5</sup>

Regarding the human resources NEAQA has seven members of the Managing Board, director, 17 members of CAQA, nine employees in the Secretariat (administrative and professional support staff) and more than 800 external experts which participate in the accreditation and audit processes. For the election and employment of all listed people, the careful selection process was conducted.

<sup>4</sup> New procedures are in place from 8 March 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Financial report of NEAQA: <https://www.nat.rs/finansijski-izvestaji/> and <https://www.nat.rs/en/financial-reports/>



The professional and administrative service of NEAQA has secretary general on the top, chiefs of two departments: department for accreditation and department for legal and financial issues, two lawyers and four accreditation officers.

At the moment the evaluation mechanisms for the internal quality assessment of NEAQA system is under construction which should provide the better insight of the resources use. Implementation of the ISO standards is planned to start from September 2019.

Based on the first review in 2012, old CAQA was granted full membership in European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ENQA in 2013 and entered on European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR in 2014. The review in 2017 has been initiated by CAQA with a view of confirming its ENQA membership and renewing its registration in EQAR. The changes of LoHE in 2017 introduced the new entity for accreditation NEAQA and put the previous CAQA's membership under review, which NEAQA received as a legal successor of CAQA. However, NEAQA is not listed in EQAR. Together with the external review of ENQA, NEAQA has applied to EQAR.

### Higher education quality assurance activities of the agency

As already mentioned in the previous section, new Law on Higher Education was enacted in 2017. This Law kept in place in essence the same HE system regarding the level of studies (Annex 1). Changes were made with respect to QA system according to the spirit of ESG (Annex 2).

This law for the purpose of performing the accreditation tasks, the assessment of quality of higher education institutions and their units, evaluation of study programmes and assurance of quality in higher education, has established National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Republic of Serbia NEAQA was officially formed on 9 February 2018 by the Government's decision. The Managing board of NEAQA was formed on 3 May June 2018 and the director and the members of the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance were elected on 18 July 2018. The Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance, as an expert body of NEAQA, was officially formed on 30 August 2018 - CAQA 2018. Until 1 March 2019 CAQA 2018 has made a draft of Regulations on standards and procedures for: (1) accreditation of HEIs, (2) study programmes, (3) initial accreditation of HEIs and programmes (4) external quality control – audit and (5) Self-evaluation of HEIs and study programmes. These drafts were confirmed by the Managing Board and sent to the National Council for Higher Education, according to LoHE, for adoption. The procedures and standards were published in Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia on 28 February 2019. The new accreditation and audit procedures now include Peer-review Panels instead of two separate reviewers. The same procedure is used for all quality assessments and they include the following steps: a sub-commission of CAQA determines a proposal of the composition of a Peer-review Panel for accreditation of HEI/programme/initial accreditation/audit consisting of five members (three academics, one student and one labour market representative) to CAQA 2018 which submits its final proposal to the Director of NEAQA, who further appoints a Peer-review Panel and its president and a Coordinator from the administrative and professional services of NEAQA. A decision on the appointment of a Peer-review Panel for accreditation is published on the website of NEAQA. Panel is drafting the preliminary report; goes to a mandatory site visit and based on the all

relevant documentation and facts makes a report which is sent to HEI. HEI has 15 days to comment on the factual mistakes after which the Panel makes a final report which is further sent to CAQA 2018, through a sub-commission, for final decision. If CAQA 2018 finds some inconsistencies in the report it can ask Panel for additional explanations, clarifications and improvements of the report. To ensure consistency in its processes, CAQA 2018 has developed templates for HEIs to prepare documentation, templates with guidelines for external experts conducting assessment as part of each process, Site Visit Protocols and documents for the assessment of quality of processes within NEAQA, which are published on NEAQA's website. The idea of introducing new Panel system by NEAQA is to provide HEIs greater support in the development of IQA and assessing its effectiveness, rather than only validating the documentary evidence. These new procedures, which should improve decision making process since the responsibilities of expert panel and CAQA 2018 are completely separate and precisely defined, were prepared by the working group consisted of representatives of CAQA 2018 and NCHE. The working group discussed all relevant details in order to acquire its high-level quality and to make the adoption procedure of NCHE shorter and start the quality assessment in accordance with the new rules, according to the timeframe set by NEAQA.

On 5 December 2018 the requests for accreditation were no longer received because CAQA 2018 were preparing the procedural change according to the ESG spirit and ENQA review 2017 recommendations and LoHE. All accreditation requests from previous CAQA and those received until 5 December 2018 (383 accreditation requests), CAQA 2018 analyses in accordance with the previous standards and procedures which include two reviewers. These requests should be analysed according to the rules which were in place at the moment of the request's submission. For requests received from 1 March 2019 the new procedures and standards apply. Until now CAQA 2018 has processed 246 of old requests of which: 146 got the accreditation, 77 acts of warning/opinion and 23 were rejected requests. In May 2019 seven Peer-review Panels were formed for the accreditation of programmes and they are used for the system testing and analysis of a possible shortcomings and methods for its improvements. Until now 5 of them were completed and additional ones are expected to be concluded in September due to the summer break.

According to the LoHE 2017, periodic accreditation of HEI and programmes takes place every seven years and external quality control – audit on every four. 'Act of warning'<sup>6</sup> no longer exists as a document which could be issued in the process of accreditation. However, CAQA 2018 is able to collect necessary information from HEI through 'opinions'<sup>7</sup>, which is based on the Law on Administrative Procedure.

Parallel with the preparation of regulations on standards and procedures for quality assessment, from September 2018 to February 2019 CAQA 2018 has made a qualitative analysis of HEIs and study

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<sup>6</sup> Act of warning is a decision of CAQA 2018 which points out the shortcomings with respect to compliance with the standards, in which case CAQA 2018 provides an adequate period of time to the institution to remove these shortcomings, and after expiry of the deadline makes a final decision upon the application. This warning gives an opportunity to the HE institution to improve the quality. Deadlines for the response to an Act of warning is maximum one month.

<sup>7</sup>LoHE 2017 does not provide an "act of warning" as an option and CAQA 2018, in order to provide HEIs with an option to correct smaller shortcomings and to collect all necessary information and relevant facts according to the Law on Administrative Procedure, issues opinion to HEIs when necessary.

programmes, for requests submitted, in order to detect shortcomings which are addressed in the new rules and regulations. The main goal of this analysis was to clarify evaluation criteria in accreditation procedure in order to perceive realistic abilities of HEIs and to look for a quality improvement in the system of higher education of Serbia.

Due to the procedural and standards change CAQA 2018 has held 4 trainings for reviewers (1 pilot and three in Niš, Novi Sad and Belgrade) attended by 448 academics, students and labour market representatives. One meeting CAQA 2018 held with schools of applied studies in which changes of standards and procedures were discussed and answers to HEI' representatives were provided. Reviewers and representatives of schools of applied studies got acquainted with the results of the qualitative analysis made and shortcomings addressed in new rules and regulations. During these events the attendants were, also, asked to give opinion on various questions and the results of these analysis are presented in this report in the following sections.

Furthermore, President of CAQA 2018 had also meetings with the Senate of the University of Belgrade and Rectors Council of Conference of Universities of Serbia - CONUS during which the recent changes of the quality assessment system were explained. Several members of CAQA 2018 have participated in the international conference "Trends of Development: Quality of Higher Education" 2019. The Minister of MoESTD, the president of the Managing board, the director and the president of CAQA 2018 presented in interviews for media new ideas and main goals of new accreditation procedures to clarify these items to general public. A meeting of NEAQA and Serbian Chamber of Commerce is planned to be held in June 2019.

## Processes and their methodologies

CAQA undertakes 4 types of external quality assurance methods:

1. Accreditation of HEIs;
2. Accreditation of study programmes;
3. External quality control of HEIs – AUDIT;
4. Initial accreditation of HEIs and study programmes.

The procedures and standards for accreditation and audit, enacted by NCHE in February 2019, are based on the ESG and LoHE 2017. CAQA 2018 made a draft version whose starting point were standards prepared by previous CAQA and enacted in 2017. The activities of CAQA 2018 regarding the quality assessment procedures are based on the PDCA cycle which includes: planning, doing, checking and acting. The assessment procedures are the following:

### Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and study programmes

Accreditation of Higher Education institution occurs periodically, according to the LoHE, on every seven years and in that process CAQA 2018 decides *if the threshold criteria are met for the accreditation of whether institution or study programme*. The same procedure is applied when an accredited HEI requests the accreditation for a new study programme. Based on the LoHE during this process CAQA 2018 and NEAQA could issue the decisions presented in the table. CAQA 2018 makes decisions on accreditation while the Director of NEAQA, as a legal representative in accordance with the rules on administrative procedure, confirms with certificate or decision on rejection that certain decision was made by CAQA 2018.

<b>Decision</b>	<b>CAQA 2018</b>	<b>NEAQA</b>	<b>comment</b>
In case of accreditation	Decision on accreditation	Certificate on accreditation <sup>8</sup>	Certificate is necessary for obtaining of operating licence
In case of a rejection	Decision on rejection	Decision on rejection <sup>9</sup>	HEI may appeal to NCHE

CAQA 2018 also uses “act of warning” and “opinions” as intermediate decisions to allow HEIs to correct documentation according to the standards in cases when it could be done within 30 days.

### Initial accreditation

Request for initial accreditation is submitted to the Ministry and then documentation is given to NEAQA for evaluating the fulfilment of standards for initial accreditation. NEAQA controls the

<sup>8</sup> In case of accreditation CAQA 2018 makes a decision (odluka) and the Director as a legal representative certifies that the decision was made with certificate (uverenje).

<sup>9</sup> In case of rejection CAQA 2018 makes a decision (odluka) while the Director certifies that decision was made with decision on rejection called rešenje, which in administrative procedure provides rights to appeal to HEIs.

completeness of the documentation submitted and CAQA 2018 conducts the qualitative assessment through Peer review Panels and gives an opinion to the Ministry. If CAQA's 2018 decision is positive NEAQA sends a report to the Ministry based on which it gives the work permit to the institution which lasts one year. After a year the HEI has to submit to NEAQA documentation for accreditation of the institution and study programmes. For the accreditation requests received before the enactment of the new regulations (March 2019), the old system (with two reviewers) is applied.

External quality control of HEIs – audit

External quality control - audit is also a periodic activity of NEAQA performed in the fourth year of the accreditation cycle (which lasts 7 years) but it could be also conducted upon the request of the MoESTD, and NCHE. *The focus in this evaluation process is to enhance the quality system of HEIs.* It represents a set of auditing activities based upon a self-evaluation report of the HEI, resulting with the audit report completed by the Peer review Panel according to the same procedure for other types of accreditation, based on which CAQA 2018 makes a final decision. The external control is regularly conducted on the basis of the HEIs self- assessment report. The external control upon the request focuses mainly on the issues which are recognised and reported as non-complying with the standards. If a HEI does not meet the required standards CAQA 2018 defines measures for correcting the detected shortcomings and follows up the activities of the institution within 6 months. After the expiration of that deadline, within 30 days CAQA 2018 prepares the final report on the external control and evaluation of quality of the higher education institution, which is published on NEAQA's website. In case the final report is negative, NEAQA adopts the decision on revocation of accreditation of a study programme, i.e. accreditation of the higher education institution. HEI may file an appeal against the decision to NCHE.

The complex external evaluation process, run by CAQA 2018, together with the measures of internal QA to enable its success is presented in the Table.

External evaluation done by CAQA	Published documents on evaluation criteria and procedures	Evaluation process	Resources	CAQA internal QA measures enabling a successful evaluation process
<b>ACCREDITATION OF HEIs (7 years)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rules and regulations of accreditation standards for HEIs and their study programmes</li> <li>- Standards for accreditation of HEIs</li> <li>- Rules and regulations for self-evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HEI submits documentation for accreditation of HEI</li> <li>- Assessment by Peer-review panel which goes on a site-visit and prepares a draft report</li> <li>- CAQA brings and publishes decision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pool of trained reviewers</li> <li>- CAQA 2018 members</li> <li>- NEAQA admin. Staff</li> <li>- Office premises and infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Measures for preventing conflict of interest</li> <li>- Professionalism of CAQA 2018 members and NEAQA staff</li> <li>-Independent decision-making</li> <li>-Training reviewers</li> <li>-Briefing HEIs</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>and quality assessment of HEIs</li> <li>-Standards for self-evaluation of HEIs</li> <li>- Guidelines for preparing documentation for accreditation of HEIs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Follow up activity after 2 years</li> <li>-Appeal procedure in the case of negative decision</li> <li>- Certificate of accreditation</li> <li>- Licence</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Measures for improvement based upon: surveys (external and internal), system-wide analysis, SWOT analysis</li> </ul>
<p><b>ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMMES</b></p> <p><i>(7 years)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rules and regulations on accreditation standards and procedures for HEIs and their study programmes</li> <li>- Standards for accreditation of study programmes of 1st and 2nd level</li> <li>- Standards for accreditation of doctoral studies</li> <li>- Standards for accreditation of doctoral studies in arts</li> <li>- Guidelines for preparing documentation for accreditation of study programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HEI submits documentation for accreditation of study programme</li> <li>- Assessment by Peer-review panel which goes on a site-visit and prepares a draft report</li> <li>- CAQA 2018 brings and publishes a decision</li> <li>-Follow up activity after 2 years</li> <li>-Appeal procedure in the case of negative decision</li> <li>- Certificate of accreditation</li> <li>- Licence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pool of trained reviewers</li> <li>- CAQA 2018 members</li> <li>- NEAQA admin. Staff</li> <li>- Office premises and infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Measures for preventing conflict of interest</li> <li>- Professionalism of CAQA 2018 members and NEAQA staff</li> <li>-Independent decision-making</li> <li>-Training reviewers</li> <li>-Briefing HEIs</li> <li>-Measures for improvement based upon: surveys (external and internal), system-wide analysis, SWOT analysis</li> </ul>
<p><b>EXTERNAL QUALITY CONTROL OF HEIS (AUDIT)</b></p> <p><i>(regularly in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the accreditation cycle and upon the request of NCHC and MoESTD )</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rules and regulations of standards for external quality control of HEIs</li> <li>- Standards for external quality control of HEIs</li> <li>- Rules and regulations for self-evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HEI submits self-evaluation report and accompanying documents</li> <li>- Assessment by Peer-review panel which goes on a site-visit and prepares a draft report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pool of trained reviewers</li> <li>- CAQA 2018 members</li> <li>- NEAQA admin. Staff</li> <li>- Office premises and infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Measures for preventing conflict of interest</li> <li>- Professionalism of CAQA 2018 members and NEAQA staff</li> <li>-Independent decision-making</li> <li>-Training reviewers</li> </ul>

