

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN SERBIA

General data about the country

As the social, political, and geographic crossroads between Western and Eastern Europe, Serbia occupies the key strategic juncture in the Balkans. It has a territory of 88 361 square km and around 8 millions of inhabitants (excluding Kosovo-Metohija). Serbs make up 82.86 percent of the population, Hungarians 3.91 percent, Bosnians 1.82 percent, followed by Roma 1.44 percent, Croats 0.94 percent, Albanians 0.82 percent, Slovaks 0.79 percent, Vlachs 0.53 percent, Romanians 0.46 percent, Bulgarians 0.27 percent, etc.

Currently, similarly to its neighbors in the region, Serbia is undergoing a process of political reforms, normalization of internal relationships and re-establishing better links with the outside world, after serious problems in the previous decade which had negative effects on all areas - especially education.

Primary and secondary schools

Length of primary school programme is 8 years; length of secondary schools programme (grammar, vocational and art schools) is 4 years; Grammar schools offer general education in social studies and science. Secondary vocational schools offer both general and vocational (practical and theoretical) education for direct entry in the world of work and further education. Secondary art schools offer courses in the fields of Music, Art and Ballet.

Higher Education

Starting with the reforms

From the year 2000 higher education institutions in Serbia became involved in the European trends of reforms and harmonization in the field of higher education known as Bologna process. Considerable reformatory activities have been launched since Serbia signed Bologna declaration in September 2003.

Legal Framework

Current Higher Education Law which is in line with Bologna Process action lines was adopted in September 2005 in the Parliament.

Comparing to old legal framework there are some significant structural changes. The leading principles are - as stated in one of the introductory articles- are:

- Harmonization with the European higher education system and promotion of academic mobility of teaching staff and students.
 - Participation of students in governance and decision-making, in particular in matters relating to teaching and quality assurance.
 - Quality assurance and efficiency of studies
 - Unity of teaching and scientific research and/or artistic work
- (Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Serbia, article 4)

Governing bodies:

- National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) is elected by Serbian Parliament,
- Commission for Accreditation and Quality Control whose members are elected by NCHE and
- The Conference of Universities which consists of rectors and vice rectors of all universities.

One of the issues that stay open is legal status of faculties.

Namely new Law on HE in Serbia leaves the possibility for individual **faculties to act as legal bodies** which means that the concept of a fully integrated university has still not been embraced. However, **university** is given certain **integrative functions** and these are:

- 1) Establishment of unified standards of work of departments and services and unified standards for creating data bases of all units;
 - 2) Strategic planning;
 - 3) Adoption of study programmes;
 - 4) Quality assurance and control;
 - 5) Enrolment policy;
 - 6) Election of teachers;
 - 7) Issuance of diplomas and supplement diplomas;
 - 8) International cooperation;
 - 9) Investment planning;
 - 10) Employment policy planning and the hiring of teachers and associates;
 - 11) Establishment and development of a unified information system;
 - 12) Lifelong learning.
- (Article 46)

UNIVERSITIES

Serbia has **7 state universities** - University of Belgrade, University of Arts, Belgrade, University of Nis, University of Kragujevac, University of Novi Sad, State University of Novi Pazar and University of Pristina dislocated in Kosovska Mitrovica. There are also **seven private universities** -

University "Braca Karic", "Megatrend" University, European University, "Singidumum" University, University "Union", University of Novi Pazar and E.Academy in Novi Sad) and several professional colleges.

According to the data from the Ministry of Science and Technology in Serbia there are 56 scientific institutions, completely independent from universities, that are predominantly engaged in research. Those institutions are not involved in education, even though many of them have scholars with Master degree or PhD.

The Implementation of the Bologna Process in Serbia

The Law on Higher Education (LHE, 2005) provides a legal basis for full implementation of the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Convention.

