

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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Summary

Quality assurance is a dynamic process that requires building upon in accordance with the changes in society and economy. The increase in the number of public and private universities, colleges and faculties as well as in the number of students requires systematic monitoring and development of an internal quality assurance system (IQAS) in order for the institutions and students to remain competitive, equal and recognized across the European Union. It is therefore extremely important that higher education institutions recognize the importance of quality assurance and continuous improvement of the quality of higher education and that the aspiration to achieve high quality standards becomes reality and everyday intertwining within the entire academic community and wider.

Key words: *internal quality assurance, higher education institution, culture of quality.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of the quality of higher education and the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in quality assurance and continuous improvement has been formally adopted within the framework of the Bologna Process as part of the Berlin Communiqué with which the ministers of EU countries committed to providing support on the institutional, national and European level.³ Quality assurance models in higher

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³ Berlin Communiqué 2003. <http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/BerlinCommunique1.pdf> (11.4.2016.)

education across Europe differ in their formal setting, criteria and methodology. The Berlin Communiqué emphasizes that the key responsibility for quality assurance lies on the institution itself. The most important thing is to inform the widest possible academic community, starting from teachers to students and finally the administrative staff that will put quality assurance into practice and implement it on their respective institution.

2. ESTABLISHING A QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

All HEIs in Croatia are obliged to establish quality assurance systems pursuant to the Quality Assurance Act (Official Gazette no. 45/09). In countries that are part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the adopted principle is that HEIs are the primarily responsible for the quality of all activities they carry out. Higher education institutions are expected to build an internal culture of quality that contributes to the realization of their vision of development as well as better recognition at national and international level. Higher education quality assurance is in the focus of interest not only in Europe, but around the world as well. This reflects the large increase in the number of private and public HEIs. In addition to this, the EU has set development goals with a view to growing into a knowledge-based economy.⁴ This corresponds to the expectations that EU higher education attends to the quality of the offered study programs and qualifications obtained.

Scientific activity and higher education represent activities that are of special interest to the Republic of Croatia and that are an integral part of the international and especially the EU scientific, art and education area. The last decade was marked by the harmonization of the Croatian higher education area with the European Higher Education Area with a view to achieving equal participation. The adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA played an important role (ESG).⁵ The said document is divided into three parts. The first part concerns internal quality assurance at HEIs, the second part concerns external quality assurance of higher education and the third the quality assurance agencies that are active in the EHEA. The document contains quality assurance and standard implementation guidelines as well as the standards themselves.

⁴ Dodiković-Jurković, V., Havranek, J., Androić, D., Briški, G., Arlović, I., „Sustavi osiguravanja kvalitete na javnim sveučilištima u Hrvatskoj“, 14. konferencija o kvaliteti i 5. znanstveni skup Hrvatskog društva za kvalitetu, Baška, otok Krk, 15.-17. svibnja 2014.

⁵ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) (http://www.azvo.hr/images/stories/vanjska_prosudba/UNIZG%2007_2015%20-%20ESG_HR_final)

3. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EUROPE AND NATIONAL DOCUMENTS

European Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance⁶ include the **quality assurance policy** that is publicly available and part of strategic planning. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. Institutions should have processes for the **design and approval of their programs**. The programs should be designed to meet the set objectives and the intended learning outcomes. It is necessary to ensure that the programs are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects such an approach. HEIs should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of a study program: **student admission, progression, recognition and certification**. In terms of **teaching staff**, HEIs should ensure the competence of their teachers and apply fair and transparent processes in terms of recruitment and development of the staff. They should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible **learning resources and student support** are provided. Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyze and use relevant information for the effective **management of their programs** and other activities. HEIs should **publish information** about their activities, including programs, which should be clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible. They should also **monitor and periodically review their programs** to ensure that they are achieving the set objectives and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should be directed toward continuous improvement of the program. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all stakeholders. Lastly, HEIs should **undergo external quality assurance procedures** in line with the ESG **on a cyclical basis**.

The Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education defines internal quality assurance and improvement system as a system of measures and activities. Its assessment objects ensure their own responsibility for effectiveness and the achievement of quality outcomes of educational and scientific activities (Article 2). Each institution in the science and higher education system regulates the internal quality assurance and improvement system by way of its own general act. The internal quality assurance and improvement system of university constituents is part of the unified quality assurance and improvement system of universities (Article 18).

4. INTERNAL AUDIT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

Internal audit of quality assurance at an HEI is conducted in accordance with the criteria of the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE)⁷ and the European

⁶ http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG_3edition-2.pdf (11.4.2016.)

⁷ Audit criteria for the development and effectiveness level of the quality assurance system at higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia <https://rio.jrc.ec.europa.eu/en/file/8133/download?> (11.04.2016.)

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). They provide the basis for the audit process that evaluates the level of development and the effectiveness of the quality system and its influence on quality improvement in overall education as well as the influence on the development of the quality of culture in general.

One of the elements of internal audit of the quality assurance system of an HEI is related to resources, i.e. departments, facilities, equipment and finances. Support departments can be organized in different ways, depending on the institutional context, but internal quality assurance guarantees that all resources are practical, affordable and that students are familiar with the services that are available to them. Support and administrative staff is key to providing support services. Therefore, they need to be qualified and able to develop their own competencies. The structure of administration and support department of higher education institutions as well as the job classification is defined under the general act of the higher education institution (Rulebook on organization of jobs) that is adopted by the Head of the Institution based on the proposal of the Faculty Council and with the approval of the University Senate.

This paper aims to demonstrate the importance of a well-established and well-organized administration department in the overall educational process.

5. RESEARCH ON THE SATISFACTION OF TEACHERS WITH THE QUALITY OF WORK OF THE ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENTS

5.1. Research objective

The higher education quality assurance system monitors and improves the education process at an HEI. Timely informing, conversations and discussions on the quality of higher education can help accomplish the spreading of the culture of quality among students, teachers and other staff. The starting point for talks and discussions are the results of the analyses of activities that have been carried out with the aim of improving quality of work of all collaborators in the education process on an HEI.

The research seeks to identify the possible weaknesses in the quality of work of individual departments as perceived by teachers. The results of the research shall subsequently be presented to the institution with a view to proposing measures to eliminate weaknesses in the work, i.e. use incentive measures to ensure that the established effectiveness and professionalism are maintained in the future.

5.2. Research methodology

5.2.1. Sample

Respondents were permanently employed teachers at the Faculty of Education. The survey was conducted in 2015 on 36 out of 65 teachers, which represents 55% of the total number of teachers. Demographic characteristics of the respondent sample are

described below. The analysis of the respondent gender structure shows that there are 8 men and 28 women in the sample. The average age of the respondents is 40 and the age range is 29 to 65. Respondents aged 35 to 45 (22 respondents) make up for 61% of the sample. The average years of service are 15 and they range from 6 to 37. The largest part of the sample comprises respondents with associate positions (16): 5 teaching assistants and 11 research assistants. The sample included 10 teachers with teaching and research positions, of which 3 were associate professors and 7 were assistant professors. Out of the 4 teachers holding teaching positions, the sample included 1 college professor, 2 senior lecturers and 1 senior language instructor. The sample also included 6 teachers whose university title could not be established from their response to the respective question (Table 1).

Table 1: Respondent shares in the 2015 sample according to reported positions and titles

Position	Title	Number of respondents	Total
Teaching and Research	Associate Professor	3	10
	Assistant Professor	7	
Associate	Teaching Assistant	5	16
	Research Assistant	11	
Teaching	College Professor	1	4
	Senior Lecturer	2	
	Senior Language Instructor	1	
Unknown		6	6
		Total	36

Source: Made by authors

5.2.2. Instruments

The research questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part concerns the demographic data on respondents, which include gender, age, title and years of employment and the second part comprises ten statements and six open questions, totaling to 16 items. The degree of agreement with each statement is expressed by using a Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

5.2.3. Procedures

The survey was carried out online. Teachers received the questionnaire via email. Research was carried out over the course of one week and data collection was anonymous. Data processing was done using the statistical package SPSS 15.0. Descriptive statistical analysis and comparison of the arithmetic means of two independent samples were applied.