	<p>and quality assessment of HEIs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Standards for self-evaluation of HEIs</li> <li>- Guidelines for preparing documentation for external quality control of HEIs</li> <li>- Guidelines for preparing self-evaluation report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CAQA makes decision on report</li> <li>- CAQA publishes report</li> <li>- Follow up procedure in the case of some shortcomings</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Briefing HEIs</li> <li>-Measures for improvement based upon: surveys (external and internal), system-wide analysis, SWOT analysis</li> </ul>
<b>INITIAL ACCREDITATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rules and regulations of initial accreditation standards for HEIs and their study programmes</li> <li>- Standards for initial accreditation of HEIs</li> <li>- Standards for accreditation of study programmes</li> <li>- Guidelines for preparing documentation for initial accreditation of HEIs</li> <li>- Guidelines for preparing documentation for accreditation of study programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HEI submits the request to the Ministry</li> <li>- CAQA 2018 gives the opinion to the Ministry on the fulfilment of standards in a 2-step procedure based on the report of the Peer-review Panel</li> <li>- Ministry gives the work permit</li> <li>- After one year HEI submits the request for accreditation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pool of trained reviewers</li> <li>- CAQA 2018 members</li> <li>- NEAQA admin. Staff</li> <li>- Office premises and infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Measures for preventing conflict of interest</li> <li>- Professionalism of CAQA 2018 members and NEAQA staff</li> <li>-Independent decision-making</li> <li>-Training reviewers</li> <li>-Briefing HEIs</li> <li>-Measures for improvement based upon: surveys (external and internal), system-wide analysis, SWOT analysis</li> </ul>

## Agency's internal quality assurance

The development and implementation of internal quality assurance mechanisms is needed to provide an account of the agency's capacity to adapt to new demands and trends and to permanently improve its actions while maintaining a solid and credible methodological framework and governance model.

NEAQA has implemented so far 2 types of internal QA mechanisms: external one such as feed-back analysis of questionnaires given to stakeholders and internal one such as SWOT analysis, implementing measures for preventing conflict of interest, preparation of the self-evaluation report, etc.

Analysis made until now regarding the CAQA 2018 and NEAQA performances are given in chapters on SWOT analysis and Information and opinions of Stakeholders.

## Agency's international activities

Previous CAQA became a full member of ENQA in April 2013 and on December 2014 was registered in EQAR. It also was active in other activities related to establishment of international cooperation. In 2017, due to the adoption of new LoHE and announced changed of QA system in Serbia CAQA's membership status was under review. As a legal successor of CAQA, NEAQA kept the status under review in *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ENQA*. However, NEAQA is no longer listed in *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education -EQAR*. With the application for external assessment of ENQA, NEAQA submitted the application for EQAR as well.

Fully aware that cooperation and exchange of good practice is the crucial element for quality improvement NEAQA sets the internalization as one of its main goals. The cooperation is important in regional as well as international level. At the moment NEAQA does not recognise the accreditations of other agencies listed in EQAR but it has initiated discussions with the MoESTD regarding this issue.

Fostering the cooperation with other QA agencies brought NEAQA participation in the ERASMUS+ KA3 -Support to Policy Reform project: "*Developing a European Approach for Comprehensive QA of (European) University Networks*" – EUniQ, from 15 May 2019 – 14 May 2021<sup>10</sup>. This project supports QA agencies in addressing evolving methodological challenges and intends to provide a roadmap for QA agencies to jointly develop QA methodologies. The partnership includes eight QA agencies, six HE ministries, and the European stakeholders' associations EUA, ESU, and ENQA. Overall, they represent the main actors for QA in the European HE Area. The project will integrate its activities into the work and schedule of the Peer Support Group on QA of the Bologna Follow Up Group - BFUG.

Regional cooperation could have multiple benefits for NEAQA because of the similarities among the countries in Western Balkan region and, in some cases, can lead to a very close cooperation due to the lack of language barrier. That is one of the reasons why NEAQA decided in this first phase to engage experts from the region for its accreditation processes aiming in the future to expand it to the international level. Following the goal set, NEAQA will submit in coming months the application for the membership in *Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – CEENQA* which provides platform for regional cooperation among the QA agencies.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.aika.lv/en/aika-about/projects/>



## Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 3)

### 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.

#### **NEAQA's compliance:**

As stated earlier, NEAQA's *mission* is to, in cooperation with the key stakeholders, maintain and enhance the quality of higher education in Serbia in accordance with the international standards and thereby increase its competitiveness. Its *vision* is to become the main driving force for QA development in the Western Balkans. Core values of NEAQA are independence, integrity, competence, transparency and openness.

NEAQA's strategy 2019 - 2022 defines its mission, vision, tasks and objectives. In its general objectives, NEAQA seeks to implement and develop a QA system and culture in Serbian higher education, and strengthen its position within the country and at international level (ENQA membership, EQAR registration, CEENQA membership, a leading position in the Western Balkans). These are further translated into specific objectives (e.g. to ensure NEAQA's standards in compliance with the ESG, its optimal performance and use of resources, etc.; to ensure that every HEI and programme meets NEAQA's standards, etc.), together with activities, performance indicators and risk assessment mechanisms. An action plan was adopted for the Strategy. Strategy is available on NEAQA's website.

The Strategic Plan also lists assessment criteria and indicators for measuring the achievement of these goals. To plan necessary actions for achieving the objectives in the Strategic Plan, NEAQA prepares a work plan for each calendar year. Implementation of the planned developments is evaluated at NEAQA's development seminars as deemed necessary, but at least once a year. NEAQA reports once a year to the Government about the progress regarding the achievement of the objectives of the Strategic Plan.

NEAQA/ CAQA's 2018 remit is defined in LoHE according to which its core activities are: conducting of initial and periodic accreditation reviews of HEIs and programmes and audits based on procedures and standards. Additionally, as part of its statutory task to support HEIs in assuring and improving quality, CAQA 2018 provides training on IQA standards to help HEIs carry out self-evaluations which provide the basis for its audits. Initial accreditation reviews are carried out when the request are submitted, periodic accreditation reviews every seven years (unless requested earlier by the HEI concerned or the MoESTD), and audits every four years (unless requested earlier by the HEI concerned, MoESTD or NCHE).

As mentioned earlier NEAQA has the Managing board, the Director and CAQA2018 as an expert body. CAQA 2018 uses external experts: academicians, students and labour market representatives for quality assessment. Two labour market representatives and one student representative are members of

the Managing board, and as such involved in the governance. With relevant stakeholders on board the implementation of the strategy should be well structured.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

NEAQA has clearly defined its mission and objectives in its Strategic plan for the years 2019 to 2022, which is made publicly available on its website. To plan necessary measures for achievement of these objectives, NEAQA prepares a work plan for each calendar year and measures its achievement. External stakeholders are regularly involved in both NEAQA's core and development activities.

#### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website):**

- NEAQA's strategy<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2. OFFICIAL STATUS

#### **Standard:**

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

#### **NEAQA's compliance:**

NEAQA is established on the basis of the 2017 LoHE (Article 14) as an independent national legal body for the purpose of performing the accreditation tasks, the assessment of quality of higher education institutions and the units therein, evaluation of study programmes and assurance of quality in higher education in Serbia. LoHE provides an overall framework for NEAQA's structure, activities, including the procedure for the appointment of its members, its EQA remit as including accreditation reviews and audits, its basic operational arrangements, and its relationship with the MoESTD and the NCHE. Statute of NEAQA regulates in more detail its structure and organisation.

As described in more details in the first part of this report NEAQA has the Managing board, the director, the Commission for accreditation and quality assurance (CAQA 2018) and the Secretariat.

Pursuant to LoHE, NEAQA's (CAQA 2018) accreditation opinions and decisions made in accreditation and audits are binding on the MoESTD and provide the basis for the Ministry to issue, amend and revoke operating licences for HEIs.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

NEAQA has a solid legal basis and is formally recognised as a quality assurance agency by the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

#### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>12</sup>:**

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<sup>11</sup> NEAQA's Strategy: <https://www.nat.rs/en/neqa-strategy/>

<sup>12</sup> NEAQA's legal framework: <https://www.nat.rs/en/legal-provisions/>

- LoHE;
- Decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia;
- Statute of NEAQA.

### 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.

#### **NEAQA's compliance:**

Pursuant to 2017 LoHE, NEAQA is an independent legal entity for accreditation and quality assessment of HE in Serbia. It is consisted of management body, the executive body, the professional body and professional services which perform the administrative-technical tasks. The more detailed conditions regarding the manner of operation, the manner and procedure of election and dismissal of the bodies of NEAQA are defined by the act on foundation and the Statute of the NEAQA.

#### Organisational independence:

The management body of NEAQA is the Managing Board. The Managing Board consists of seven members, appointed by the Government, with respect to gender equality principle. One of the members of the Management Board is appointed by CONUS from the line of the full professors of the university, one member is appointed by the Conference of Academies of Applied Studies Serbia from among professors of applied studies, two members shall be proposed by the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, and three members shall be appointed at the proposal of the Ministry. The members of the Managing Board are elected for a period of four years, with the possibility of additional re-election. A person elected, designated or appointed to an office in a state authority, a body of the autonomous province or local self-government, a body of a political party or to the post of the executive body of a higher education institution, as well as the person being a member of the National Council, the Accreditation Commission or a person employed at NEAQA may not be a member of the Managing Board. The Managing Board: 1) elects and dismisses the director of NEAQA; 2) elects and dismisses the members of CAQA; 3) adopts the annual programme of work and the financial plan, upon the consent of the Government; 4) adopts the Statute and general acts; 5) directs and oversees the work of the Director; 6) adopts the ethical code and code of conduct of the persons employed by NEAQA, members of CAQA and reviewers; 7) determines the amount of accreditation fee, with the consent of the Government; 8) performs other tasks in conformity with the law, the Statute and the act on foundation of NEAQA. The Managing Board adopts the Statute upon prior consent of the Government.

The executive body of NEAQA is director. The Director is elected and dismissed in line with the law, based on a public competition, from a line of full professors of the university who have experience in managing and assuring quality in higher education. The Director is elected for a period of five years, with the possibility of re-election. The Director: 1) upholds and represents NEAQA; 2) manages work and

operations of NEAQA; 3) manages work of the professional services of NEAQA; 4) decide on the rights, obligations and responsibilities of the employees of NEAQA; 5) adopts a rulebook on internal organisation and job classification; 6) implements the decisions of the Managing board; 7) appoint reviewers from the lists defined by NCHE, at the proposal of CAQA; 8) performs other tasks in line with the law, the Statute and Founding Act of NEAQA.

NEAQA is financed from the income generated by fees for the accreditation and the assessment of quality of higher education institutions and the units therein, the evaluation of study programmes and quality assurance in higher education and other incomes in accordance with the law. It has separate bank account. According to LoHE, Managing Board adopts the annual programme of work and the financial plan, upon the consent of the Government and determines the amount of accreditation fee, also with the consent of the Government;

#### Operational independence:

According to NEAQA's Statute, the Secretariat (internal organizational unit which performs administrative and professional support activities) of NEAQA is managed by the Secretary, in accordance with the Regulations of organization and job classification. The Secretary coordinates and manages the work of the administrative and professional service, takes care of the preparation of the materials for the sessions of the bodies of NEAQA, monitors their work and formulation of decisions, coordinates their work in accordance to the instructions of the Director, execute decisions of the bodies that are in the competence of the administrative and professional service and acts upon the decisions of the Director, takes care of the protection of the assets of NEAQA, keeps the seals of NEAQA and performs other tasks determined by the law, this Statute and other general acts of NEAQA.

#### Independence of formal outcomes:

The professional body of NEAQA is Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance – CAQA (2018). It conducts the procedure of accreditation of higher education institutions and the study programmes, as well as the procedure of external evaluation of quality of higher education institutions - audits, in accordance with the law and prescribed procedure and standards for accreditation and for external evaluation of quality. CAQA has 17 members. The members of CAQA are elected by the Managing board of NEAQA, at the proposal of the National Council, respecting the gender equality and representation of the educational-scientific, i.e. educational-artistic domains. They are elected every five years. A person elected, designated or appointed to an office in a state authority, a body of the autonomous province or local self-government, a body of a political party or to the post of the executive body of a higher education institution, as well as the person being a member of the National Council, or a person employed at NEAQA may not be a member of CAQA. The person elected as a member of CAQA, cannot perform the tasks of a reviewers during the mandate. The Managing Board will dismiss the member of CAQA: (1) upon personal request; (2) if he fails to perform his duties in CAQA conscientiously or if his misconduct harms the reputation of the duties he performs; (3) if he becomes an elected or appointed person to any of the positions listed above; (4) due to violation of the code of ethics. CAQA

elects the President and Vice-President from among its members and establishes sub-commissions to perform its tasks.

CAQA 2018 adopts its Rules of Procedure which lay down its organisational and decision-making arrangements. It draws up its own schedules of EQA activities and may also be requested to carry out a periodic accreditation review by the MoESTD and an audit by MoESTD and NCHE and its own decision. Its standards and procedures for EQA processes are approved by the NCHE; recently, standards have been revised by CAQA and NCHE as part of a joint working group. Academic experts participating in EQA processes are selected by NCHE for the pool of experts and appointed for individual reviews and audits by CAQA. Student and employer representatives involved in EQA processes are selected for the pool of experts by SCONUS and SCAAS and by the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, and various professional associations, and appointed for individual reviews and audits by CAQA 2018.