The three-cycle structure

The implementation of the Bologna Process was actually put formally in place from the academic year 2006/2007 on. The three-cycle structure prescribed by LHE is established in all university higher education institutions. The percentage of the total number of all students below doctoral level enrolled in two cycle degree system in academic year 2008/2009 is 89%. The second cycle of academic qualifications gives a direct access to the third cycle. The third-cycle programmes (PhD) started in 2006/2007 in many university institutions. In order to gain entry to the doctoral level programmes, students must have accumulated at least 300 ECTS credits for most study programmes and at least 360 credits for medical sciences. Within the doctoral programmes, students must earn a minimum of 180 credits to obtain the degree. Doctoral programmes include obligatory course work and individual research. The doctoral dissertation is the final part of the study program at the doctoral studies, except doctors of arts, which is an artistic program. Accomplished scientific contributions are graded according to the number of the scientific publications, patents or technical innovations.

The ECTS system

The Law on Higher Education introduces ECTS as the mandatory credit system to be used by all higher education institutions in all degree programmes, for both credit transfer and accumulation. The ECTS system is fully implemented in all HEIs. The study program contains the elements specified in the LHE. Every study program covers precise description of the courses and the number of ECTS. ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes. 60 ECTS credits are attached to the workload of a full-time year of formal learning (academic year) and the associated learning outcomes. A proper implementation of ECTS based on student workload and learning outcomes still remains a priority. Developing, describing and implementing learning outcomes is one of the main task. Within the TEMPUS framework there have been several projects involving many HE institutions, where the application of ECTS was widely discussed. CAQA also provides continuously actions to assist HE staff in applying ECTS system.

The National Qualifications Framework

Some initial progress has been made towards the development of national qualifications framework, but much more effort is required.

The Minister of Education of the Republic of Serbia set up (2005.) a commission mandated to create a **National Qualifications Framework**. The commission includes representatives from all levels of education (elementary, secondary and tertiary), as well as representatives of the employment services, trade unions, the Chamber of Commerce

and the Ministry of Labor and Employment. Due to political instabilities and frequent changes of the Government and Ministries, the commission has not fulfilled its duty. In the beginning of 2008, a working group was nominated by NCHE and MoE, mandated to create a draft of NQF at the higher education level. The group includes all stakeholders (ministries, HE institutions, students, employers, trade unions).

The List of professional, academic and scientific Titles (LoT), with indication of the occupation within the corresponding levels, issued by the NCHE (in March 2007 and in April 2008) represents a firm basis for the work. A timetable has been scheduled, where the first task is to analyse existing experiences of European countries which have substantial progress in the NQF and to understand and fully integrate the existing European qualification framework. Qualifications frameworks are important instruments in achieving comparability and transparency within the higher education systems. This aspect of the work has been supported by the CoE Project "Strengthening HE Reforms in Serbia" by organizing international seminars and bringing renowned international experts.

At the moment, the first draft of NQE is under discussion at NCHE. A national qualifications framework for higher education has been drafted and will be discussed widely in the Serbia and with external peers. The draft has been presented to the Government and will be subject to national consultation. A timetable for all further actions has been precisely defined, including broad consultations at the national level, formal approval by the Government and further implementation of NQF. It is expected that this work will be finished and NQF published by the end of 2009.

National implementation of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance

Serbia operates an integrated national quality assurance system complying with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). At national level a fully functioning quality assurance system is in operation. The QA system which includes internal, external quality assurance and accreditation is required by the LHE.

The Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assessment (CAQA) is legally responsible for organizing and monitoring the quality assurance scheme for all HEIs in Serbia. CAQA is formed (June 2006) as an independent expert body of the NCHE. CAQA designs standards, protocols and guidelines for the NCHE's approval and publication as bylaws and helps institutions in creating their respective quality management systems. CAQA carries out quality assurance processes in forms of accreditation and external quality assurance of all higher educational institutions and study programmes according to LHE. During the development of the QA system, the ESG document was utilized as the main source of information. Therefore, the existing accreditation standards, which do include QA topics, fully comply with the ESG.

CAQA has a policy for the assurance of its own quality. The Commission is subject to national and international peer review; internal quality assurance procedures for the

Commission are publicly available on the website along with the mission statement, and management and action plans. CAQA regularly conducts (once a year) internal evaluation and continuously produces reports on its work and achievements to the NCHE. The CAQA has not yet been internationally reviewed. CAQA is full member in INQAAHE and has the associate memberships in ENQA. An external review of the CAQA is scheduled for 2009.