5.3. Research results

In terms of statements from the 2015 survey (Table 2), the descriptive statistical analysis shows that mean values for all items are very high and that responses are homogenous. The data shown in the Table indicates that respondents are mostly satisfied with the work of the Faculty departments (4.53). The highest mean value was recorded for the Student Service department (4.69) and the lowest for the IT Department employees (3.69). In regards to the statement on the poor library stock, the mean value is rather small and was recorded at 2.92.

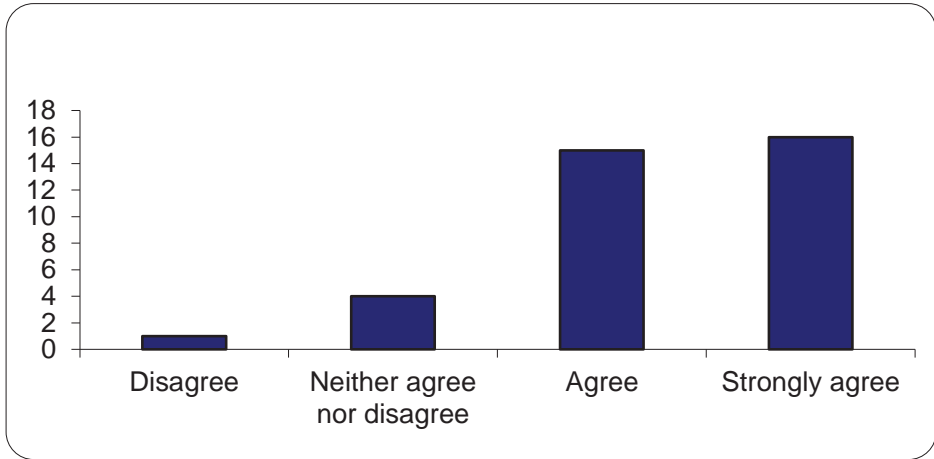
Table 2: Descriptive statistical analysis for statements from the 2015 survey

Item no.	Description	No. of respondents	Min	Max	Mean value	SD	C	D
1.	The Faculty Secretariat staff is prompt in carrying out its duties.	36	2	5	4.28	.779	4	5
2.	The Faculty Secretariat staff provides reliable and relevant advice and information.	36	2	5	4.22	.832	4	4
4.	The Accounting Department staff is professional in carrying out its work.	36	2	5	4.31	.710	4	4
6.	The Student Service Department staff works professionally and in accordance with the needs of the teachers.	36	3	5	4.64	.639	5	5
7.	The Student Service Department staff is kind in communication with others.	36	3	5	4.69	.525	5	5
9.	The library is poorly stocked with relevant literature and other sources.	36	1	5	2.92	.937	3	3
10.	Library staff helps me in my work.	36	3	5	4.36	.683	4	5
12.	IT Department staff works professionally and in accordance with the needs of teachers.	36	1	5	3.69	1.142	4	4
14.	Technical and support staff is available to me when needed.	36	2	5	4.22	.832	4	5
16.	Express your overall satisfaction with the work of Faculty departments.	36	3	5	4.53	.609	5	5

Source: Made by authors

The majority of respondents, i.e. 31 of them (86.1%) expressed satisfaction with the work of Secretariat staff. A smaller number of respondents (n=4, i.e. 11.1%) neither agreed nor disagreed and only 1 respondent (2.8%) expressed dissatisfaction with the statement (Figure 1).