CAQA 2018 takes formal decisions in its EQA processes in accordance with its Rules of Procedure (LoHE). Decisions are taken by a simple majority vote, with at least two-thirds of its 17 members required to attend a meeting (Rules of Procedure). According to the LoHE, NCHE acts as the appeals body for accreditation processes; it may confirm CAQA's decision, or refer the case back to CAQA to reconsider its decision. NCHE can take its own decision only if CAQA 2018 rejects again the accreditation after the appeal has been returned to it.

CAQA 2018 works independently of the Government, HEIs, industry and other organisations. CAQA 2018 members, staff, academic experts, students and labour market representatives involved in EQA processes are obliged to adhere to CAQA's 2018 Rules of Procedure, Code of Ethics and Regulation on Peer-reviewers. The Code of Ethics and Regulation on Peer-reviewers define a conflict of interest, values and rules of conduct such as independence, integrity, objectivity, impartiality and individual responsibility, and specifies cases considered a breach of the Code and sanctions. Before accepting any review, reviewers are obliged to sign a statement of non-existence of conflict of interest.

## **CONCLUSION:**

NEAQA is a new independent entity established according to LoHE, ENQA 2017 recommendations and ESG. It enjoys organizational and operational independence as well as independence of formal outcomes in the field of external evaluation of higher education. However, LoHE has kept the two previous solutions: (1) quality assessment regulations are adopted by NCHE and (2) NCHE is an appellate body for NEAQA's decisions.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>13</sup>:**

- LoHE;
- Statute of NEAQA;
- CAQA 2018's Rules of Procedures.

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<sup>13</sup> NEAQA's website: <https://www.nat.rs/en/legal-provisions/>

### 3.4. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

**Standard:**

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

**NEQA's compliance:**

Previous CAQA has produced a number of thematic analyses since 2012. They include: System-wide analyses of higher education institution units in Serbia, of higher schools of professional studies in Serbia, and of HEIs in the field of medicine; Accreditation of faculty units; Accreditation in higher education in the field of agriculture; Distance learning in Serbia; Effects of quality assurance in Serbian higher education after the first round of accreditation; Impact of the evaluation process on HEIs in Serbia; and CAQA experience after two cycles of study programme accreditation. Since NEQA is newly established body it will produce in the future thematic analysis, especially after the implementation of the first cycle of accreditation and audits according to the new procedure which include Peer-review Panels. At the moment there are no internal regulations on the conducting of thematic analysis.

**CONCLUSION:**

NEQA plans to produce in the future various thematic analyses, use their results for discussion with all relevant stakeholders and improvement of the quality assessment system.

### 3.5. RESOURCES

**Standard:**

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

**NEQA's compliance:**

The NEQA resources are described above in the separate chapter of this report. It is funded from the accreditation and audit fees paid by HEIs and other sources according to the LoHE. The level of accreditation fees is determined by the Managing Board with the consent of the Government. NEQA's budget is set annually on the basis of its financial plans approved by the Board and by the Government and funds are disbursed in accordance with financial regulations for the public sector. Premises are provided by the MoESTD free of charge. NEQA now has its own Secretariat (administrative and professional support staff). The main items in CAQA's budget are salaries for the Board members, director, CAQA members, administrative and professional support staff and fees for reviewers (academics, students and employers) involved in EQA processes; costs of equipment purchase; external services; missions; and membership fees for international organisations. The budget is planned to provide the level of funding that CAQA 2018 needs for its activities.

CAQA 2018 has 17 members who now divide among themselves tasks related to conducting EQA processes and related decision-making. NEAQA has a pool of around 800 external experts whose task is to involve in accreditation and audit processes, and provide a basis for CAQA's decision making. NEAQA's secretariat has 8 permanent staff members, including the Secretary, five officers supporting EQA processes, a financial officer. The job description of the NEAQA's employees is regulated by the separate regulations. Most of the administrative staff has worked since 2012. At the moment the establishment of an incentive scheme is under construction as well as career development opportunities.

NEAQA's premises include three offices and a room for the director (previous conference room) in a state building, with IT equipment and access to the Internet. NEAQA has its own website system and the IT system is under construction.

## **CONCLUSION:**

NEAQA's resources have improved compared to previous CAQA period. However, since NEAQA is new independent body the structure is still under construction and is expected to grow in the coming period. At the moment the available human and material resources are sufficient, but with further development of the institution and expansion of the external assessment processes the resources should be increased to support the emerging institution.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>14</sup>:**

- LoHE;
- Statute of NEAQA's;
- Regulation on job descriptions in NEAQA;
- CAQA 2018's Rules of Procedures.

### **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.

#### **NEAQA's compliance:**

The IQA of NEAQA is explained earlier in the separate chapter. Various aspects related to internal quality and professional conduct are addressed by NEAQA's Code of Ethics, and Strategy, all published on its website. As a new body NEAQA's IQA system is still under construction. One of NEAQA's actions planned to be conducted in the near future is the implementation of ISO standards: 9000, 20000 and 27000 in order to improve the quality of its activities and defines principles underlying its work based on the PDCA principle.

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<sup>14</sup> NEAQA's website: <https://www.nat.rs/en/legal-provisions/>

The Code of Ethics defines rules of conduct, and cases considered, and sanctions for, a breach of the Code, and provides for the establishment of an ad-hoc Ethics Committee to deal with a breach.

Until now, previous CAQA has collected external feedback through surveys among HEIs (2011, 2015 and 2017), students (2011 and 2015) and academic experts (2017) and NEAQA and CAQA 2018 plan is to continue with this practice. At the moment the feedbacks from schools for applied students and reviewers have been collected and their analysis is a part of this report. The questionnaires have been made for the purpose of collecting the opinions of stakeholders regarding the changes of regulations and efficiency of CAQA 2018. The majority of stakeholders tend to agree that system changes will bring the improvement of the quality.

In the meantime, through conducting of pilot projects according to the new rules the members of Peer-review panels are asked to give their opinions and comments regarding the new procedures on the relationships between Panels – NEAQA – HEIs. The insights of labour-market representatives are particularly important since their role is relatively new in QA assessments.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

NEAQA's is fully aware that efficiency and effectiveness are key aspects of its work and therefore considers as the most important to follow the principle of continuous quality improvement approach.

#### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>15</sup>:**

- Feedback of schools for applied studies and reviewers;
- Code of Ethics;
- CAQA's 2018 Report to the Managing Board and Director.

#### **3.7. CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENICES**

##### **Standard:**

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

##### **NEAQA's compliance:**

NEAQA is not explicitly required by LoHE to undergo a (cyclical) external review but should ensure that its standards and procedures are consistent with those of the EHEA. This is the third ENQA-coordinated external review: two of previous CAQA and one of NEAQA. As a result of the first review in 2012, CAQA was granted full membership of ENQA in 2013 and entered on EQAR in 2014. The review in 2017 has been initiated by CAQA with a view to confirming its ENQA membership and renewing its registration in EQAR. Because of the changes of LoHE previous CAQA's membership was under review and

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<sup>15</sup> NEAQA's website: <https://www.nat.rs/en/>



as a legal successor NEAQA inherited the same status. However, due to the status change NEAQA was no longer listed in EQAR. Together with the external review of ENQA, NEAQA has applied to EQAR.

## Compliance with European Standards and Guidelines (Part 2)

### 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.

#### **NEAQA's compliance:**

According to the article 14 of LoHE and Statute, NEAQA's main tasks are accreditation, the assessment of quality of higher education institutions and its units, evaluation of study programmes and assurance of quality in higher education. According to these provision NEAQA's core processes in the external quality assessment of higher education include the following key activities:

1. Initial accreditation of HEIs and study programmes;
2. Accreditation of Institutions (periodic);
3. Accreditation of study Programmes (periodic);
4. External quality control - audit.

NEAQA's quality standards and external assessment procedures, enacted in February 2019, are in accordance with the legislation and strategies on higher education of the Republic of Serbia, international trends and the ESG for Quality Assurance in the EHEA. Establishment of NEAQA represents improvement of quality assessment in Serbia, since NEAQA is the legal successor of CAQA. For the above-mentioned key activities there are separate standards for initial institutional and study programmes accreditation, periodic institutional accreditation, periodic programme accreditation, self-evaluation of HEIs and audits. Standards and procedures for accreditation reviews of programmes of the existing HEIs are the same for initial and periodic reviews. Slight differences exist between the standards for first-/second-cycle and third-cycle programmes (11 common standards; distance learning and studies conducted outside HEI's headquarters as additional for the former; accreditation for scientific research institution and transparency, as an additional for the latter). Audits (external quality control) of HEIs are based on general standards for audits (e.g. use of HEIs' self-evaluations, procedure, reporting) and on the standards for self-evaluation conducted by HEIs. NEAQA's internal regulations for each process are published on its website. The table below maps the Part 1 ESG onto NEAQA's standards for all processes and discusses the compliance of the standards with the ESG for all key processes:

Process	Initial HEI accreditation and programmes	Periodic HEI accreditation	Initial and periodic programme accreditation*	Self-evaluation as a basis for audit
<b>ESG 1.1 Policy for QA</b>	Standards 1 (HEI's objectives and tasks); 12 (IQA mechanisms)	Standards 1 (Goals and objectives); 11 (IQA mechanisms)	Standard 11 (Quality control)	Standards 1 (QA strategy); 3 (QA system); Standard 2 (QA standards and procedures) and 8 (with regard to discrimination)
<b>ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes</b>	Standards 3 (Programmes/Studies); 4 (Research)	Standards 4 (Programmes/Studies); 5 (Research)	Standards 1 (programme structure); 5 (curriculum); 6 (quality, modernity and international compatibility); 15 (distance learning)	Standards 4 (quality of programmes); 6 (quality of research/artistic/professional activities); Standard 3 with regard to student involvement in programme design.
<b>ESG 1.3 SCL, teaching and assessment</b>	Standards 3 (programme/studies); 8 (students)	Standards 4 (programme/studies); 8 (students)	Standards 4 (Graduate competences); 5 (curriculum); 8 (student assessment and progression)	Standards 4 (quality of programmes); 5 (quality of the teaching process); 8 (quality of students)
<b>ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</b>	Standard 8 (students)	Standard 8 (students)	Standards 7 (student admission); 8 (student assessment and progression)	Standard 8 (quality of students)
<b>ESG 1.5 Teaching staff</b>	Standards 4 (research); 5 (quality of teaching staff); 6 (requirements for teaching staff)	Standards 5 (research and artistic activities); 6 (teaching staff)	Standard 9 (teaching staff)	Standards 6 (Quality of research/artistic/professional activities); 7 (Quality of teaching staff)
<b>ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support</b>	Standards 7 (Non-teaching staff); 9 (Facilities); 10 (Library, resources and IT); 11 (Funding);	Standards 7 (Non-teaching staff); 9 (Facilities); 10 (Library, resources and IT); 12 (Funding sources);	Standard 10 (organizational and material resources)	Standards 9 (Quality of library resources and IT facilities); 10 (Quality of HEI management and non-teaching support); 11 (Quality of facilities); 12 (funding)
<b>ESG 1.7 Information management</b>	Standard 2 (Organization of HEI)	Standards 2 (Planning & monitoring); 3 (organization & administration)	Standard 11 (Quality control)	Standards 3 (QA system); 10 (Quality of HEI management and non-teaching support); Standards 1 (QA strategy); 2 (QA standards and procedures) and Standard 14 (Systematic surveillance and periodic quality control)
<b>ESG 1.8 Public information</b>	Available after positive decision. NEAQA plans to publish short summaries of CAQA 2018 decision on the website in the future.	Standard 13 (Transparency)	2 (Programme purpose); Standard 9 (Teaching staff); 12 (Transparency: 3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle programmes)	Standards 1 (QA strategy); 2 (QA standards and procedures); 4 (Quality of programmes); 7 (Quality of teaching staff); Standard 5 (Quality of the teaching processes)
<b>ESG 1.9 On-going monitoring and period review of programmes</b>	Standard 12 (IQA mechanisms)	Standard 11 (IQA mechanisms); Standards 4 (Programmes/Studies) and 5 (Research and artistic activities)	Standard 11 (Quality control)	Standards 1 (QA strategy); 2 (QA standards and procedures); 3 (QA system); Standards 4 (quality of programmes); 5 (quality of the teaching process); 13 (role of the students in self-assessment)
<b>ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</b>	Periodic accreditation after one year required by LoHE	Required by LoHE on every seven years	Required by LoHE on every seven years	Required by LoHE on every three years

\* Both initial and periodic accreditation programme reviews are based on the same standards

Compared to the Self-evaluation report from 2017, the quality assessment framework provided by LoHE and regulation on procedures and standards for quality assessments provide a space for CAQA 2018 to shift the focus from accreditation to auditing by strengthening the IQA in HEIs. The newly enacted LoHE provides for less frequent accreditation reviews (seven years) and more frequent audits (four years).

According to LoHE external stakeholders are involved in NEAQA in two ways: (1) as members of Managing Board and (2) as members of Peer-review Panels in quality assessment procedures. Within this framework in the future the discussion on Student Centred Learning, academic integrity and fraud and recognition of qualifications will be better addressed, as suggested by ENQA report from 2017.

## **CONCLUSION:**

NEAQA continued the previous setting of CAQA to have all the standards and guidelines described in Part 1 of the ESG covered by its key processes at different (institutional and study programme) levels, avoiding overlaps between assessment criteria. In 2017 ENQA panel came to a similar conclusion by saying that all processes fully embrace ESG 1.6. However, the standards for accreditation reviews focus on few selected aspects of Part 1 ESG, while those for audits cover the ESG quite comprehensively. This is, according to the panel, justified because institutional and programme accreditation reviews serve the purpose of checking compliance with minimum requirements, whereas audits aim at quality enhancement and, thus, all processes are complementary, and audits are conducted between periodic accreditation reviews.

