Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education

From establishing quality assurance in Croatian HE to joining ENQA

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GIQAC project – Training workshop for agencies in the Balkan region
Preparation of external reviews and writing of self-evaluation report
Zagreb, 8-9 March 2012

The beginnings – 1990s

- Croatia – 4.3 million people, 11.8% with higher education qualifications (2001 census)

- higher education system inherited from Yugoslavia
- first legislative changes in 1993
- establishment of private HEIs enabled
- National Councils (science and HE) set up: strategic role plus external quality assurance
- 1999 – 2004: approval of new institutions (paper-based) plus evaluations of about 30 existing institutions – self-evaluation, peer review (1 or 2 foreigners), site visit and final report

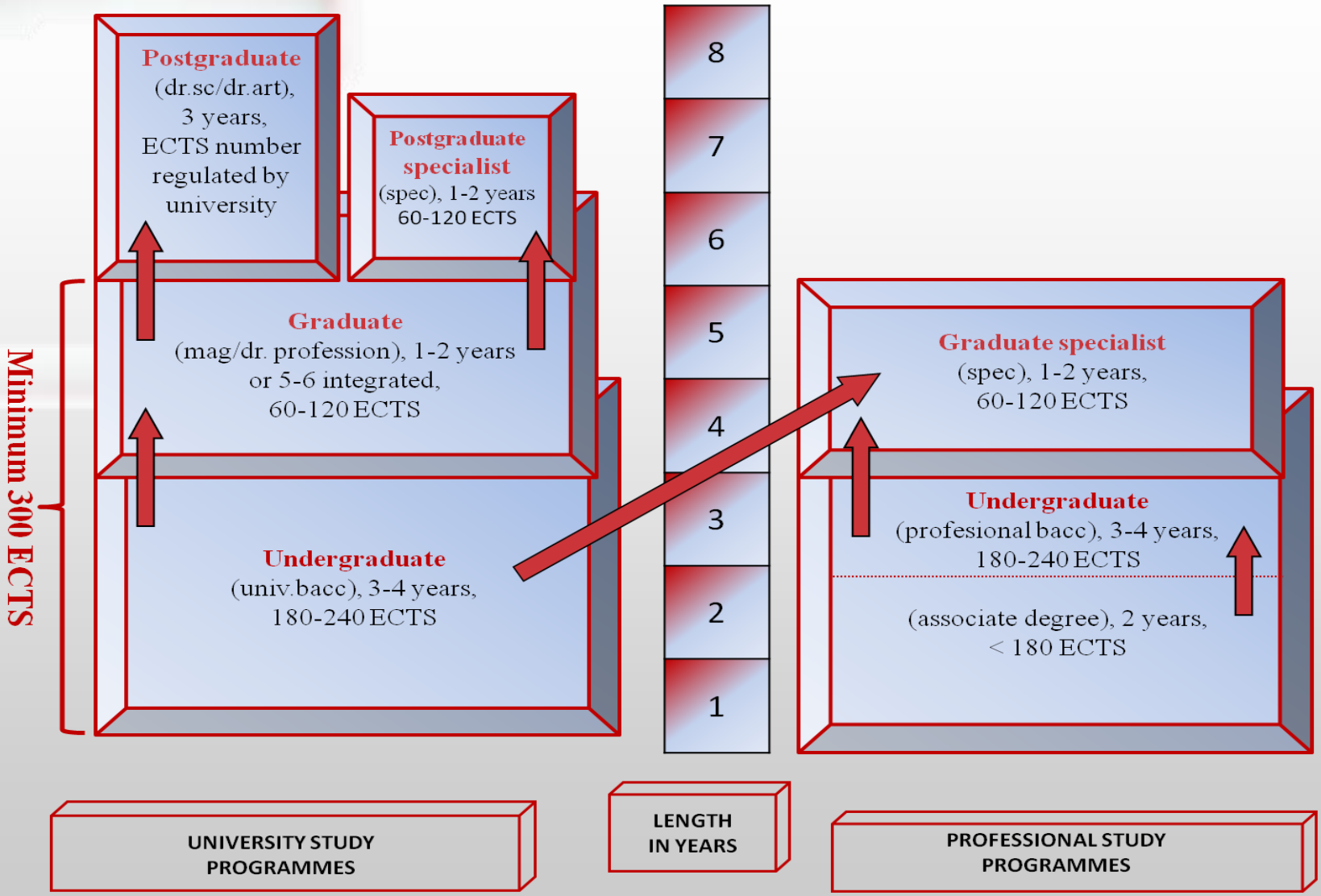
Introduction of the Bologna reform in Croatia