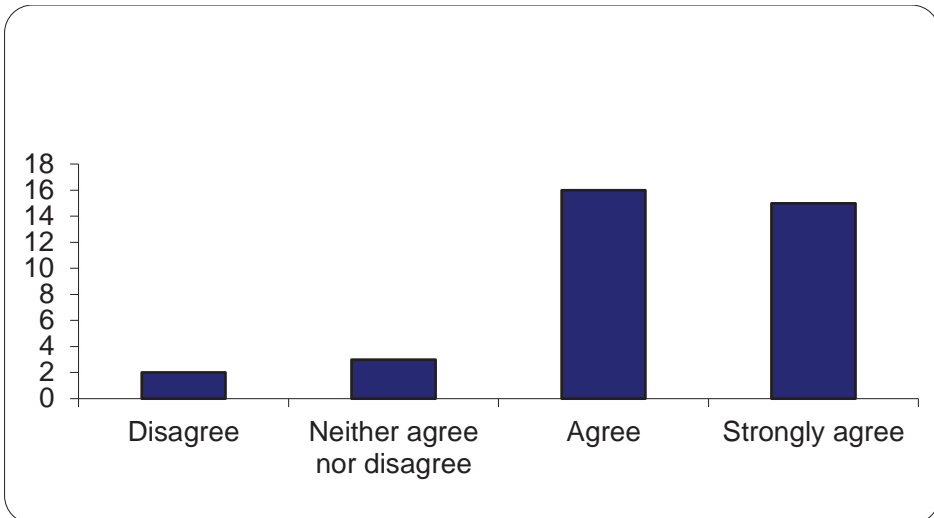
Figure 1: Satisfaction with the promptness of work of Secretariat staff on a Likert scale



Source: Made by authors

The majority of respondents, i.e. 86.1% or 31 were of the opinion that Secretariat staff provides reliable and relevant advice and information; 3 respondents (8.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 2 respondents (5.6%) did not agree with the statement (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Satisfaction with the work of Secretariat staff on a Likert scale

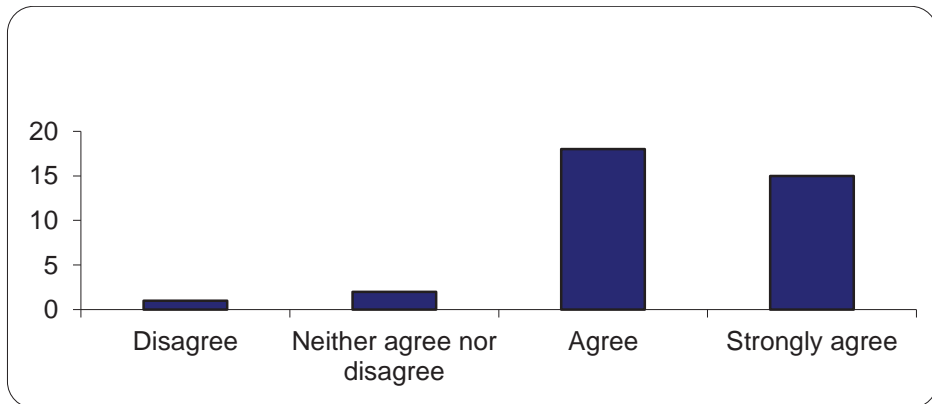


Source: Made by authors

Agreement with the statement on professionalism of the Accounting Department staff was recorded for 33 respondents (91.7%), whereas a smaller number of re-

spondents neither agreed nor disagreed (n=2, i.e. 5.6%) and only 1 respondent (2.8%) disagreed with the statement (Figure 3).

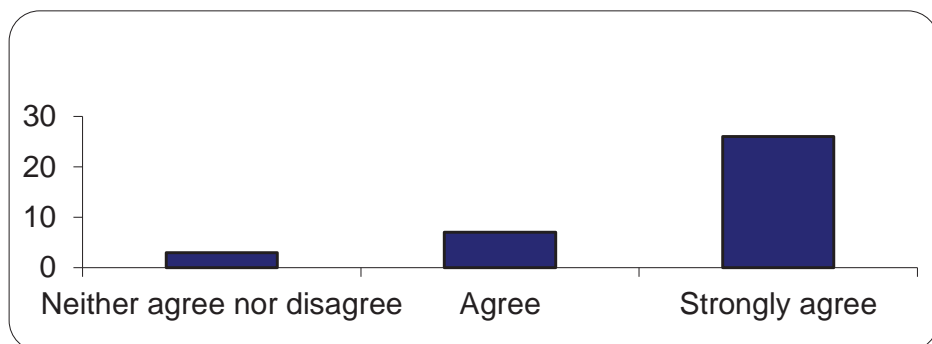
Figure 3: Satisfaction with the work of the Accounting Department staff on a Likert scale