NEAQA's position is that the responsibility for the quality of institution and study programmes and its continuous improvement lies, first and foremost, with the education institutions themselves. The main goal of external assessment is to provide educational institutions feedback which should support their development and improvement. NEAQA wishes to move from the evaluation of the quality system per se, to its integration with the assessment of core processes of HEIs. In order to achieve that NEAQA plans to conduct surprise visits and meetings and seminars for HEIs and students in order to clarify the concept of SCL and responsibility of HEIs for IQA systems.

Proper establishment of new quality assessment system which should provide higher quality of higher education in Serbia will be the highest challenge of NEAQA.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>16</sup>:**

- Regulations on Standards and Procedure for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions;
- Regulation on Standards and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes;
- Regulations on Standards for Initial Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes;
- Regulation on Standards and Procedures for External Quality Control;
- Regulations on Standards and Procedure for Self-Assessment of HEIs;

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

## **Standard:**

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<sup>16</sup> NEAQA's website: <https://www.nat.rs/en/regulations/>

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

#### **NEAQA's compliance:**

The NEAQA's EQA processes and methodologies are, like during the CAQA period, predefined by the national legislation. Accreditation reviews of institutions and programmes, on one hand, aim to assess compliance with minimum standards and conditions laid down in LoHE (types and minimum number of programmes for the individual types of HEIs; number, qualifications, mode of employment and workload for teachers, etc.). On the other hand, audits are intended to assess whether HEIs comply with their QA obligations, and are geared towards quality enhancement. Between the accreditation reviews and audits, there is a little overlap and the processes are designed so that they lead to clearly defined outcomes and a follow-up. NEAQA involves all relevant stakeholders in the development of regulations which are based on existing legislation, include clear aims and descriptions. All relevant documents are published on NEAQA's website.

Using the information from stakeholders (HEIs, Students and labour market representatives) collected by previous CAQA and ENQA's review recommendation from 2017, NEAQA has proposed revision of procedures for accreditation and external quality control – audit, which, in February 2019, were adopted by the NCHE. Pursuant to LoHE, CAQA 2018 makes a proposal of standards and procedures to the NEAQA's Managing Board which adopts its final draft. The final draft is then sent to NCHE for the approval. NCHE is composed of representatives of the Government, HEIs (CONUS and COHS) and labour market representatives. For the issues relevant for students their representatives, appointed by the student conferences, take part in the decision making.

The latest revision of standards (February 2019) brought the essential procedural change in the accreditation reviews of institutions and programmes and audits in the methodology, which now follows the spirit of ESG. Since the LoHE form 2017 does not contain provisions about the anonymity of experts, the Peer-review Panels have been introduced, composed of three academics, one student and one labour market representative, which now have the central role in EQA processes. For the accreditation of Ph.D programmes one of the academics should be a foreign expert.

All requests for accreditation received from 1 March 2019 will be assessed according to the new regulations. Therefore, CAQA 2018, until now, held one meeting and three trainings for relevant stakeholders. The results of the analysis made are presented in the Chapter: Information and Opinions of Stakeholders of this report.

The experience of previous CAQA was dominantly based on quantitative aspects set by the LoHE and standards. As earlier stated, NEAQA's goal is to refocus its processes towards qualitative aspects and effectiveness of HEIs' IQA by building its external assessment processes on the Continuous Quality improvement approach with the main goal of meeting the needs and expectations of all stakeholders.

Therefore, the new guiding principles of NEAQA for all external reviewers are set in the following way:

- External evaluation processes comply with the laws and strategies of the RS, ESG and international trends for QA in EHEA;
- The main purpose of external evaluation is to give a feedback to HEIs which would help them to improve the quality and support their development;
- All relevant stakeholders in the processes of external evaluation contribute to development of evaluation policies and procedures;
- The focus of external evaluations is on the core processes of HEIs;
- Regulations for external evaluations of NEAQA are based on the PDCA cycle: planning, implementation, assessment and improvements (plan, do, check and act);

#### **CONCLUSION:**

NEAQA initiated the change of procedures for accreditation and external quality control - audit and they now include Peer - review Panels, composed of three academics, one student and one labour market representative, which follows the spirit of ESG. In the process of changing these procedures, all relevant stakeholders were involved. The trainings of experts and meetings with HEIs representatives were organised in order to prepare them for the implementation of the new processes.

NEAQA is also setting the ground for shifting its course from accreditation reviews and compliance with minimum standards towards quality enhancement as the primary aim of audits. One of the challenges recognised in this moment is the design of proper questionnaires which will enable CAQA 2018 to produce various qualitative analysis.

#### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>17</sup>:**

- Regulations on Standards and Procedure for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions;
- Regulation on Standards and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes;
- Regulations on Standards for Initial Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes;
- Regulation on Standards and Procedures for External Quality Control;
- Regulations on Standards and Procedure for Self-Assessment of HEIs;
- Questionnaires distributed to reviewers and representatives of schools for applied studies

#### *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;

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<sup>17</sup> NEAQA's website: <https://www.nat.rs/en/regulations/>

- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

### **NEAQA's compliance:**

#### *Self - Assessment*

NEAQA has adopted various internal documents for its processes, including the Rules of Procedure, internal regulations on the standards and procedures for each process, and site visit protocols for the relevant processes. According to the LoHE self-evaluation is conducted on every three years maximum, which provides the basis for external quality control – audits. Self-evaluation reports are taken into consideration in periodic institutional and programme accreditation reviews and audits. They follow classical assessment model which includes self-assessment report prepared by the educational institution. These written information and publicly available information together, as well as documentation enclosed according to the procedures for accreditation and standards and corresponding recommendations make a ground for initial assessment for Peer-review Panels which conduct external quality assessment processes.

In the coming period CAQA 2018 plans to offer self-assessment trainings to educational institutions keeping in mind that HEIs need to understand what is expected of them during self - assessment and other types of assessments.

#### *External assessment*

External quality processes performed by NEAQA are: initial accreditation (which combines an institutional and programme review), periodic accreditation of institutions and programmes and external quality control – audit.

LoHE predetermines NEAQA's procedures by stating that periodic accreditation of institutions and programmes are conducted on every seven years. Reviews of new programmes at existing HEIs are conducted in accordance with the procedure for periodic programme accreditation. External quality control - audit is, on the other hand, regularly conducted in the fourth year of the accreditation cycle, and if necessary, upon the request of the Ministry, the National Council and CAQA. In case of an initial accreditation, NEAQA gives an opinion to MoESTD regarding the standards by the new HEI. If the standards are not met NEAQA gives negative opinion. If the standards are met NEAQA recommends to MoESTD to issue an operating licence. A new HEI and its programmes has to undergo accreditation within the first year after an issuing of operating licence. After this first accreditation they are subject to periodic accreditation after seven years.

According to the new Regulations from February 2019, all external quality processes, mentioned above now, use the same procedure for quality assessment (Annex 3): a sub-commission of CAQA determines a proposal of the composition of a Peer-review Panel for accreditation of HEI/programme/initial accreditation/audit consisting of three peer-review experts selected from the list of professors at HEIs established by the National Council, one student from the list of students determined by the Student Conference of Serbian Universities or Student Conference of Academies of Applied Studies Serbia and one expert for specific area proposed by appropriate organizations of employers, professionals or professional associations, labour markets, chambers. A Sub-commission submits the proposal to the

Accreditation Commission, which submits the final proposal to the Director of NEAQA, who further appoints a Peer-review Panel and its president and a Coordinator from the administrative and professional services of NEAQA. A decision on the appointment of a Peer-review Panel for accreditation is published on the website of NEAQA. The president of the Peer-review Panel is in charge for the organization of the panel's work. After the receiving of HEIs documentation, he manages the writing of a preliminary report based on it. Peer-review Panel has to submit report as a group, and CAQA 2018 has developed guidelines for report writing, having in mind that panel is consisted of different stakeholders' representatives. These guidelines should only help panel members to draft the initial report by focusing on the standards which are covered by their expertise. This does not imply that experts are not equal in assessing all standards relevant for quality system of HEIs. After the completing of preliminary report the President of the Panel sends it to the Coordinator who then contacts HEI in order to schedule site visit and define the Site Visit Protocol. Assessment visits are mandatory for all external quality processes. Panel meets, one day before the site visit, in order to prepare it. A site visit is planned to last one day, between 6 to 8 hours and should include meetings with the HEI management, self-evaluation team, programme heads and non-teaching staff, students, other staff holding management positions (e.g. finance, library, IT) and a tour of facilities. An interview with students is conducted only by a student member of the site visit panel so as to ensure an open and frank discussion. At the end of the visit, a Panel should sum up the facts and results and define strong and weak points, which are then presented to a HEI on a final meeting. Panel also concludes the grades for each standard but it does not announce them to a HEI. The idea of introducing new Panel system by NEAQA is to provide HEIs grater support in the development of IQA and assessing its effectiveness, rather than only validating the documentary evidence.

After the termination of site visit Panel updates the preliminary report which Presidents sends to the coordinator who sends it further to a HEI. In 15 days upon its receiving, HEI can oppose only the finding of facts and not the Panels analysis and sends it to the Panel Coordinator which forwards it further to the Panel. Panel takes the HEI's comments into consideration and makes the final report which is then forwarded to the Sub-commission of the adequate scientific/artistic field. Based on a Report of a Peer-review Panel for accreditation of a HEI, the Sub-commission determines a proposal of a Decision on accreditation of a HEI and submits it to the Accreditation Commission within 30 days from the date of the Peer-review Panel Report submission. In the first session after receiving a Decision on accreditation proposal, the Commission considers the submitted proposal, and if necessary, ask for additional explanations from the Peer-review Panel, after which it shall issue a decision on accreditation.

To ensure consistency in its processes, CAQA 2018 has developed templates for HEIs to prepare documentation, templates with guidelines for external experts conducting assessment as part of each process and Site Visit Protocols.

In May 2019 seven Peer-review Panels were formed and at the moment the practical implementation of defined procedures is taking place. The panels have been formed for the accreditation of programmes and they are used for the system testing and analysis of a possible shortcomings and methods for its improvements.

## *Follow up*

Previous CAQA had a kind of a built-in follow-up process for HEIs and programmes which have received an ‘act of warning’ as an outcome of a periodic review by which HEIs were required to address the shortcomings identified and submit revised documentation within a timeframe set by CAQA (between one week and six months, depending on the type and number of shortcomings). On this basis, CAQA took a final decision and prepared a final report. New LoHE does not provide ‘act of warning’ as an option and this mechanism is used only for the request submitted before enacting of the new law. However, CAQA 2018 established new rule in accordance with the Law on Administrative procedure of the RS, by which Commission could issue an ‘opinion’ to a HEI by which it asks from a HEI clarifications and corrections in the process of accreditation of institutions and programmes.

For external quality control process – audit LoHE (article 22) and Regulation on Standards prescribe the following procedure which could be initiated by CAQA, MoESTD and NCHE: the CAQA 2018 submits the report on conducted external quality control – audit of a HEI, both to a HEI and a claimant. In case the higher education institution fails to fulfil the obligations pertaining to quality, CAQA 2018 will impose measures to a higher education institution, aimed at correcting the identified deficiencies and follow up lasting for a period of six months from the date of submission of the report with measures. Within a period of 30 days from the date of expiry of the deadline of six months, CAQA 2018 prepares the final report on the external assessment and evaluation of quality of the higher education institution. This report, to which the higher education institution has not filed an objection within the mentioned 30 days, as well as the report the Commission adopts upon expiry of the deadline of six months is published on the official website of the National Accreditation Body. If the final report is negative, NEAQA within 30 days from the date of publication of the final report adopts the decision on revocation of accreditation of a study programme, i.e. accreditation of the higher education institution. A HEI may file an appeal against that decision to NCHE through NEAQA.

Upon its establishment, CAQA 2018 in September 2018 initiated the practice of writing recommendations in positive decisions in the accreditation processes of HEIs and programmes. HEIs are obliged to inform CAQA in two years on progress achieved in accordance with the recommendations. In the coming period the follow up procedure on this new follow up aspect will be developed. Also, in the process of accreditation of new HEIs CAQA 2018, where it is necessary, in the case of positive decision introduces mandatory audits for a shorter period prescribed by the law (eg. 2 years).

As a legal successor of previous CAQA, NEAQA’s CAQA 2018 is developing at the moment a plan and schedule for external quality control – audits for this year in which the institutions scheduled for the regular audit by the law will be listed, as well as the HEIs for which the requests for audit are received.

Finally, CAQA 2018 is planning to organize meetings and seminars in order to provide a floor for discussion and best-practice sharing among HEIs in order to create a community which inspires for change and improvement and follows the maxim that quality is not a destination but journey.

## **CONCLUSION:**

New CAQA 2018 now as part of NEAQA, has developed external quality assessment procedures in the spirit of ESG. New model integrated ENQA’s recommendations in the Report form 2017 and in the



coming period it should be implemented. In May 2019 seven panels were formed and at the moment the enacted procedures are undergoing the process of first implementation which should help CAQA 2018 to spot the shortcomings and find the ways for its overcoming.

NEAQA's main approach is to encourage HEIs to build stronger IQ systems through discussion during the site visits but also through various seminars and trainings which are planned to be held in the future. At the moment, CAQA 2018 has organized meeting only with the representatives of schools for applied studies on new regulations and documentations for external quality assessment. It will take some time to change the quality culture from the focus on accreditation to audit principles.

#### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>18</sup>:**

- Guidelines for preparation of documentation for quality assessment, standards and tables for all QA processes: initial accreditation of HEIs and programmes, accreditation of HEIs, accreditation of programmes and external quality control – audit;
- Instructions and report templates for Peer-review Panel for all quality assessment processes;
- Site visit protocol;
- Decisions on Panel formation.

#### *2.4. PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS*

##### **Standard:**

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

##### **NEAQA's compliance:**

The regulations for external quality processes has been changed according to ESG and ENQA's recommendation and they now include Peer-review Panels consisted of three peer-review experts selected from the list of professors at HEIs established by the National Council, one student from the list of students determined by the Student Conference of Serbian Universities or Student Conference of Academies of Applied Studies Serbia and one expert for specific area proposed by appropriate organizations of employers, professionals or professional associations, labour markets, chambers. The decision on forming a panel is made publicly available on NEAQA's website before the mandatory site visit.