- 2001 Prague – Croatia signs the Bologna declaration
- impetus: wish to improve the education structure of the population, reform the system and join the EU
- 2003 – new legislation enters into force

- ECTS
- 3 cycle system (instead of 4 + 2 + 3, or 2)

- binary system
- National Councils tasked with external quality assurance

Types of study programmes at HEIs in the Republic of Croatia



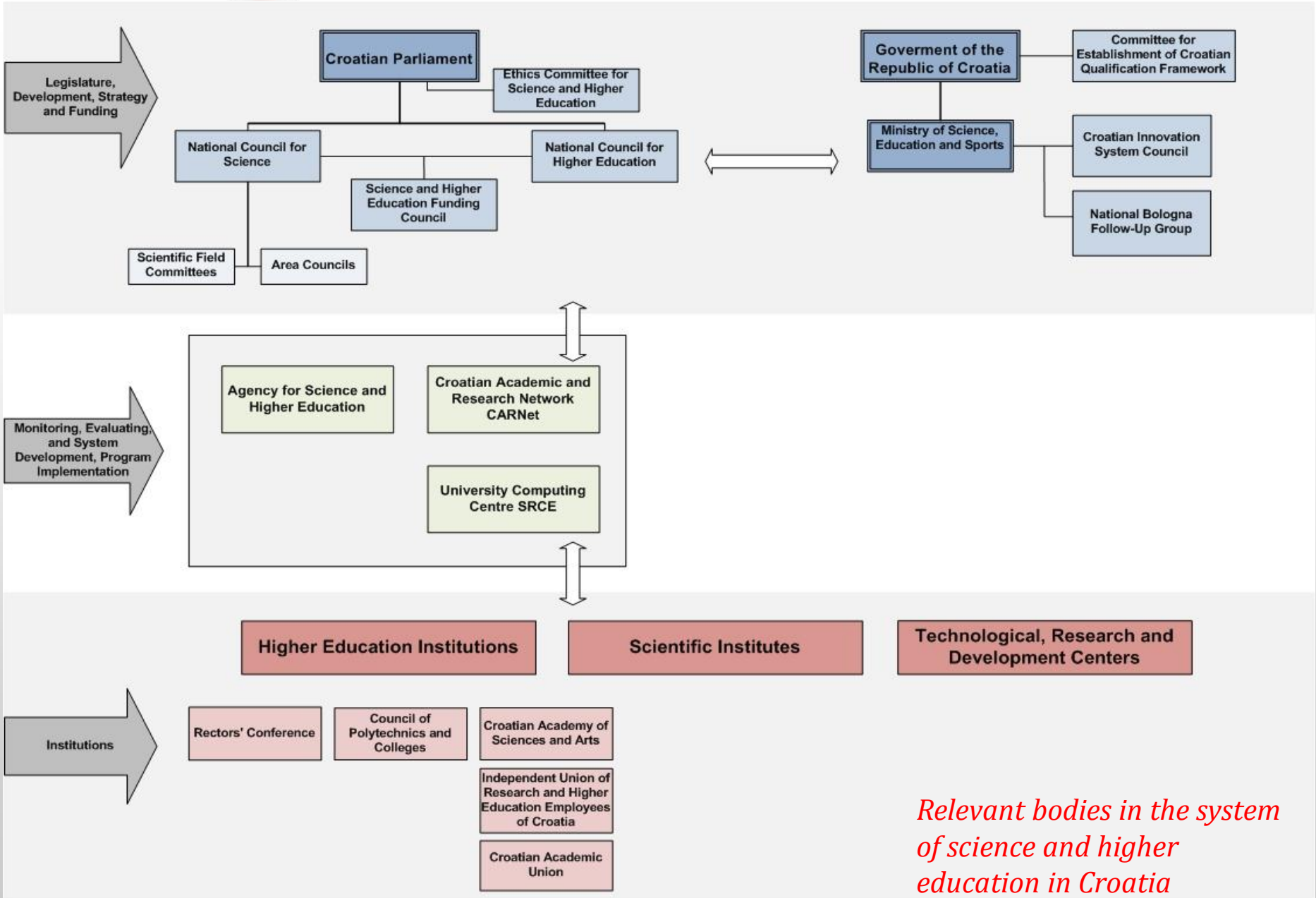
Full-fledged QA: Phase I

- the need to accredit all newly restructured programmes
- 2005: **ASHE established** as an agency supporting the National Councils and recognizing foreign higher education qualifications (as part of ENIC network)
- 2005: 800 programmes accredited
- paper-based accreditation (minimal standard: staff number); peer review (1 foreigner)
- outcome: yes/no/conditional
- 2005/06 – first „Bologna" students enrolled
- 2005 – 2009: 400 programmes accredited (mostly postgraduate)
- Due to huge workload, ASHE develops MOZVAG, a specialised software system

ASHE – not only quality assurance in HE

ASHE role until 2009:

- Member of the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC/NARIC) – performs recognition of foreign higher education qualifications
- member of INQAAHE and CEENQA
- Support to the stratigic bodies - National Council for National Council for Science – evaluations of scientific organizations
- Administrative support to other national bodies in HE and science (appointment into scientific and teaching grades)
- Emphasis on internal QA: ISO awarded



Relevant bodies in the system of science and higher education in Croatia

Establishment of new HEIs

- 60 requests, half approved, leading to the current number:

HEI	Public	Private
University	7	3
Polytechnic	13	2
College	3	27

- site visits, peer review (Croatian experts), no students and no public reports
- the number of students doubles: from 70 000 in 1990 to almost 140 000 in 2007; the % of HE graduates reaches 20 in 2011 (shorter graduation time, more students)

Problems identified

- Increase in the number of students and HEIs, driven partly by the national strategy of decentralization, but mostly by tuition fees
- In 2007 ASHE applies to ENQA: accepted only as an associate member, due to the small number of staff and lack of independence
- Although there is independence in practice, it is not formalized: the National Council for HE makes the accreditation decisions and the minister is not legally obliged to accept them
- ASHE starts to call for reforms in order to tackle these problems, to align Croatian higher education with the European systems and to join the relevant associations