Source: Made by authors

The majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the work of Student Service staff (n=33, i.e. 91.6%), 3 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and none of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Satisfaction with the professionalism of the Student Service staff on a Likert scale

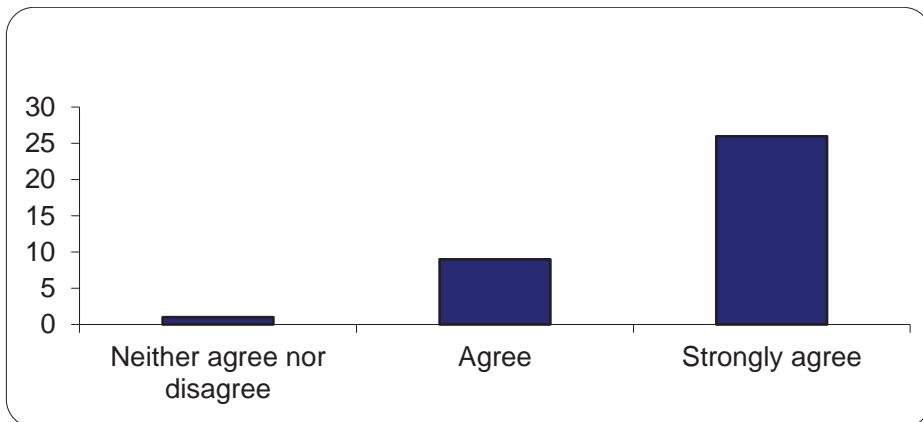


Source: Made by authors

The majority of respondents, i.e. 35 of them (97.2%) agreed with the statement on the kindness of Student Service staff. Only 1 respondent (2.8%) neither agreed nor

disagreed and none of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with this statement (Figure 5).

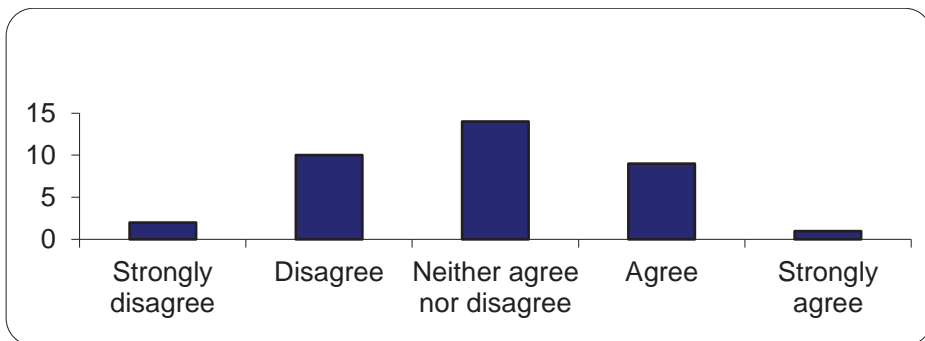
Figure 5: Satisfaction with communication with Student Service staff on a Likert scale



Source: Made by authors

A smaller number of respondents (n=10, i.e. 27.7%) agreed that the library is poorly stocked with relevant literature and other sources; 14 respondents (38.9%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 12 respondents (33.4%) disagreed with the statement (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Satisfaction with the library stock on a Likert scale