Academic reviewers for panels CAQA 2018 select from the list which adopts NCHE. NCHE publishes an open call with the application available on its website and from the pool of applications creates a list which is publicly available on its website. This list includes appointed teachers of higher education institutions in the Republic, as well as teachers of appropriate qualifications from the higher education institutions abroad. The list contains the following data: name and surname of the reviewer; state, place and institution at which he acquired the highest level of education; current teaching-scientific qualification and the year and institution in which he was elected for the teaching-scientific position; and educational-scientific, i.e. educational-artistic field and domain within which he was chosen for the

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<sup>18</sup> NEAQA's website: <https://www.nat.rs/akreditacija/>

teaching-scientific position. A person elected, designated or appointed to an office in a state authority, a body of the autonomous province or local self-government, a body of a political party or to the post of the executive body of a higher education institution, as well as the person being a member of the National Council, the Accreditation Commission, i.e. employed at the National Accreditation Body may not be found on the list of reviewers. The total number of academic experts/reviewers after two public calls conducted is 753 in total: 696 domestic and 57 international. Due to the lack of international experts, the call for their applications is open until the end of 2019.

In the accreditation process of PhD programmes one of the academics is international expert/reviewer. At the moment in the pool of these experts are mostly those from the region and Serbian-speaking academics living abroad. The reasons for current pool composition lays in two facts: (1) NEAQA wishes to foster regional cooperation keeping in mind numerous similarities of HE systems (e.g. countries of ex -Yugoslavia) which should encourage cooperation and best practice exchange; (2) the language barrier which asks for translation of the documents in English language, which induces additional costs wither for HEIs or NEAQA.

However, NEAQA has set, as its main goals internationalization and substantial compliance with ESG and EHEA, in that context it took steps which should set the ground for future development in that directions. The first step was made in the second call for reviewers when in the application form the applicants were asked to assess their English language knowledge. Beside the acquiring information on which experts could assess the programmes in English, this will also allow NEAQA to recommend its experts to other QA agencies. With such a practice it will provide them with additional experience and education which will be valuable for the domestic external assessments and, together with CAQA 2018 expert training, represents investment in human resources which is crucial for the institutional development. Furthermore, in order to overcome the language barrier CAQA 2018 plans to ask from the applicants in one of the coming new accreditation cycles, to submit the accreditation documentation for PhD programmes in English language. These steps are aimed to expand the quality processes and, even though LoHE regulates its use only for PhD programmes, there is no barrier for use of international experts in the future in other quality assurance processes.

Students are selected by SCONUS and SCAAS and employer representatives by the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and other professional associations so that NEAQA receives lists of nominees, based on their assessments. The call for these two types of experts is open continuously. Experts, students and employers for individual reviews / audits are pre-selected from the pool / lists by the relevant CAQA 2018 sub-commission, in consultation with SCONUS and SCAAS in the case of students, and approved by CAQA. Selection is based on expertise, the type of HEI subject to a review / audit. Lists of students and labour market representatives are available on NEAQA website. The assessment of their knowledge of English language will be conducted in the future. Based on the hitherto experience, the estimation is that new quality assessment procedures will ask for additional engagement of CAQA 2018 for the involvement of labour market representatives in the process. In the past decade students were active part of the QA processes and belong to the HE community. On the other hand, labour market representatives did not have an active role, except occasional involvement. Therefore, the extra effort should be invested in their animation and willingness to participate in these processes because this new aspect of QA induces some challenges: labour market representatives should invest their time to learn about HE system and QA standards since the whole system is not well known to them; adequate financial compensation for the

opportunity costs, etc. Based on the analysis of the first-round training of experts, which was conducted in April and May 2019, CAQA 2018 will make a plan for addressing this issue.

Competent experts are crucial for professional external assessment. NEAQA thus gives special attention to their selection and training. In order to be seen as good expert should be: be impartial and independent during the assessment process and his opinion should always rely on evidence; value partnership and cooperation, treating other panel members and HEIs representatives with respect; maintain the confidentiality of information revealed during the assessment process; and be reliable and follow the agreed timeframe and division of tasks.

In order to prevent conflict of interest NEAQA adopted Code of Ethics and Regulations on Peer-review experts, published on the website<sup>19</sup>, which regulate the behaviour in QA processes. For example, an academic expert and student should not come from the HEI concerned is one of the principles stated in these acts. All three groups are informed of the existence of these regulations and are obliged to sign the statement on the absence of conflict of interest.

In order to assess the quality of experts CAQA 2018 grades its work and ranks them. This analysis has two goals: to detect shortcoming which should be overcome with trainings and improving of human resource capacities of NEAQA. The assessment until now was made only for the academic reviewers because CAQA 2018 had to complete the accreditation procedures started in the period of previous CAQA and according to old rules. The assessment was based on the reports from academic experts which vary in quality, from accurate, focused and well-substantiated to those which do not provide clear, consistent and sufficient information. Scores given by some experts vary greatly or high scores are not substantiated by evidence. The experts involved in such cases are at this stage noted and will be monitored in the future engagement in Peer- review Panels. As the procedure has changed and trainings on new procedures conducted new chance should be given to the experts who should be carefully selected.

Additional mechanism to assess the quality of experts are opinions of fellow Panel members and coordinators and opinion of HEIs which will be added to the information about experts who have participated in assessments. NEAQA takes that feedback into consideration when forming future assessment committees.

As already mentioned, together with the procedures and standards change, CAQA 2018 has created guidelines and report templates for reviewers. During April and May 2019 CAQA has organised trainings for reviewers in three regional centres: Niš, Novi Sad and Belgrade. On these trainings the total of number of 448 reviewers was present of which 408 academics, 39 students and 1 labour market representatives. Beside these general trainings, CAQA 2018 organises trainings for Peer-review Panels before each assessment and site visit. NEAQA plans to organize additional training for labour market representatives in June 2019 since they have not taken active part in HE QA system so far. Therefore, NEAQA will endeavour to provide additional incentives for their participation in this process. The results of the analysis made are presented in the Chapter: Information and Opinions of Stakeholders of this report.

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<sup>19</sup> NEAQA's website: <https://www.nat.rs/en/legal-provisions/>

## **CONCLUSION:**

The engagement of experts in quality assessments processes in Serbian QA system has changed according to the spirit of ESG and ENQA's recommendations from the last assessment. The new system is currently in the phase of initial implementation and during May 2019 seven Panels were nominated for the accreditation of study programmes. These processes should help CAQA 2018 to detect weak and strong points and to improve shortcomings for future requests. General training of experts has been conducted as well as individual Peer-review Panel trainings before the site visits for the accreditation of the above-mentioned programmes.

The new quality assessment model imposes challenges which should be addressed in the future. The labour market representatives were not significantly involved in HE processes and additional efforts by NEAQA should be made to overcome all obstacles raising from this fact.

Regarding the engagement of international experts, in the future NEAQA plans to broaden the scope from regional to international and has already made first steps towards the realisation of this goal.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>20</sup>:**

- Code of Ethics;
- Regulations on Peer-review experts;
- List of experts.

### *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.

#### **NEAQA's compliance:**

All of NEAQA's processes end with a formal outcome, and accreditation outcomes are binding on the MoESTD. Initial accreditation reviews lead to a positive or negative decision by CAQA 2018, based on which NEAQA issues and opinion to MoESTD to issue or refuse an operating licence to a new HEI and its programmes or (refuse to) include a new programme in the licence of an existing HEI. Upon completion of a periodic accreditation review, NEAQA may grant accreditation and issue an accreditation certificate, or refuse accreditation. An 'act of warning' (regarded as an intermediate or temporary outcome) is no longer provided in LoHE, but it is used if necessary, for the accreditation requests submitted before the enactment of new Law (8 October 2018). In the case of refusal, the MoESTD revokes an HEI's licence or amends it to exclude the non-accredited programme. An audit ends with CAQA 2018 adopting a report which confirms that an HEI fulfils its QA obligations with recommendations for further improvement of

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.nat.rs/en/legal-provisions/>

which HEI needs to inform CAQA 2018 after two years or initiating a follow-up process (this is also considered an intermediate or temporary outcome).

At the moment CAQA 2018 operates in two manners. One is applied to the “old cases” and the decision-making processes for accreditation requests for institutions, programmes and initial accreditation received before 5 December 2018 are conducted as follow: decisions are proposed by the CAQA 2018 sub-commission whose members are directly involved in a given review / audit. CAQA 2018 takes decisions in its meetings by a simple majority vote, with at least two-thirds of the membership required to attend; a member from an HEI undergoing the review / audit concerned is not present.

CAQA 2018 takes decisions based on compliance with the standards defined for its EQA processes, as assessed in its final reports where CAQA 2018 integrates findings from its own analysis of documentation, academic experts’ reports and site visit reports. During the site visit, the key standards for accreditation are those covering curriculum, staff, space and facilities. An ‘act of warning’ is issued only for the old cases where shortcomings can be eliminated in a short time (one week to six months, according to the procedure, e.g. one course to be replaced; mission and vision not clear), and otherwise (e.g. significant gaps in curricula, inadequate qualifications of staff) accreditation is refused. No minimum criteria or benchmarks are defined for follow-up in audits, but there are detailed reports with as many recommendations as possible, and follow-up is initiated if a significant shortcoming is identified under any standard. Since the LoHE form 2018 does not provide ‘act of warning’ as an option for temporary decision, in order to give an opportunity to HEIs to correct smaller and technical shortcomings of the documentation in 30 days, CAQA 2018 uses ‘opinion’ in accordance to the Law on Administrative Procedure, as already mentioned. This mechanism is used for the accreditation requests which were received between the enacting of new LoHE and 5 December 2018. However, both temporary outcomes ‘act of warning’ and ‘opinion’ will no longer be used in the new QA processes.

CAQA 2018 was established at the end of August 2018 and at that moment it inherited 383 pending requests. At the moment 254 were processed of which: 135 got the accreditation, 77 acts of warning/opinion, 34 were rejected and 8 waived the request. Deeper analysis on CAQA 2018 decision made until now was not preformed due to the time constraint.

Since the procedure for assessments have been changed to include external experts NEAQA has developed the foundation for scoring guidelines and numerical parameters for assessment of standards and are published on NEAQA’s website. In order to provide a uniform implementation of these criteria, all reviewers are required to participate in trainings, general and before each external review, during which CAQA 2018 explains to them the content of requirements and the principles of assessment. CAQA is also entitled to ask from panels to supplement or clarify their report in order to ensure the consistency of the reports. However, CAQA 2018 does not interfere with panel’s substantial assessment. The draft assessment report is sent to HEIs by NEAQA, to which they can submit comments on it within 15 day upon it receiving. Comments are then forwarded to the Panel which takes them into consideration and prepares final assessment report. This report should be consensual or in exceptional cases contain reasoned dissenting views of committee members. Since the understanding of what is expected from the HEIs during different types of assessment is necessary NEAQA provides training for them. Until now one training for schools of applied studies was held and in the coming period they will be organised for the universities, faculties and high schools for academic studies (colleges).

All NEAQA regulations contain descriptions of the decision-making processes, including the obligation to make the assessment outcomes on the predetermined criteria and evidence. CAQA 2018 bases its decisions on the proposition of the Sub-commission which analyses the report made by the Peer-review Panel. Panel proposes the decision based on the written materials/self-assessment report submitted by the HEI, the assessment report, the comments by the educational institutions received in due time, and on additional materials submitted upon the request of a Panel. In order to make the best possible decisions, CAQA 2018 and its Sub-commission have the duty to analyse assessment reports. In case of contradictions or inadequate justifications in a report, CAQA 2018 has the right to return it to the assessment panel to be clarified or supplemented. Experts' work is considered to be completed only after CAQA has made its decision based on their report. The decision should be based on strengths and areas for improvement of educational institutions identified in assessment reports. CAQA 2018 interprets assessment reports and adopts the subsequent decisions in a consistent way, making similar decisions when comparable circumstances are present.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

CAQA 2018 assessment and decision-making criteria comply with the ESG requirements. To guarantee the foreseeability of the assessment results and make the decision-making process more transparent, CAQA 2018 will update the decision-making criteria after the implementation of few accreditation and audit cycles in order to provide a proper sample.

#### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>21</sup>:**

- Regulations on Standards for all types of quality assessments;
- Templates for Peer-review Panel reports;
- Guidelines for Peer-review Panel reports.

#### *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.

##### **NEAQA's compliance:**

According to the old procedures three types of reports were produced as part of CAQA's processes: (1) individual academic experts' reports based on the analysis of documentation from HEIs; (2) site visit reports (where a visit is undertaken) drafted by CAQA members involved, with comments on drafts from students and employer representatives integrated; and (3) final reports, drafted by the CAQA sub-commissions concerned, which incorporate findings from the other two reports which provide the

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<sup>21</sup> NEAQA's website: <https://www.nat.rs/akreditacija/> and <https://www.nat.rs/uputstvo-za-rad-recenzenata/>

basis for CAQA's decisions/opinions. Where there is a difference of opinion between experts in their preliminary reports, CAQA members verify this during a site visit and rely on their findings.

These reports are currently in place only for the accreditation of institutions, programmes and initial accreditation for the institutions which submitted requests before 5 December 2018 and in accordance with the old procedures. For all requests submitted from 1 March 2019 the procedure is different due to the change in Regulations on standards for accreditation and audit adopted by the NCHE in February 2019.

According to the new procedure, a final report is written by a Peer-review Panel, which includes three academics, a student and a labour market representative respectively. For all QA processes the templates were developed by CAQA 2018 and they are available on NEAQA website. They contain general information on the QA process, HEI, Peer-review Panel, analysis of standards and their grades, summary, recommendations and signatures of panel members. The draft of a report is sent to the HEI concerned for a factual accuracy check and if it has any comment on it the panel has to take it into consideration before making the final report, which is sent to the sub-commission of CAQA 2018. Beside the report, panel is also obliged to write a short summary in Serbian and English. Two documents are published on NEAQA website. Together with the summary, the list of accredited HEIs and programmes is published on NEAQA's website.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Since the reporting system has changed according to the new procedures it requires now time for it to be fully implemented and for stakeholders to adjust to it. A challenge for NEAQA in the future will be continuous working on improving the level of content and language editing of the reports, which will be at times, inevitably, uneven.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>22</sup>:**

- Template reports;

### *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.

#### **NEAQA's compliance:**

LoHE regulates the appeal procedure stating that the appellate body is NCHE. In the case of refusal of accreditation, the HEI concerned (or its founder) may lodge an appeal to NCHE through NEAQA. The appeals procedure is laid down in the NCHE's Rulebook on deciding on the appeals on CAQA decisions, published on the NCHE's website.