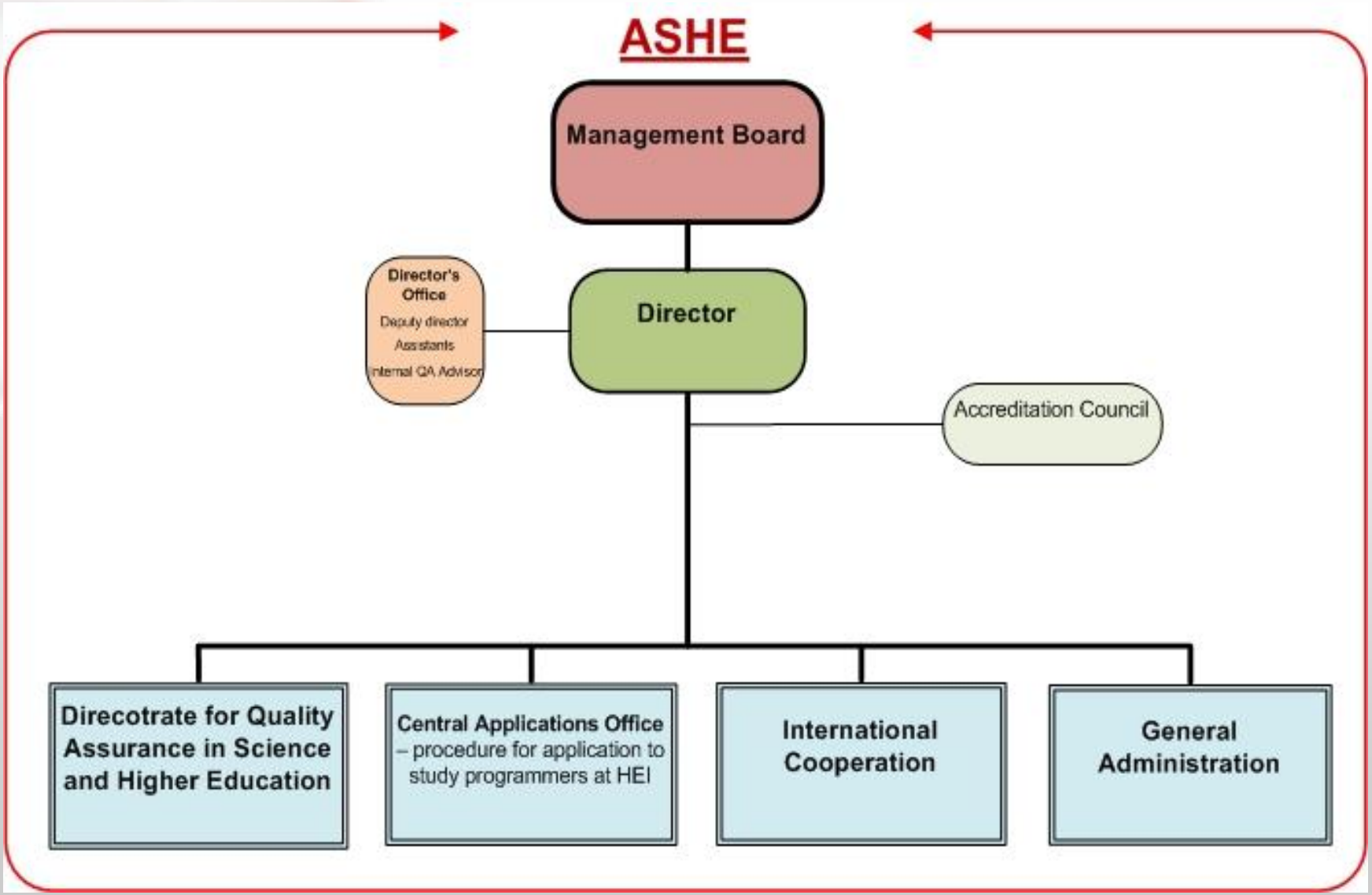
2009 - Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education:Phase II

- the act written in the spirit of ESG: peer review (foreigners), student participation, site visit and other ESG elements entered the legal text, as well as deadlines for ENQA membership/ EQAR inclusion
- Councils remain with the strategic role
- minimal standards (S T ratio, resources), „mentoring" period and the strategic document „Network of HEIs" introduced to tackle the rise in the number of HEIs and excessive enrolment quotas