The HEIs have the legal obligation to develop internal quality assurance systems. The implementation of the standards for internal quality assurance is in the first place the responsibility of the institutions. Internal quality assurance is one of the themes in the accreditation frameworks. Important elements on which programmes will be assessed for accreditation are whether there is a coherent system of internal quality assurance with clear goals and regular monitoring which leads to continuous improvement. The self-assessment report is an obligatory document in the accreditation file of any HEI. Students are involved in the preparation of self-assessment reports and in the follow-up procedures.

The external quality assurance system operates at the national level; only accredited higher education institutions and study programmes are entitled to award bachelor, master and doctoral - PhD degrees. The accreditation and external quality assessment are a part of the work permit procedure done by the MoE. The accreditation process comprises accreditation of all higher education institutions (institutional accreditation) and of all their study programmes (programme accreditation). Seven public universities (85 faculties), 6 universities established by non-state founders (43 faculties) and more than 80 UPS (under primary domain of CAQA) are subject of compulsory national accreditation. The accreditation of HEIs carried out by CAQA started 2007 and includes all existing HEIs in Serbia. The accreditation is completed for the UPS, which had previously two-year programmes. The UPSs provide the first cycle (professional-bachelor) programmes and the second cycle (professional-master) programmes. Due to limitation of CAQA resources, up to now the accreditation has been completed in more than 50% HEIs. According to LHE the accreditation process of all the existing HEIs (245) and study programmes should be finished until October 2009.

Recognition of degrees and study periods

A. The Diploma Supplement

The Law on Higher Education also introduces the **Diploma Supplement** as a mandatory document to be issued by all higher education institutions, for all programmes. The DS is issued automatically and free of charge in Serbian and English and the language in which the study programme was carried out (if different from Serbian and English). NCHE approved the form of the Diploma Supplement proposed by a special commission nominated within MoE, which is in agreement with the EU/CoE/UNESCO format.

Traditionally, the communication tool towards the labor market has been the title of the qualification itself. The use of Diploma Supplement has been promoted by MoE and

HERE on different occasions (seminars, conferences, student meetings, job fairs). Association of employers has also been involved in all these actions.

B. Joint degrees

The Law on Higher Education allows for joint study programmes organized by more than one licensed higher education institutions. A **joint degree** can be issued upon approval from all higher education institutions involved. Some higher education institutions in Serbia currently carry out joint degree programmes with local and foreign partners. The percentage of the HEIs which are involved in joint degree programmes is less than 20%. Future challenges should include increasing number of joint degree programmes, especially PhD programmes.

Mobility

In order to increase student and staff mobility, several actions have been undertaken at both the national and the institutional levels, so that all major universities participate in mobility programmes. A great number of mobilities has been realized through research projects supported by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development. There are also some bilateral agreements on student and staff mobility. Part of the mobilities is also carried out through various international students' associations (of medicine, economy, pharmacy students, students of technical sciences). Since Serbia participates in Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window, Erasmus Mundus and Tempus programmes, students and staff have better opportunities for mobilities. Financial support to mobilities is provided by these programmes. Also, there are some system mechanisms for colleagues from other countries to come to HE institutions in Serbia.

Still there are some obstacles related to financial support and visa issues.

General remarks:

National structures which oversee the implementation of Bologna Process in Serbia are in line of major Bologna trends.

All the institutions: The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), The Conference of Serbian Research Universities, The Conference of Serbian Universities of Professional Studies, The National Team of Higher Education Reform Experts – HERE continuously supervise the implementation of the Bologna Process, and the Ministry of Education is going to re-establish the national BFUG in the near future.

The progress has been made towards the development of national quality assurance system, the implementation of **three-cycle structure and of ECTS**, but much more effort is required for the development of qualifications frameworks and the recognition of qualifications.

Serbia plans measures to improve the active participation in BFUG and cooperation with consultative BFUG members: European University Association (EUA) European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), European Students' Union (ESU), Council of Europe, UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES), European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

(text prepared by Tempus office Serbia)