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<sup>22</sup> NEAQA's website: <https://www.nat.rs/uputstvo-za-rad-recenzenata/>

Before HEI fails a complaint it has possibility to state its opinion before the decision is made. According to the Regulations on accreditation and audit institution can comment on factual ground of Peer-review Panel report which is sent to an institution before CAQA 2018 makes decision.

In case of the rejection of accreditation, of either an institution or study programme, HEI could file a complaint to NCHE through NEAQA. This procedure is at the moment regulated by the regulations of accreditation standards and procedures for HEIs and their study programmes and *Rules of Conduct of NCHE in making decision upon the appeal in the process of accreditation and operation of the appellate commission*. According to these rules when NEAQA receives an appeal and if it finds the appeal justified, it may change its original decision, with or without an additional review. Otherwise, an appeal is considered by the NCHE within 90 days. NCHE appoints an appellate commission whose task is to analyse the appeal and the documentation and propose a decision within 30 days from the day of appointment. The NCHE takes a decision by a majority vote. It may (1) reject the appeal if the procedure was properly implemented by CAQA 2018 (or procedural faults had no impact on its decision) and its decision is justified and taken in compliance with the relevant regulations; (2) override CAQA's 2018 decision, in whole or in part, and instruct it to reconsider its decision and conduct another review if key evidence is incomplete or incorrect, or the relevant regulations were not taken into account, or the decision is unclear or not adequately substantiated; (3) override CAQA's 2018 decision and take its own decision based on the evidence collected if the evidence was incorrectly assessed or led to an erroneous conclusion, or the relevant regulations were incorrectly applied. The third option is only possible if CAQA 2018, after NCHE has returned the decision for reconsideration, again rejects the request. According to the LoHE if NCHE refuses the accreditation HEI can initiate administrative dispute in court.

## **CONCLUSION:**

New LoHE has kept in essence the old appellate system in which NCHE is appellate body for NEAQA's negative decisions which does not give NEAQA a separate body within itself to consider appeals. However, NEAQA is at the moment working on the appellate/complaint procedure which aims to find the way to implement the requirements of the standard ESG 2.7 and LoHE and to regulate the NEAQA's procedure when NCHE returns the accreditation request to NEAQA for reconsidering.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (published on NEAQA's website)<sup>23</sup>:**

- LoHE;
- Rules of Conduct of NCHE in making decision upon the appeal in the process of accreditation and operation of the appellate commission.

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<sup>23</sup> NEAQA's website: <https://www.nat.rs/en/legal-provisions/>



## Information and opinions of stakeholders

In this chapter the results of two questionnaires are presented. Stakeholders were surveyed two times: during the meeting with the representatives of schools for applied studies and during the training of reviewers.

The first meeting's goal was to inform the representatives of these HEIs about new rules and their implementation in practice. CAQA 2018 representatives answered numerous questions put by HEIs representatives regarding the new regulations and its implementation. During that meeting their feedback was collected and analysed:

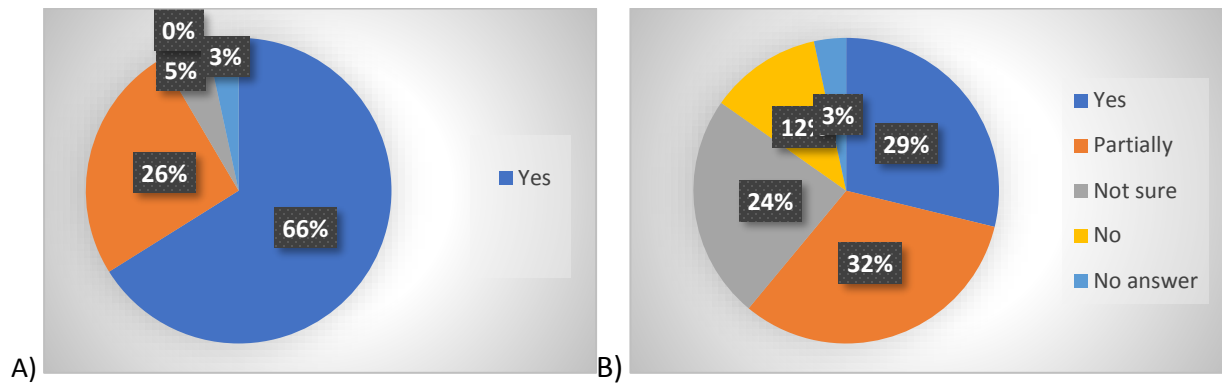
Among 62 representatives of HIEs present in this meeting 59 fulfilled the questioner, which shows high level of interest in cooperation with CAQA 2018. The questioner consists of 18 questions including the option for additional comments. The most frequent comments are the followings: necessity of having an electronic approach in processing of the documentation, a good communication with CAQA 2018, misunderstanding of students and employers in peer review panels, CAQA's 2018 inefficient work at the moment, need for the questionnaire improvement. Comments show the respect of NEAQA idea to collect the opinions on improved procedures of accreditation and quality assurance in higher education. This was the main idea for preparation of the questionnaire. However, CAQA 2018 members were aware of the fact that the preparation of a proper questionnaire is a very challenging tasks for a short period of time, but it was very important to collect feedbacks from the stakeholders at this stage in the framework. The results of the analysis show that HEIs agree with the changes of accreditation and QA in the new cycle. The comments also show a need for organisation of more frequent meetings with HEIs representatives to clarify the role of students and employers' representatives in peer review panels. Notified NEAQA's inefficient work at the moment is a consequence of difficulties which are very common in establishing of new institution. However, this might be resolved: (1) increasing the number of administrative staff; (2) processing of all accreditation requests submitted before 5 December 2018, (3) completing of all preparations for the implementation of new regulations and (4) acquiring of some experience with modified accreditations procedures.

From the point of NEAQA's view for this self-evaluation report the most important questions in the questionnaire were the followings:

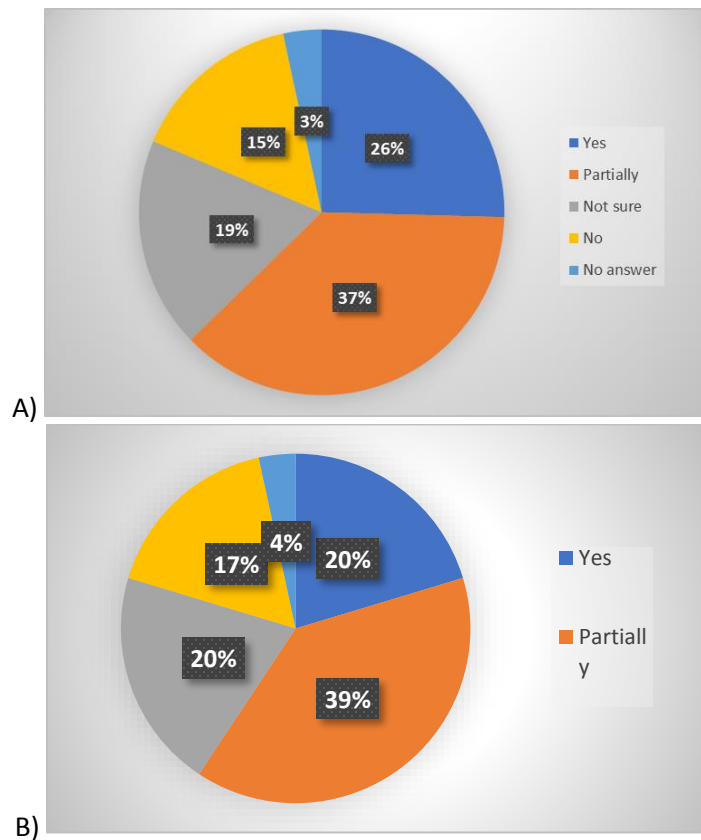
- Are you familiar with improved quality assurance system in the Serbian HE established by LoHE from 2017?
- Do you expect that improved quality assurance system will contribute to further development of HE quality in Serbia?
- Do you expect that improved procedures will make CAQA 2018: more effective, more efficient and more transparent?
- Do you expect that improved procedures will contribute to further development of HEIs and study programmes quality?

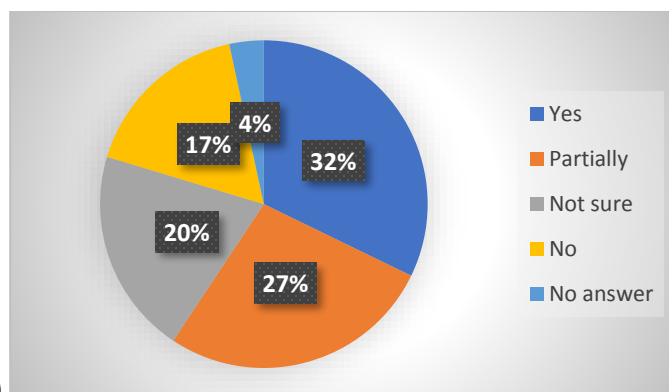
More than 91% of HEIs representatives state that they are fully or partially familiar with the improvements of QA system and more than 61% of them are convinced that these changes will imply a better quality of Serbian HE. HEIs representatives expect that improved procedures will contribute more

to further development of HEIs and SP qualities (more than 66%) than to CAQA's 2018 effectiveness, efficiency and transparency (about 60%).



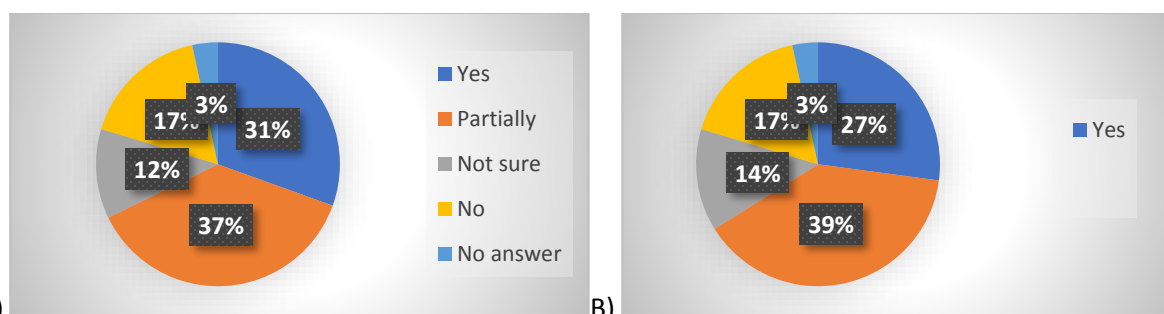
Graph 1. a) Are you familiar with improved quality assurance system in the Serbian HE established by LoHE from 2017? b) Do you expect that improved quality assurance system will contribute to further development of HE quality in Serbia?





c)

Graph 2. Do you expect that improved procedures will make CAQA: a) more effective, b) more efficient and c) more transparent?



A)

B)

Graph 3. Do you expect that improved procedures will contribute to further development of a) HEIs and b) study programmes quality?

The second group of trainings included experts of Peer- review Panels in three cities: Niš, Novi Sad and Belgrade, 484 academics, students and labour market representatives were trained for the implementation of new procedures. The experts were asked to give their opinion on various questions and the results are the following and its analysis is presented in the next section of this report.

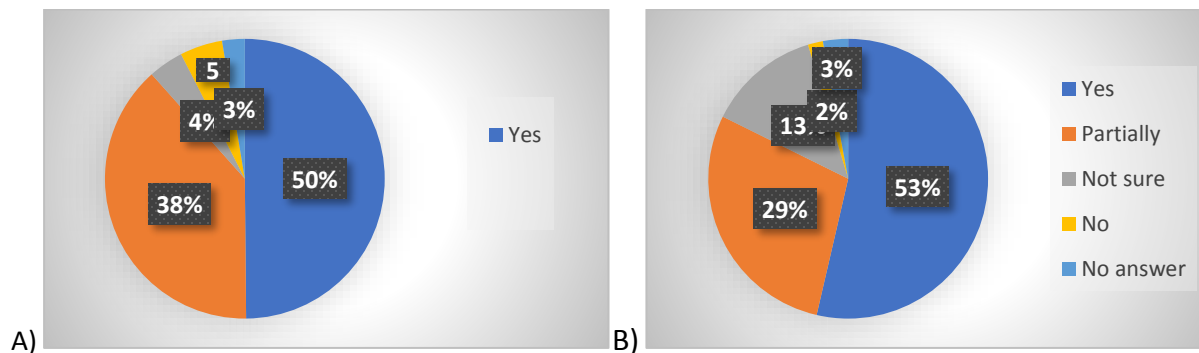
Among 448 trained reviewers the most represented were academics, much less students and minimally labour market representatives. The questionnaire was fulfilled by 345 trained reviewers, which presents a good sample for analysis and conclusions.

The questionnaire for reviewers consists of 16 questions including the option for additional comments. The most frequent comments are almost the same as in the sample of HEIs representatives. However, there are some specific reviewers' comments regarding their status: academics, students and labour market representatives. Labour market representatives more often point out the problem of leaving the work for site visits; and academics, for example, are more interested in frequent meetings with CAQA 2018, especially for issues specific for scientific fields. The comments show a need to organize more frequent and different kinds of meetings with reviewers, as well as more trainings for them to clarify issues that are specified for each scientific field. Also, from reviewers' feedbacks CAQA 2018 noticed issues that should be resolved shortly in order to provide a smooth operating of Peer-review Panels.