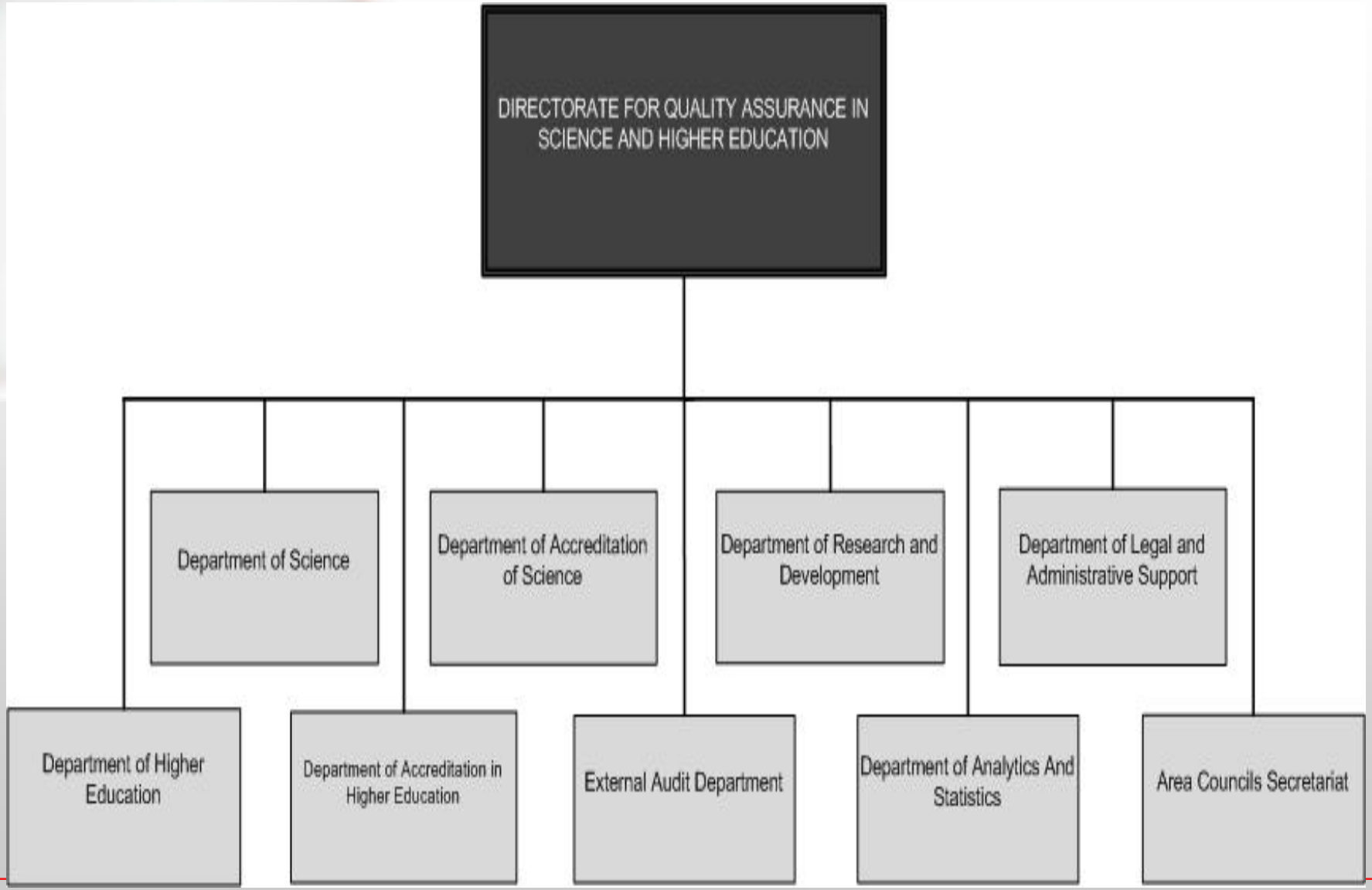
Independence enters the law

- Act reinforced the ASHE role, strengthened its independence
- The Accreditation Council of the ASHE: an independent stakeholder body (NGO observer member)
- Minister obliged to accept the Council decisions
- HEI autonomy enforced: public universities self-accredit their study programs (ASHE assesses the need for public funding)

ASHE Organisational Chart



The Organigram of the ASHE Directorate for Quality Assurance



New procedures introduced…

ASHE activities	Self - assessment	Peer review	Site visit	Publication of a report	Follow-up procedure
Reaccreditation	+	+	+	+	+
Thematic evaluation	+	+	Possible, not compu-lsory	+	Not formally, but a negative outcome is followed up by reaccreditation
Audit	+	+	+	+	+

