

INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW SYSTEM FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AT THE FACULTY OF ENGINEERING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA

In accordance with the “Education and Culture Development Plan of the Republic Croatia during the Period 2005 – 2010” issued by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, and in line with “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area” published by the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)*, the Quality Assurance Department of the Agency of science and higher education adopted the model of external independent periodic peer review system for quality assurance at higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia.

The cooperation of the Quality Assurance Department of the Agency with consultants of the CARDS 2003 project: “Strengthening the capacity of the Agency for science and higher education in the sphere of developing quality assurance and establishing a supporting information system”, contributed to further development of the model for external independent periodic peer review system for quality assurance. The proposal of consultants to implement a pilot project of external independent periodic peer review for the quality assurance system through CARD 2003 at three higher education institutions was adopted during the session of the Governing Agency Council, held on July the 17th, 2007.

By an official letter dated from the 25th of September of the year 2007, the University of Rijeka proposed that the Faculty of Engineering participate in the pilot project of the external independent periodic peer review system for quality assurance. An Agreement, imposing obligations upon both sides, the Faculty of Engineering and Agency, was signed on the 5th of November, 2007. Accordingly, the agreement specifies the documents which have to be submitted by the Faculty to the Agency and sets the target date, but it also obligates the Agency to submit the official decisions demonstrating appointments commission for peer review implementation, the programmes of visit and delivery of basic texts for peer review implementation, both to the Faculty and the Commission. On the basis of the delivered documents and the visit to the Faculty, the Commission enforced the peer review system for quality assurance.

The peer review commission members were: D. Sc. Sergij Gabršček, head of the Commission, University in Ljubljana, an expert in external evaluation of higher educational institutions and external peer review systems for quality assurance; Assist Prof. D. Sc. Bogomir Mihevc, University of Ljubljana, independent counsellor for quality and development of teaching and scientific activity; Prof. D. Sc. Jasna Helena Mencer, the University of Zagreb, female rector of the University of Zagreb (2002-2006), the female member of the *Institutional Evaluation Programme of European University Association*; Prof. D. Sc. Bruno Saftić, Zagreb University, Faculty of Mining, Geology and Petroleum Engineering, member of the University Board for quality management; Romana Vidić, grad. eng. SMS Split; Šime Višić, student,

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Organization and Informatics in Varaždin, president of the Student Assembly of the University of Zagreb; and D. Sc. Vesna Dodiković-Jurković, representative of the Agency, *Internal Quality Risk Manager/Auditor* for the ISO 9001. The Commission is not only aiming at the quality assurance system development evaluation of the Faculty and coordination with standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, but also at the evaluation of good European practice in implementing the quality assurance system and its improvement.

During peer review, the Commission questioned whether the quality assurance system of the Faculty complies with the traced mission, vision and strategy of the Faculty. Special focus is placed on the transparency of all the relevant documents concerning the quality assurance system as well as on the information flow within the Faculty. On the basis of the implemented FINHEEC (*The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council*) criteria, the Commission evaluated the current state of the quality assurance system at the Faculty. The Commission visited and judged the Faculty on the 26th and the 27th of February, 2008. On the very first day of peer review, the Commission had a talk with the administration of the faculty, management board of the Faculty, and the committee of the Faculty for quality system improvement, to students, and teaching staff representatives belonging to all academic years and also to external stakeholders (representatives of the local community, economy and media). On the second day of peer review, the Commission had a talk with the representatives of the administrative and technical personnel, and then they made a tour of the library, computer centre as well as some laboratories and lecture-rooms. The Commission spent the rest of their time drawing conclusions and proposals, which were then introduced to the Faculty Board at the final meeting.

Subsequently, the Commission drew up a detailed report and delivered it to the Faculty, which gave a corresponding declaration statement, pursuant to the guidelines of the agreement for external peer review.

Some of the observations and conclusions were highlighted by the Commission.

- *The Faculty defined the mission, vision and strategy;*
- *The strategy is well elaborated with an array of indicators;*
- *Orientation towards both quality culture development and continuous quality improvement has been accepted by management board, teachers and students;*
- *The fact that the Dean appointed assistants for the strategy, new programmes and monitoring of the Bologna Process was seen in a positive light;*
- *The positive experience is not only the implementation of the thematic meetings but also news briefings with all shareholders;*

- *Monitoring of the students' improvement is well organized;*
- *The student exam passing rate is being monitored;*
- *The complaint procedure is well defined;*
- *A qualitative relationship between students and teachers is established;*
- *Resources for practical classes have been developed;*
- *Library is well equipped;*
- *Policy and quality assurance system procedures are well defined, readily accessible and carried out in dynamic surroundings;*
- *The Bologna process is being implemented in accordance with national and university plans;*
- *Both teachers and students are familiar with clearly defined task activities for the following period;*
- *In the domain of student assessment, the Faculty deploys a transition from traditional evaluation into an evaluation system based on learning outcomes;*
- *There is a quality assurance system for teacher competence promotion;*
- *Information systems are currently satisfying the need for a quality assurance system, etc.*

Consistent with the FINHEEC criteria, the level of quality system development at the Faculty has been evaluated in the following way:

- Goals, the complete organization and internal quality system correlation have been evaluated with the highest mark ever, concluding that the system covers almost all the activities of the Faculty, whereas the quality assurance system procedure creates a very dynamic whole;
- Documentation, including quality policy, definition of procedure and accountabilities of all stakeholders are clear, comprehensive and clearly defined. Documentation is readily available. The quality assurance system is well organized.
- Concerning comprehensiveness, the quality assurance system covers a lot of activities and processes linked to the essential higher education institution mission.
- Students, teachers, back up personnel and personnel for other services, researchers, administrative personnel, managing and external stakeholders have an active role in the quality assurance system.

- The quality assurance system is a constituent part and an indicator of all the working operations. The management board is responsible for and committed to quality system development. There is clear evidence that systematic information is used during the managing, monitoring and development processes. A wealth of quality system information depicts the general education quality as well as other higher educational and institutional activities.
- Activities and crucial quality system outcomes are known to all internal stakeholders. All relevant quality system procedures are readily accessible to them;
- The Commission estimated that external stakeholders are not included enough in quality system planning and development and that information is sporadically delivered to them;
- Quality assurance system procedures promote activity development and bring (about) changes. Established quality standards are efficiently identified. Quality assurance system information is employed as a means for qualitative managing, and as a promotion of education and other activities. Feedback information is used;
- The Faculty monitors quality system realization and is aware of all its effects and outcomes. Quality system development is planned and documented so that the higher education institution could clearly demonstrate its importance and effectiveness.

After participating in an Agency pilot project and the CARDS 2003 project, we were offered an opportunity not only to present the results of our work in the establishment and development of the quality assurance system at the Faculty, but also to obtain an independent peer review for the quality system coordination of the Faculty with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area.

With pleasure we can ascertain that the very high evaluating marks reflect our efforts in setting up and promoting all aspects of the activity at the Faculty. In addition, we are sure that outlined suggestions and conclusions are going to be of immense help in the further development of the quality assurance system as well as of all aspects of work and life at the Faculty.

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(Dean's person in charge for quality assurance)*