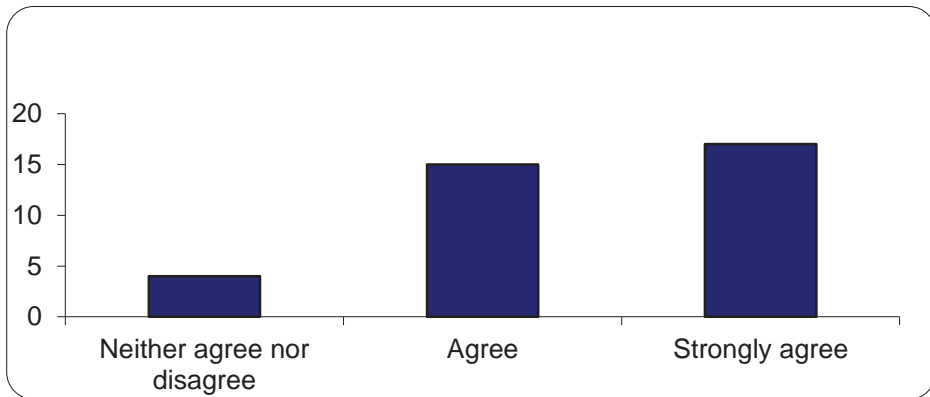


Source: Made by authors

The majority of respondents (n=32, i.e. 88.9%) agreed with the statement and were of the opinion that library staff assists teachers in their work; 4 respondents (11.1%)

neither agreed nor disagreed and none of the respondents disagreed with the statement (Figure 7).

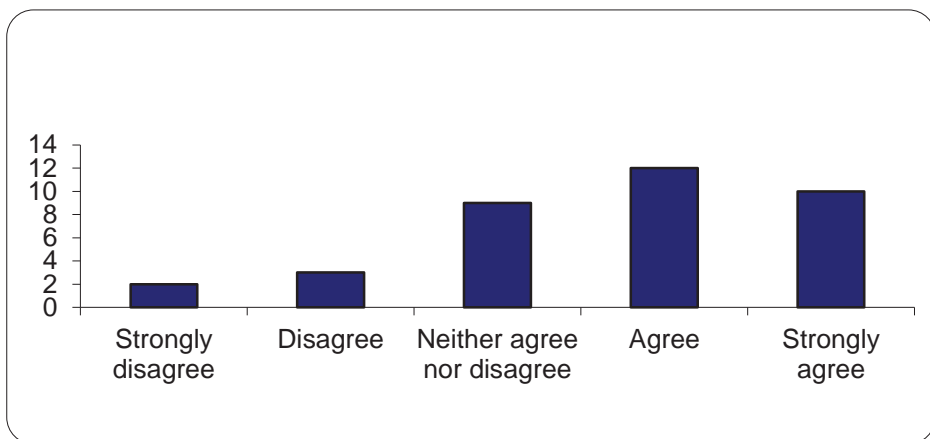
Figure 7: Satisfaction with the work of the library staff on a Likert scale



Source: Made by authors

More than half of the respondents (22 of them, i.e. 61.1%) were satisfied with the work of the IT Department staff; 9 respondents (25%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 5 respondents (13.9%) disagreed with the statement, i.e. expressed dissatisfaction (Figure 8).

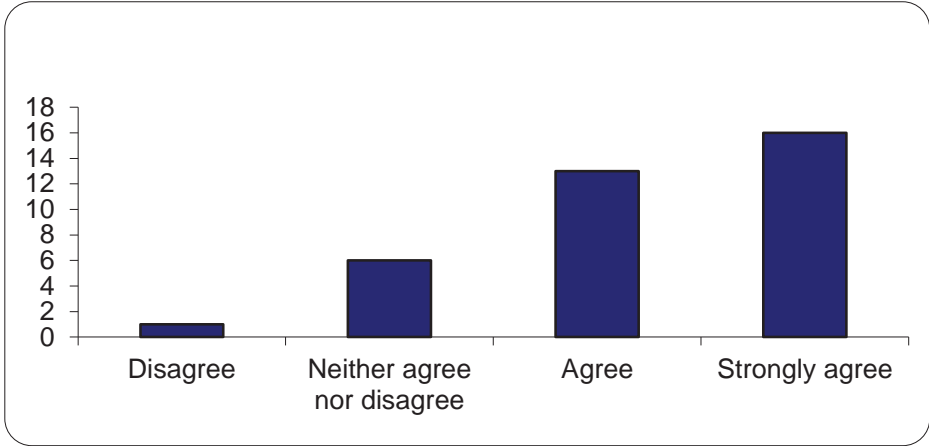
Figure 8: Satisfaction with IT Department staff on a Likert scale



Source: Made by authors

A large number of respondents (n=29, i.e. 80.5%) was of the opinion that technical and support staff of the Faculty were available when needed; 6 respondents (16.7%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 1 respondent (2.8%) disagreed with this statement.