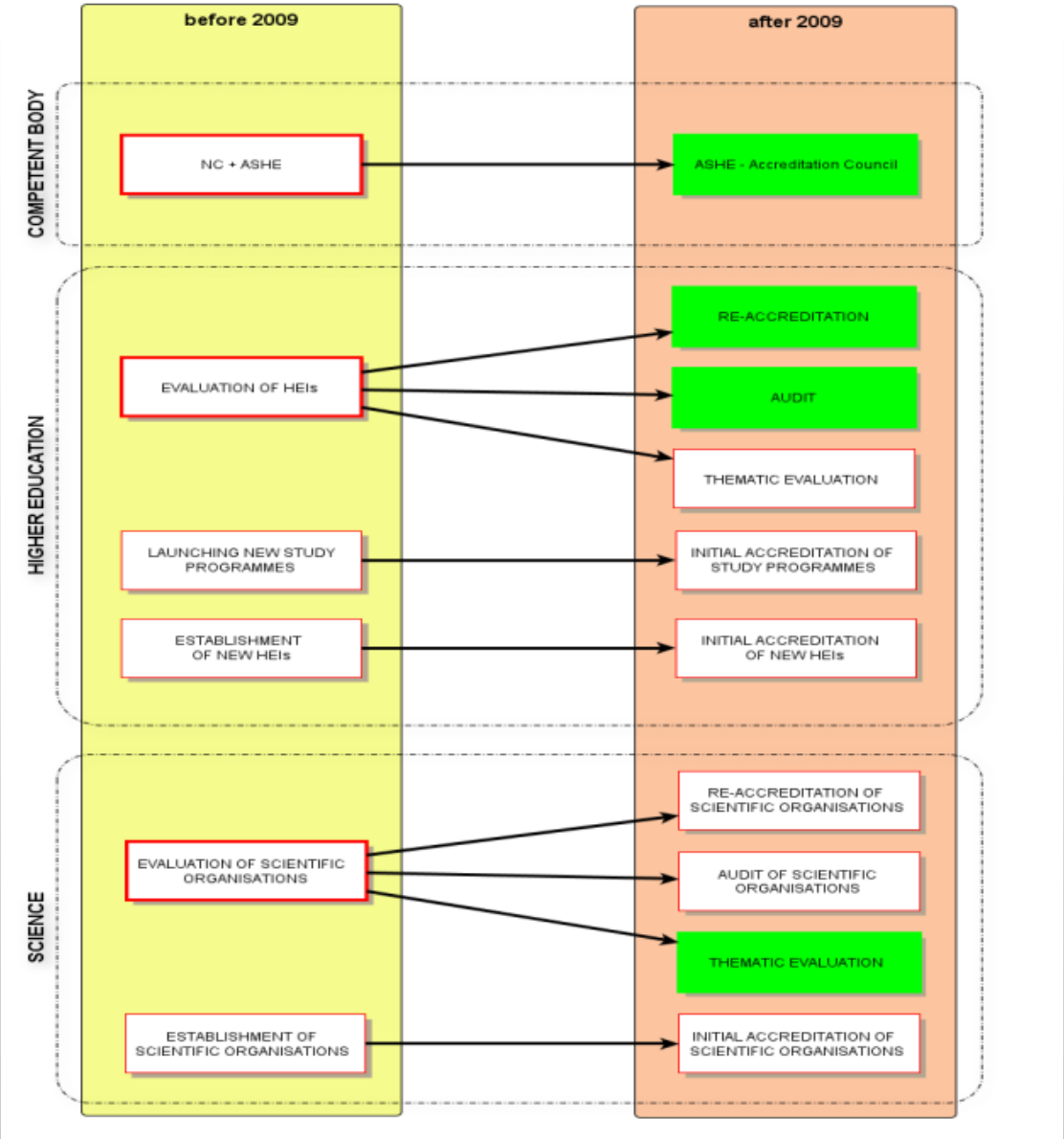
…and implemented

- Re-accreditation: 19 HEIs re-accredited in 2011 (economy), 32 to be re-accredited in 2012 (technical) – all 134 to be re-accredited in the following 3 years
- Thematic evaluation: 25 scientific organisations evaluated in 2011
- Audit: 9 HEIs in 2011, 9 in 2012
- Initial accreditation: the Network of HEIs adopted by the Parliament in 2011
- Re-accreditation of scientific organisations – to be prepared on the basis of the thematic evaluation