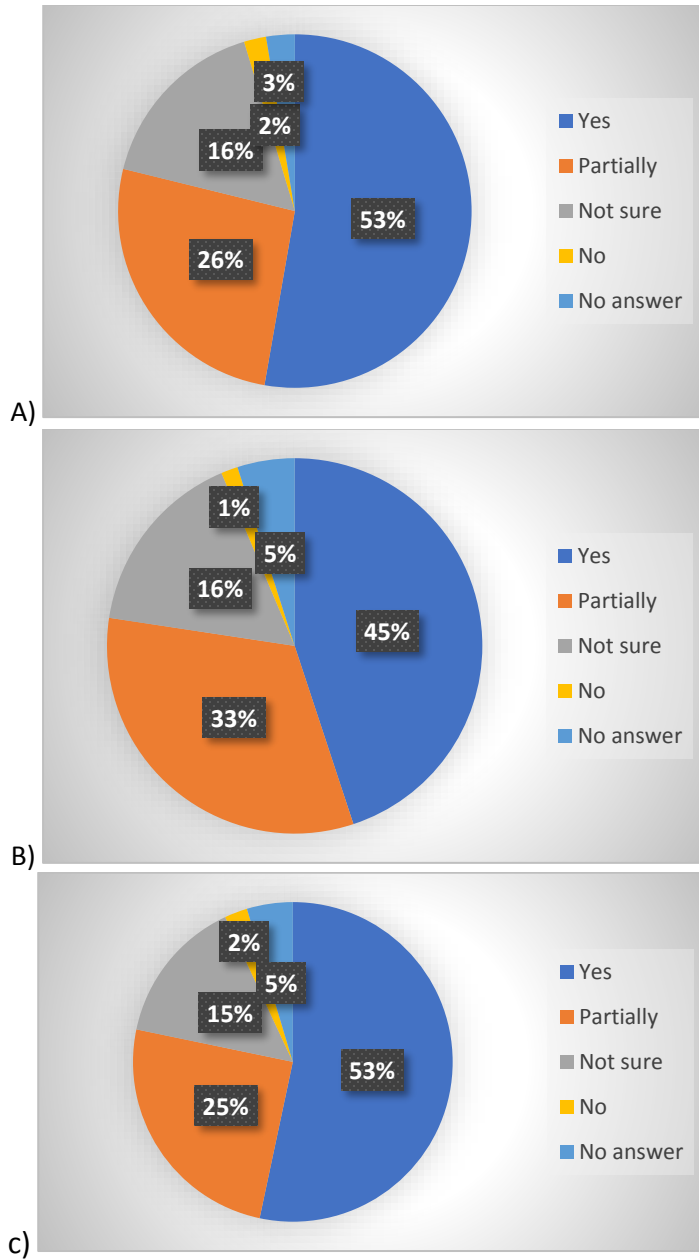
From the point of CAQA's 2018 view for this self-evaluation report the most important questions in the questionnaire (as in the case of questionnaire for HEIs representatives) are the following:

- Are you familiar with improved quality assurance system in the Serbian HE established by LoHE from 2017?
- Do you expect that improved quality assurance system will contribute to further development of HE quality in Serbia?
- Do you expect that improved procedures will make CAQA: more effective, more efficient and more transparent?
- Do you expect that improved procedures will contribute to further development of HEIs and study programmes quality?

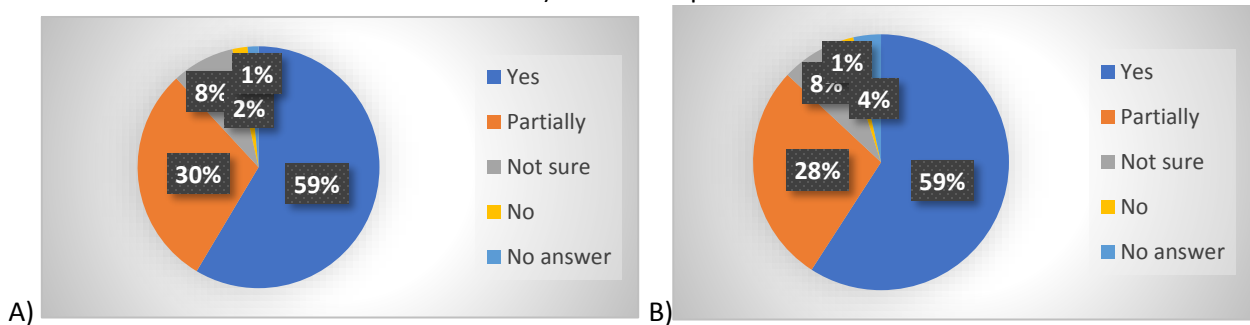
More than 88% of trained reviewers state that they are fully or partially familiar with improvements in QA system and more than 82% of them are convinced that these changes will imply a better quality of Serbian HE. Reviewers, as well as HEIs representatives, expect that improved procedures will contribute more to further development of HEIs and SP qualities (more than 87%) than to CAQA's 2018 effectiveness, efficiencies and transparency (about 77%). These data show that reviewers have been well selected to achieve NEAQA's goal to shift from accreditation to improved quality culture of HEIs. Very high percentage of trained reviewers, which are familiar with improvement in QA system, could be interpreted as willingness of reviewers to participate in further development of HE quality in Serbia. High level of trained reviewers' expectations, that improved procedures will contribute to further development of HEIs and SP quality and make CAQA 2018 more effective, more efficient and more transparent, shows that Serbian academic community overcome a resistance in the frame of QA system changes, that was recognized in ENQA 2017 panel.



Graph 1. a) Are you familiar with improved quality assurance system in the Serbian HE established by LoHE from 2017? b) Do you expect that improved quality assurance system will contribute to further development of HE quality in Serbia?



Graph 2. Do you expect that improved procedures will make CAQA: a) more effective, b) more efficient and c) more transparent?



Graph 3. Do you expect that improved procedures will contribute to further development of a) HEIs and b) study programmes quality?

CAQA 2018 plans to continue with the meetings with the representatives of HEIS and trainings of reviewers after the summer break of which the detailed plan was adopted. The same methodology (questionnaires) will be employed in order to collect information and opinions of the stakeholders.

## Recommendations and main findings from previous review(s) and agency's resulting follow-up

Based on the legal continuity of previous CAQA, NEAQA's starting point for self-assessment was ENQA's review form 2017 of CAQA. The progress made based on ENQA's recommendations is presented below.

### **ESG 2.1 consideration of internal quality assurance – Substantially compliance**

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that CAQA (1) amend slightly its audit standards so that they embrace all aspects of ESG 1.1, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.7, and have a discussion with academic experts, students and employers participating in processes to arrive at a common understanding of how student-centred learning and recognition should be addressed; (2) refocus audits more towards the effectiveness of internal quality assurance; and (3) provide greater support for HEIs to take the primary responsibility for quality.*

#### **NEAQA's response:**

The ENQA recommendations are acknowledged by NEAQA but they will be addressed in the forthcoming period, since NEAQA is still constructing the QA system according to the spirit of ESG. With the lower work load of CAQA 2018 members, since they will not be longer engaged in a double role as decision makers and experts, they could focus more to help institutions in achieving the goals suggested by the ENQA panel (arriving to common understanding of how student-centred learning and recognition should be addressed, refocusing of audits towards the effectiveness of internal quality assurance and to provide greater support for HEIs to take the primary responsibility for quality). CAQA 2018 will be able to dedicate more time to education and training of all stakeholders through which the new quality culture could be created.

### **ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose - Partially compliant**

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that CAQA (1) devise, in cooperation with the national authorities, arrangements where its members do not combine the role of a body taking decisions with the role of key external experts, and where they focus on the former role in line with the spirit of the ESG; (2) place a stronger emphasis on quality improvement in its processes; and (3) amend its internal regulations to ensure full clarity and consistency. For a related recommendation about expert involvement, see ESG 2.4.*

#### **NEAQA's response:**

According to the new regulations, CAQA 2018 members are no longer engaged in two roles (a decision makers and external experts) and they now focus only on decision making, while external experts are engaged among academics, students and labour market representatives. In training of reviewers, individual meetings with academics, representatives of HAIs CAQA's 2018 members learned that the academic community accepts the new concept of accreditation and quality assessment believing that it will be useful to involve site visits as a lot of relevant information could be gathered in direct contact with staff and students and it would be easier to conclude which are strong and weak parts regarding the corresponding study programme or HEIs. Consequently, the Peer - review Panel recognizes recommendations for improvement.

Through the established processes CAQA 2018 members will have more time to focus on the quality and its improvement. Previous rules and regulations were changed and improved in order to establish new quality assessment system in the spirit of ESG. However, its forthcoming implementation will provide new insights and possible shortcomings which will be in the future addressed by necessary amendments.

### **ESG 2.3 Implementing processes - Partially compliant**

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that CAQA (1) revise its procedures to include a site visit as part of each periodic programme review; and (2) devise a way for HEIs to report on progress in the implementation of its recommendations as part of existing or new arrangements; (3) consider developing guidelines on scoring for academic experts to ensure greater consistency in their approach to assessment. Involvement of CAQA and external academic experts in line with the ESG is addressed by recommendations under ESG 2.2 and 2.4 respectively.*

#### **NEAQA's response:**

Site visits are, according to the new regulations, mandatory for all quality assessment processes (accreditation of HEIs, study programmes and audits) performed by CAQA 2018. In order to place a stronger emphasis on quality improvement CAQA 2018 introduced recommendations for quality improvement as part of its positive decisions on accreditations and obliged HEIs to inform it after two years on improvements made.

Guidelines on scoring for academic experts are partially improved by pre-defined standards which are eliminatory in their decision-making process. As before, numerical parameters for quantitative analysis of study programme and HEIs may be considered as a part of guidelines of scoring. Shortcomings in great variations between scores given by academic expert in their reports or the highest scores which are not justified by comments will be omitted. There are two reasons for that: (i) the Per-Review Panel need to write the joint report, (ii) CAQA 2018 may look for more clarifications and explanations of details in report from the per-review panel. An interview with students conducted only by a student member of the site visit panel will be supported in the future having in mind a good experience from previous period to ensure an open and frank discussion.

### **ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts - Partially compliant**

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that CAQA (1) ensure the involvement of external experts as playing a central role in EQA processes, in line with the ESG; (2) ensure the involvement of students and labour market representatives in all periodic programme accreditation reviews; (3) provide space for students to contribute to its EQA processes beyond a range of aspects considered to be strictly student matters; (4) ensure much wider involvement of international experts, not only in periodic programme accreditation reviews but also in audits; (5) provide regular training, and feedback on reports, to academic experts. See also the related recommendation about CAQA's role in EQA processes under ESG 2.2. and guidelines for experts under ESG 2.3.*

#### **NEAQA's response:**

In accreditation and audit procedures, according to the new regulations, central role is given to external experts – Peer - review Panels. Beside three academics, these panels include students and labour market representatives in all accreditation and audit processes. Students and labour market members in per-review panels are considered as experts, like academic representatives. The panel members receive general and specific trainings and write reports together.

Regarding the recommendation of ENQA that wider involvement of international experts, not only in periodic programme accreditation reviews but also in audits, NEAQA is at the moment unable to fulfil because the pool of international experts is not that large yet for all fields. NEAQA is working to improve this challenge step by step. HEIs have prepared the documentations in Serbian language for this cycle and partially for the next one during the autumn. Having in mind various novelties in new regulations NEAQA would like to stabilize these procedures on national level and later on to enlarge to the international one.

### **ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes - Substantially compliant**

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that CAQA define more explicitly in its internal regulations the benchmarks for its decisions (an 'act of warning' as opposed to refusal of accreditation, and approval as opposed to follow-up in audits) which are consistently used in practice.*

#### **NEAQA's response:**

'Act of warning' no longer exists and the situation is now clearer when it comes to decision making. For more detailed explanation see the explanation of ESG 2.3 of this section.

### **ESG 2.6 Reporting - Partially compliant**

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that CAQA (1) devise a way for ensuring, even within the current legal constraints, a more substantial contribution from external experts, including academic experts, students and labour market representatives, to its final reports; (2) devise, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, an arrangement for CAQA to publish its initial accreditation opinions / reports on newly accredited institutions and their programmes; (3) define more clearly the rules*



*for the publication of reports in its internal regulations; and (4) consider providing drafts of its reports to HEIs for a factual accuracy check. For a related 'systemic' recommendation about the involvement of external experts, see ESG 2.2.*

**NEAQA's response:**

According to the new regulations, Peer -review Panel members have to work and write reports together. The templates for all types of peer-reviews panels have been made and are publicly available. Also, HEIs are provided with the draft reports for a factual accuracy check within 15 days from the day of the Panel report receiving.

The rules for the publication of reports are not yet formally defined. However, NEAQA plans to publish abstracts of all reports in Serbian and English language on its website. At the end of this year NEAQA will start with the preparation of a publication with all new regulations, quantitative and qualitative analysis of accredited and rejected study programmes and HEIs, having in mind among others data collected through questionnaires answered by reviewers, self-evaluation bodies of HEIs and others.

Regarding the recommendation number 4, according to the new quality assessment procedures, draft report of Peer-review Panel is sent to HEI for factual accuracy check.

***ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals - Partially compliant***

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that (1) CAQA put in place a procedure for HEIs to file a complaint as it is defined under ESG 2.7, and (2) a separate appeals body be established within CAQA (or, if possible, within the new quality assurance body to be set up by the newly enacted Law on Higher Education).*

**NEAQA's response:**

The legal framework for applying this recommendation is limited. New LoHE has kept the NCHE as an appellate body for NEAQA's rejection decisions which does not give NEAQA a separate body within itself to consider appeals. However, NEAQA is at the moment working on the appellate/complaint procedure which aims to find the way to implement the requirements of the standard ESG 2.7 and LoHE and to regulate the NEAQA's procedure when NCHE returns the accreditation request to NEAQA for reconsidering in ESG spirit.

***ESG 3.1 Activities, policy, and processes for quality assurance - Partially compliant***

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel encourages CAQA to consider establishing an advisory body involving international experts.*

**NEAQA's response:**

This recommendation is still under consideration in order to find the best way for its implementation.

