Corruption in HE: Can QA make a difference?  
- the case of Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education

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Summary

• What is corruption in HE?
  ▪ QA as a tool for preventing corruption in Higher Education – Agency for Science and Higher Education in Croatia – (ASHE) example

▪ Conclusion
Definition

• Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. (Transparency International)

• The systematic use of public office for private benefit whose impact on access, quality or equity in education is significant.

• Higher education is not immune to corruption.
Impacts of trends in HE to create motive and opportunity for corrupt practices:

– Governments **decrease funding in HE** – reflected in an erosion of salaries and conditions of service for academic staff
– Emphasis on HEIs to find **other sources of funding**
– Higher **placement in international rankings** – pressure to conduct research and publish in top journals
– Granted **greater administrative autonomy**
– Academics under greater job pressure but sometimes not enough oversight of their behavior.
Corruption in HE includes the following aspects:

Potential areas which are exposed to corrupt practices:
- student admission
- student assessment
- student dormitories application
- recruitment and promotion of academics
- job pressure – less oversight
- new technologies in HE
- cross-boarder HE
- proliferation /privatization of HE

Direct forms of corruption:
- financial fraud
- exam cheating
- degree mills
- plagiarism
- teachers fail to meet their obligation towards students
- accreditation mills

MOTIVES AND OPPORTUNITIES
How to tackle the problem of corruption in HE?

An example of ASHE anti-corruption practices...
Croatian HE system

QA in Croatian HE system – the **responsibility of a single public Agency** – Agency for Science and Higher Education

- **10** universities (8 public and 2 private)
- **15** polytechnics (11 public and 4 private)
- **25** colleges (3 public, 22 private)
- **180,000** students
2005 – ASHE establishment and beginning of development of QA model in line with the *Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* using best international practices.

- 2011 – externally evaluated – ENQA/EQAR membership/full compliance with ESG
- INQAAHE full membership
ASHE activities

1. **Quality Assurance activities in HE and Science**
2. Central Applications Office
3. National ENIC/NARIC office
4. Collecting and analyzing data on systems of science and higher education
5. Support for the work of various bodies
6. International cooperation
QA activities as a reliable and consistent tool, not only to prevent, but also to raise awareness of corruption in HE and Science ...

*QA mechanisms that call for integrity are a road to awareness...*
Sound regulatory framework

- State Matura

- Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (2009)
  - Re-accreditation mandatory for all public and private higher education institutions and carried out in five-year cycles
  - HEIs and study programmes which were not accredited are not allowed to carry out higher education activities/award higher education qualifications

- Act on the Recognition of Foreign Educational Qualifications
Ensures **transparency** and **impartiality of enrolment procedure**

- **Centralized application** to study programmes via the National Information System for Applications
- **Enrolment criteria** – defined by HEIs, predefined, publicly disclosed on the website on which students apply
- **Automatically generated** ranking lists (State Matura results + grades)
- HEI receives a **list of candidates** who qualified for enrolment, no entrance exams
Clear and transparent re-accreditation standards

- **Stakeholder representatives** were involved in the development of standards
- Standards adopted by the **Accreditation Council**, ASHE’s expert body comprising representatives of stakeholder groups
- **Publicly disclosed standards**
- **Guide with an explanation of each standard** to ensure consistency
- **Training of expert panels**
- **Active role of coordinators**
- **Consistency** of implementation and application
Synergy between internal and external QA

- **External evaluation of QA bodies supports internal QA of QA bodies**
- **External QA evaluates and supports Internal QA**
- **HEIs internal QA (self improvement)**
Standards cover various segments of HEI activities

- HEI management and internal QA
- Study Programmes
- Students
- Teachers
- Research and scientific activity
- Mobility and internationalization
- Resources
Ethical behavior and academic integrity in revised ESUG

- Having stakeholders involved in the management of HEI, the development of study programmes etc.
- Code of Ethics, Rules on disciplinary liability and procedures for solving unethical behavior
- Public disclosure of information, transparency
- Impartiality and consistency of assessment and the possibility of appeal
- Procedures and methods for the detection and prevention of plagiarism (software)
- Collecting feedback
- Student ombudsman
- Rules and procedures of teacher employment and advancement (public and international calls)
- Procedures and criteria for student enrolment
ASHE secures its independence & accountability

Stakeholders:
- participate in implementing changes and carrying out activities
- engaged in public discussion (standards and procedures)
- included in Management Board and Accreditation Council
- **NGO representative** is a member of the Accreditation Council
- **Confidentiality Statement** – ASHE staff
- **Code of Ethics** – Accreditation Council
- No gifts or paid meals from HEIs – written policy
- Feedback **surveys**
Employing various methods

• Raising motivation in stakeholders for fighting corruption

• Planned and unplanned talks with students and teachers

• Analyzing information received in confidential communication

• Analysing short written feedback on advantages and disadvantages of HEIs collected from students and assistants
Independent and impartial experts in the Expert panel

- International public call for Experts (peer reviewers)
- Appointment of experts by Accreditation Council
- Foreign reviewers, business representatives and students in review panels
- Non-conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement
Transparency of accreditation reports and decisions

PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

- ASHE DOCUMENTS (STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES)
- ACCREDITATION REPORTS AND DECISIONS
- SUMMARIES OF THE REPORTS
- ASHE ANNUAL REPORT
- PERIODICAL NEWSLETTER
- CANDIDATES CHOOSE AND APPLY TO THEIR STUDY PROGRAMMES
Other activities as a tool for preventing corruption in HE and Science
• Ensuring **relevance of data** on which decisions are based

• Collecting and analyzing data on HE and science

• Data contained in self-analysis documents, ASHE information systems, Ministry of Science, Education and Sport registers etc.
- Preventing degree mills
- Recognition of higher education degrees
- Providing information on national and foreign higher education systems, the number of accredited higher education institutions and programmes
Support for various bodies

- Support for the bodies in the appointment to grades – appointment/reappointment governed by law, in cycles, data on appointments to grades
- Ethics Committee in Science and Higher Education – preventing and sanctioning unethical behavior in academic community – national level (link with the work of ethics committees in HEIs)
Cooperation between ASHE and HEIs in preventing academic corruption

- Raising awareness of the importance of fight against corruption
- Encouraging internal QA
- Seminars, training, exchange of information
- Collecting and disclosing data, transparency
- Collecting feedback and carrying out activities for quality improvement
The integrative anti-corruption approach

- Legal reforms
- Administrative and civil reforms
- Educational public expenditures
- Financial management reforms
- Societal reforms

- Setting the EU bar: The Bologna process + ESG
Recommendations to

- Governments
- Accreditation bodies
- HEIs
- Students and civil society
Thank you for your attention!

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