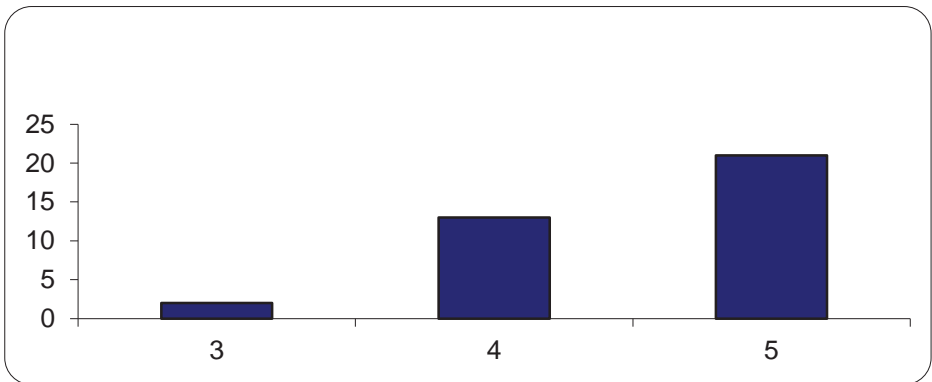
Figure 9: Satisfaction with the technical and support staff on a Likert scale



Source: Made by authors

In terms of overall satisfaction with the work of the Faculty departments, respondents rated their satisfaction on a scale from 1 to 5, whereby one stands for “dissatisfied” and 5 for “satisfied”. Twenty-one respondents rated their degree as “satisfied” (58.3%), 2 respondents were “somewhat satisfied” (5.6%). None of the respondents rated their degree as “dissatisfied” (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Overall satisfaction with the work of Faculty departments



Source: Made by authors

6. CONCLUSION

The results of the research indicate satisfaction of teachers with the work of administration departments of the Faculty of Educational Science. The most pronounced positive shift in the perception of teachers relates to the library stock of relevant literature and other sources. Annual reports of the library on increased procurement of literature in the last five years support this result. Suggestions of teachers from the open questions of the questionnaire refer to enlarging the library space and subscription to professional journals and databases. The IT Department was rated lowest of all faculty departments. The reason for this is evident in the comments of teachers in their responses to open questions. They concern the instability of the IT system and frequent problems with the server, communication with the IT Department staff and individual IT needs of teachers in relation to their classes. One of the suggestions for improvement is the introduction of an inbox on the Faculty website via which teachers would notify of any computer and other equipment breakdowns in classes and offices with a view to solving issues as soon as possible.

The increase in the overall satisfaction of teachers with the work of the Faculty departments is rather encouraging. It is upon the institution to apply incentive measures and invest in staff training and education with a view to maintaining or even increasing the quality of their work in the future.

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6. Website of the Agency for Science and Higher Education: www.azvo.hr

UNUTARNJE OSIGURANJE KVALITETE NA VISOKOŠKOLSKOJ USTANOVI

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Sažetak

Osiguravanje kvalitete je dinamičan proces koji kontinuirano treba graditi u skladu s promjenama koje nastaju u društvu i gospodarstvu. Povećanje broja javnih i privatnih sveučilišta, veleučilišta i fakulteta, kao i povećanje broja studenata, zahtjeva sustavno praćenje i razvijanje unutarnjeg sustava osiguravanja kvalitete kako bi institucije i studenti bili konkurentni, ravnopravni i prepoznati na prostoru cijele Europske unije. Stoga je iznimno važno da institucije uključene u visoko obrazovanje prepoznaju značaj osiguravanja i stalnog unapređivanja kvalitete visokog obrazovanja te da težnje za dostizanjem visokih standarda kvalitete postanu realnost i svakodnevno prožimanje unutar cjelokupne akademske zajednice, a i šire.

***Ključne riječi:** unutarnje osiguravanje kvalitete, visoko učilište, kultura kvalitete.*

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