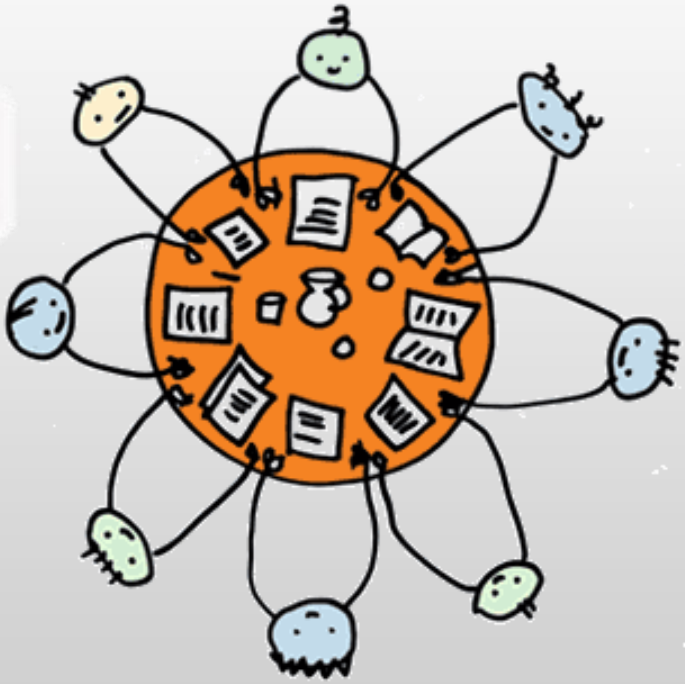
ASHE - new tasks added

- **Central Applications Office**: administering the centralized information system for applications to Croatian HEIs
- **Interdepartmental Body for Labour Market Monitoring**: a strategic body assessing the skills supply and demand
- **National Information System for Science and Higher Education:** currently developed as a comprehensive information system containing all relevant data on the sector in Croatia

Chart 8 Chart of ASHE activities before and after 2009



2010/2011 – Preparing the external evaluation of ASHE



External evaluation of ASHE

- May 2011: setting up the self-evaluation team - the team that was previously working on the institutional strategy, about 10 people
- The strategy team identified values which will serve as a basis of future self-evaluation work (ESG 2.1 and 2.2): reliability, professionalism, accountability, flexibility, cooperation, openness
- Which type of evaluation?

  Type B – due to other tasks performed by ASHE
- Choosing the coordinator: national institutions reported lack of necessary resources; searching a similar foreign agency – Spanish AGAE (which also performs evaluations of both science and HE) (in the future – ENQA only)

External evaluation of ASHE

Involving the stakeholders

- Annual ISO survey of customer satisfaction
- Accountability & cooperation: annual reports, newsletter, press releases, workshops; all documents published and publicly discussed before adoption
- Constantly work not only on providing information, but providing clear, concise and *attractive* information which stakeholders will use
- External review – ESG-specific survey on values: 500 questionnaires sent, 139 filled out
- Information reguralry sent to all stakeholders from the process start

Drafting the self-evaluation

- The final phase of a **5-yr work** which required substantial legislative and institutional changes
- 8 month's work : May 2010-January 2011
- **Evidence** for each criteria had to be collected in one place (internal document sharing system) – and translated to English
- Issues: our work is aligned with the ESG – but how to present it? Interpretation of certain standards (overlaps)?
- Support: meeting with the review coordinator; workshops with other agencies; careful study of other agencies' self-evaluations before the drafting process started

Review panel and site visit

- The coordinator appoints the panel – no Croatian experts, but the secretary from a similar system (Slovenia) and members from a country with similar QA system (Spain)
- Essential: one person from the agency coordinating all the technicalities – from document delivery to timetable
- Do everything well in advance – since almost each step needs to be agreed by all members and ENQA-approved
- Meetings: as well as in drafting the self-evaluation, adhere to the advice usually given to HEIs: mention problems, put sincerity over self-praise – everything can always be improved

After the review

- After sending comments to the report, expect further work on application documents and replies to additional ENQA/EQAR questions – to be answered by the agency or the panel
- Prepare a follow-up strategy to implement the recommended changes
- Think of a strategy on new issues – for example, will you accept offers for reviews outside your country?

What next for ASHE?

- Implementation of panel/ENQA/EQAR recommendations
- Support to evidence-based policy making: focus on information collection
- Thematic reviews of „burning issues” in Croatian HE: doctoral education, learning outcomes…
- Further support to development of quality culture: workhsops, reports…
- Development dana base of international experts
- Regional and international cooperation

Thank you for your attention!

Q & A

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