### **ESG 3.2 Official status - Fully compliant**

### **ESG 3.3 Independence - Substantially compliant**

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that CAQA be provided with its own bank account to reduce its dependence on the Ministry of Education in administrative terms which has significant impact on CAQA's planning and management. For the recommendation on the appeals procedure, see ESG 2.7.*

**NEAQA's response:**

As an independent body and legal person NEAQA has its own bank account and obtains its own financing independent of the Ministry.

### **ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis - Substantially compliant**

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that CAQA produce regularly thematic analyses addressing quality and internal quality assurance, in addition to those available and planned which focus on quantitative aspects.*

**NEAQA's response:**

NEAQA plans to produce various reports, after the implementation of the first cycle of accreditation in accordance with the new rules and procedures.

### **ESG 3.5 Resources - Substantially compliant**

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that CAQA enhance its resource planning and management to ensure that it makes best possible use of the resources available. See also the related recommendation about a bank account under ESG 3.3.*

**NEAQA's response:**

The resource planning is made by the Managing board of NEAQA, which is, according to the LoHE, in charge for the approval of the financial plan. Since NEAQA is new body it will take some time to achieve its optimal resource planning.

### **ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct - Partially compliant**

**ENQA's 2017 review recommendation:** *The panel recommends that CAQA (1) devise an action plan for the development of its internal quality system, and (2) put in place formal mechanisms for gathering external feedback after each accreditation review and audit and internal feedback on a regular basis, and for following up on internal and external feedback collected.*

**NEAQA's response:**

CAQA 2018 has already prepared questionnaires for HEIs representatives and reviewers upon training respectively. Analysis of answers is presented in the Chapter: Information and Opinions of Stakeholders of this report. NEAQA plans to publish self-analysis on an annual basis using external and internal feedback collected. It also plans to implement ISO standards: 9000, 20000 and 27000.

**ESG 3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies - Fully compliant****SWOT analysis**

NEAQA is in the phase of building a new system of accreditation and deeper analysis of trends and behaviours will follow in the future. The SWOT analysis was made by CAQA 2018 and the Managing Board at the beginning of 2019 and it should provide the clearer picture of the current situation of NEAQA's position.

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishment of NEAQA as an independent body;</li> <li>- Competences, professionalism and accountability of CAQA 2018 members;</li> <li>- Experiences of previous CAQA;</li> <li>- Standards and procedures for internal and external evaluations in HE in accordance with ESG;</li> <li>- Dedication of CAQA members to quality improvement in HE;</li> <li>- Large pool of trained reviewers;</li> <li>- Involvement of students and other stakeholders in NEAQA activities;</li> <li>- Advisory role of CAQA;</li> <li>- Good cooperation with HEIs.</li> <li>- Competences, professionalism and accountability of administrative staff;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increasing the awareness of labour market representatives regarding their role as partners in HE;</li> <li>- Development of IQA within HEIs;</li> <li>- Improvement of systematic research of the effects of the accreditation processes and external quality control on the quality and efficacy of studying (data collected);</li> <li>- Good international cooperation with international associations (ENQA, EQAR, CEENQA, etc.) and other QA agencies;</li> <li>- Participation in ERASMUS+ projects;</li> <li>- Creating a regional pool of reviewers;</li> <li>- Involvement of international experts in all quality assessment processes;</li> </ul>
<b>WEAKNESSES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An insufficient number of administrative staffs;</li> <li>- Insufficient involvement of international experts and reviewers in the accreditation and external evaluation of HEIs;</li> <li>- Number of reviewers in some fields not adequately distributed;</li> <li>- Appeal procedure not in accordance with ESG;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Small academic community within the country (personal contacts; a higher probability of conflict of interest);</li> <li>- Presence of corruption in different areas of society;</li> <li>- Lack of descriptors of competences for all scientific/artistic areas at the European level;</li> <li>- Relations with NCHE regarding appeal procedures;</li> <li>- space and infrastructure in NEAQA's office;</li> </ul>

**Measures for alleviating Weakness No. 1:** Increase of the number of administrative staff trained for particular activities such as writing the reports, including administrative staff members in international activities by their participation in conferences and workshops and visits to other European agencies. Time scale: 1-3 years

**Measures for alleviating W2 and W3:** Campaign for introducing new reviewers from domestic, regional and international academic community, organising their trainings and regular payments. Improvement of cooperation with various stakeholders (CONUS, CAASS, SCONUS, SCAASS, Chamber of Commerce, regional and international QA Agencies...)

Time scale: 1-3 years

**Measures for alleviating W4:** LoHE defines the appellate procedure. However, NEAQA will try to regulate this issue respecting the LoHE but in the spirit of ESG.

Time scale: 1 year

## Current challenges and areas for future development

This SER presents NEAQA's progress in development of more efficient accreditation procedures and quality assurance in higher education of the Republic of Serbia based on the Law on Higher Education and recommendations of ENQA panel held in October 2017. It contains many details of the activities which NEAQA has performed since its foundation; however, we would like to point out the two most important changes within the system made:

1. the organization of NEAQA, as an independent agency and
2. Improved methodology of accreditation procedures and external quality assessment which includes Peer- review Panels and site visits with emphasizing the separated roles in decision making process of CAQA 2018 members and Per-review Panels.

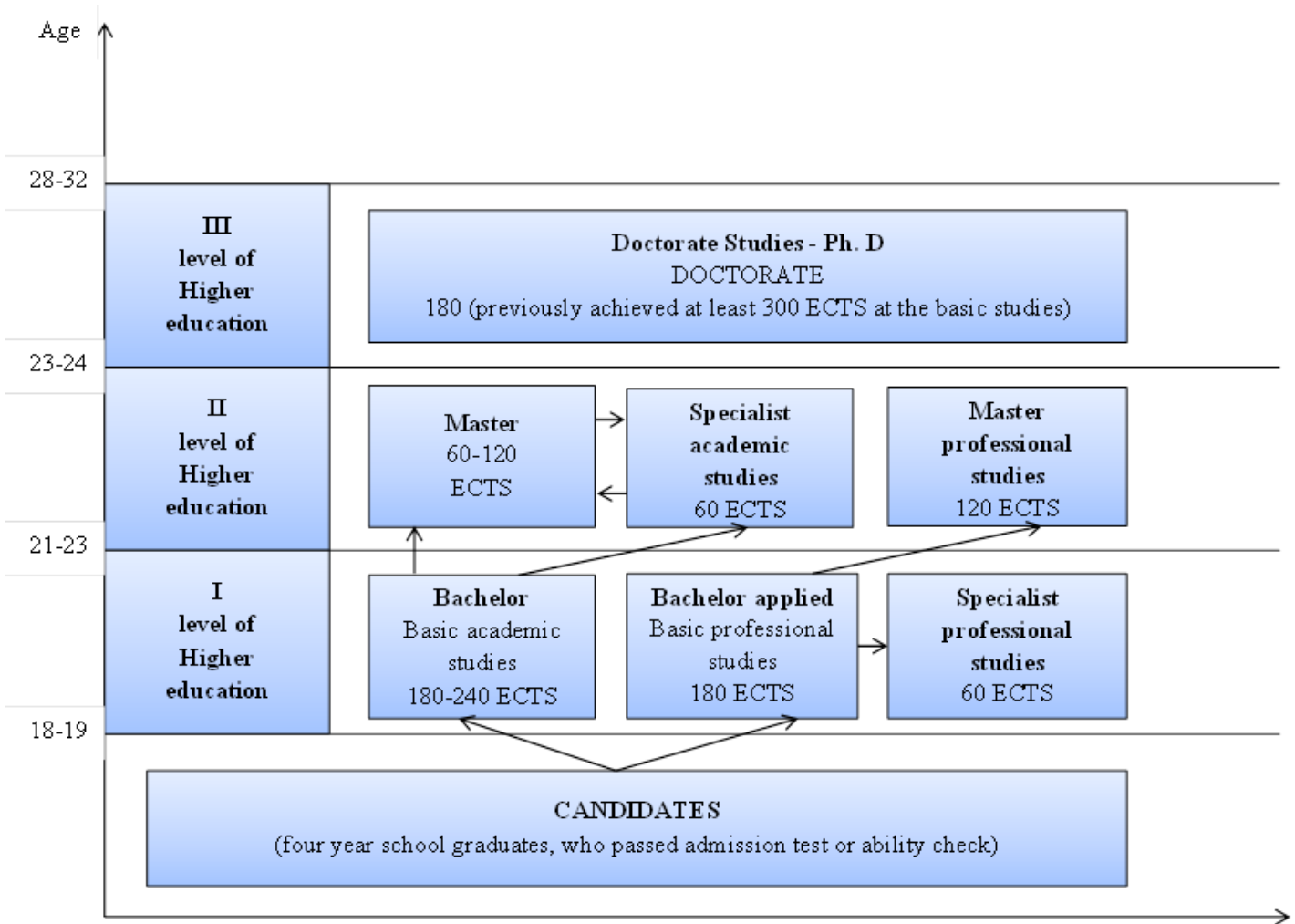
Even though independent, NEAQA continues cooperation with MoESTD as well as all other relevant stakeholders to acquire higher level of QA in HEIs' approaching to quality culture in higher education in Serbia. The goal is to enable them to cooperate on the same level with other HEIs in EHEA and to answer successfully on challenges and new needs of the society in accordance with appropriate development. We recognise necessary activities on implementation of ours mission, vision, strategy and core values.

In order to achieve this goal, we have raised the training level of reviewers to improve their competences and skills in implementation of improved accreditation and QA methodology and to ensure their ability for effective and efficient processing within QA system. As necessary precondition CAQA 2018 made drafts of Regulations, Instructions, Templates of Reports, appendixes, tables, etc. which were approved by the relevant bodies in accordance with LoHE.

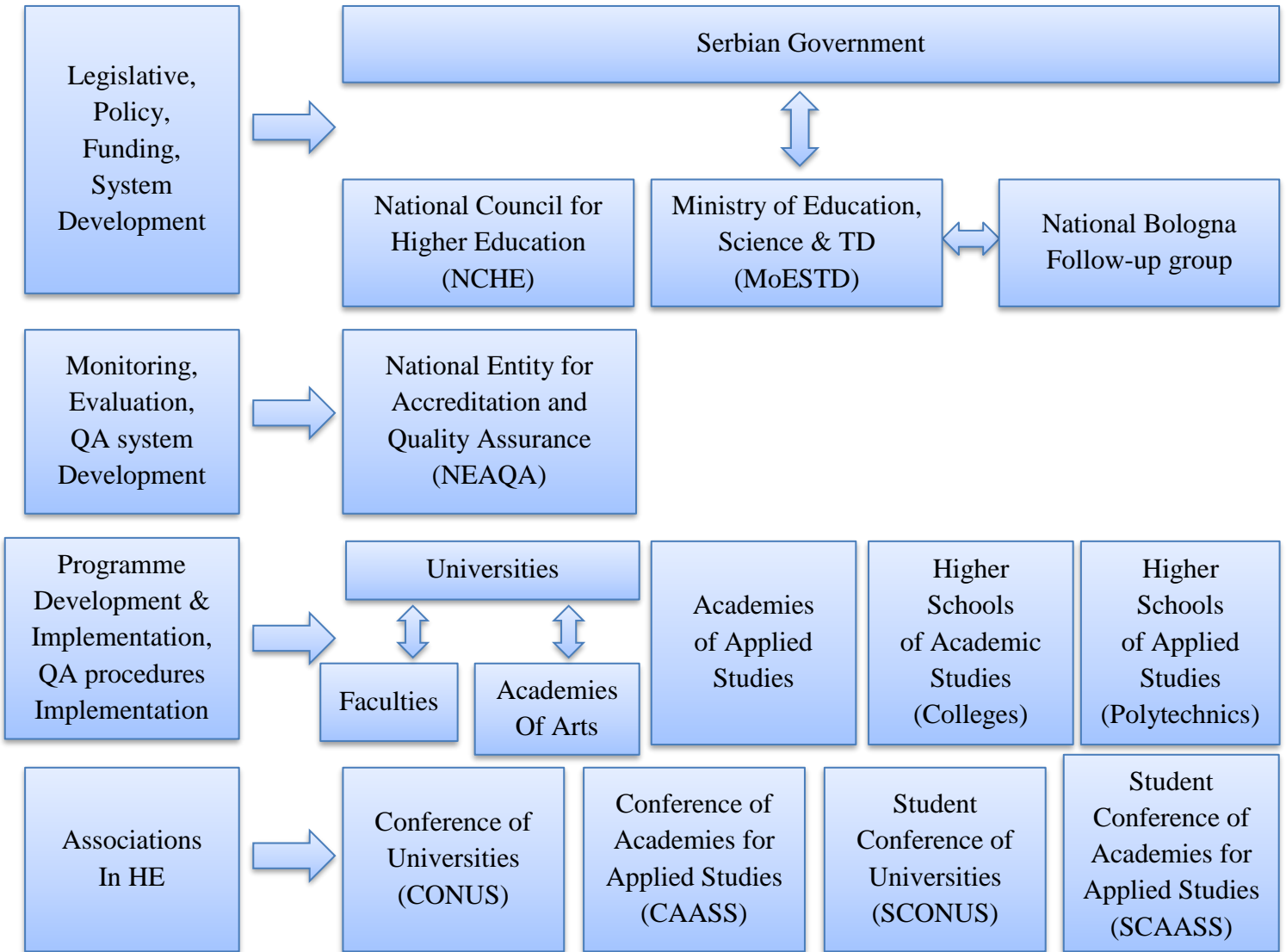
After the implementation of the first cycle according to the newly established procedure, NEAQA plans to conduct a qualitative analysis of QA system in Serbia in order to detect the areas for improvement. Based on the European trends, results of the conducted analysis and currently recognised necessity to improve the appeal procedure according to the ESG, NEAQA will in the future initiate the changes of the legal framework for QA in HE of Serbia.

This report was a great opportunity for NEAQA to analyse its work since establishment and to detect the areas for further improvement on the journey called quality assurance.

ANNEX 1



**ANNEX 2**



**ANNEX 3:**

