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Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije  
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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education



*Naložba v vašo prihodnost*

OPERACIJO DELNO FINANCIRA EVROPSKA UNIJA  
Evropski socialni sklad

# **SELF-EVALUATION REPORT**

## **OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION from 2010 to 2012**





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The self-evaluation report was prepared by the working group for self-evaluation composed of: Klemen Šubic, Jernej Širok, MSc., and Dr Alenka Braček Lalić.

All SQAA staff, members of the SQAA Council and the SQAA management participated in the preparation of the report.

The SQAA Council granted consent to the self-evaluation report on its 62<sup>th</sup> session on 13 March 2013.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. ABOUT THE SQAA SELF-EVALUATION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. SUBJECT, PURPOSE AND GOAL OF SELF-EVALUATION .....	4
1.2. DESCRIPTION OF SQAA SELF-EVALUATION .....	5
1.3. STRUCTURE OF THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT .....	7
<b>2. SQAA DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION .....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT (NCQHE, OHE, CHERS, SQAA) .....	8
2.2. SQAA COMPOSITION AND OPERATION .....	10
2.3. REVIEW OF THE WORK PERFORMED BY SQAA .....	14
<b>3. SQAA AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE ESG .....</b>	<b>22</b>
3.1. SQAA AND ESG 2 .....	22
3.2. SQAA AND ESG 3 .....	31
<b>4. FINAL ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT .....</b>	<b>42</b>
4.1. FIRST STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE UNTIL 2013: PARTICIPATING IN DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA ...	43
4.2. SECOND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE UNTIL 2013: QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION .....	44
4.3. THIRD STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE UNTIL 2013: ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF SQAA .....	45
<b>LIST OF ANNEXES .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>ANNEX 1 .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>ANNEX 2: .....</b>	<b>60</b>

## 1. ABOUT THE SQAA SELF-EVALUATION

### 1.1. SUBJECT, PURPOSE AND GOAL OF SELF-EVALUATION

The Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: SQAA) strives for continuous improvement of its functioning and thereby for constant development and improvement of the quality system in higher education and higher vocational education in the Republic of Slovenia and for strengthening the quality culture.

#### **Mission**

SQAA provides for development and functioning of the quality assurance system in the Slovenian higher education area. It operates responsibly, both formally and substantially, and counsels all stakeholders and participants in tertiary education in line with the European and global directions of development.

#### **Vision**

SQAA shall, with its system of quality assurance development, contribute to the higher education in Slovenia being of high quality in terms of education and research, internationally recognisable, competitive and equally integrated in the global higher education area.

Strategic objectives of SQAA until 2016:

- development and operation of the quality assurance system;
- monitoring progress and strengthening quality culture in higher education;
- presenting the role, importance and quality of the SQAA operation in public for better recognition;
- co-creation and development of higher education policy in the area of quality, encouraging the quality of transnational education;
- admission of SQAA to international associations (ENQA and EQAR);
- providing high-quality consulting services by its professionally qualified staff.

The SQAA self-evaluation constitutes an important element to accomplish and assess the objectives set in the strategy; it provides an opportunity for self-reflection and defines recommendations and measures to improve both the internal and external quality system.

Since this is the first time for SQAA to systematically assess its operation through a self-evaluation process, this self-evaluation report focuses not only on year 2012 but considers the total period of the SQAA operation, i.e. from March 2010 to the end of 2012.

By taking into account the time perspective of the SQAA operation, the self-evaluation report contains the following:

1. assessment of the SQAA internal quality system including all working processes associated with fundamental areas of its operation;
2. assessment of implementation of priority strategic objectives of SQAA until 2013, such as:

- transformation of the quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education;
  - establishment and development of the quality assurance system of SQAA;
  - participating in development of higher education and higher vocational education in Slovenia;
3. assessment of implementation of the second and third part of the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in European Higher Education (hereinafter: ESG):
- 2.1: use of internal quality assurance procedures;
  - 2.2: development of external quality assurance processes;
  - 2.3: criteria for decisions;
  - 2.4: processes fit for purpose;
  - 2.5: reporting;
  - 2.6: follow-up procedures;
  - 2.7: periodic reviews;
  - 2.8: system-wide analysis;
  - 3.1: use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education;
  - 3.2: official status;
  - 3.3: activities;
  - 3.4: resources;
  - 3.5: mission statement;
  - 3.6: independence;
  - 3.7: external quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies;
  - 3.8: accountability procedures.

The main purpose of the SQAA self-evaluation is to:

1. gain insight into how successfully and effectively internal processes at SQAA are conducted;
2. assess implementation of the priority strategic objectives set by SQAA until 2013;
3. evaluate implementation of the second and third part of ESG;
4. specify opportunities to improve the SQAA operation.

The aim of self-evaluation is to improve the SQAA internal quality system. By realising this goal, the external quality system is also improved, leading to the establishment of quality loop and increased awareness on quality culture. Based on the self-evaluation results, measures for improvements shall be prepared and adopted and shall be taken into account in the SQAA work plan for 2013.

## **1.2. DESCRIPTION OF SQAA SELF-EVALUATION**

After the adoption of the SQAA quality manual (Annex 7) on the 39<sup>th</sup> session of the SQAA Council in November 2011, two working groups were appointed for the SQAA self-evaluation: project group for preparation for external evaluation and working group for self-evaluation.

The project group is comprised of the SQAA Council representatives, an external expert in the field of quality assurance in higher education and a member of the SQAA staff, who is also the coordinator of the working group for self-evaluation, which is comprised of three members of the SQAA staff.

The working group for self-evaluation began its work in February 2012; it prepared the action plan for self-evaluation of SQAA and made preparations for external evaluation (hereinafter: action plan). It also prepared questionnaires intended to obtain opinions of all stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education on the satisfaction with the SQAA operation. The project group and the SQAA Council approved the action plan and the contents of the questionnaires on the 51<sup>th</sup> session on 28 June 2012.

The action plan specifies tasks according to the following thematic fields:

- 1. revision of the SQAA acts** (review of stakeholders' opinions, analysis of the applicable criteria, preparation of new criteria and harmonisation with stakeholders);
- 2. training of experts** (training supplementation, supplementation of the manual for experts, preparation of the protocol for the site visit of the group of experts, preparation of the protocol for conducting accreditation and evaluation procedures (the staff – experts – the SQAA Council));
- 3. external quality assurance system** (analyses of the performed external evaluations and surveys on the performed site visits, analysis of the reports of groups of experts, analysis of self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, prompt reporting on the accredited study programmes and institutions, surveys among all stakeholders ...);
- 4. internal quality assurance system** (plan for the preparation for external SQAA evaluation (beginning of 2013), analysis of financial and human resources at SQAA, training of the staff in Slovenia and abroad, coordination of work, conducting procedures ...).

Analysis of surveys (Annex 1) assessing satisfaction of all stakeholders with the SQAA activities and operation (higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, experts, the SQAA staff, the SQAA Council members, external stakeholders) was also helpful in preparing the self-evaluation report. The questionnaires contained questions associated with accreditation and evaluation procedures and criteria, site visits and work of groups of experts, quality of work of the staff, the SQAA management and the SQAA Council members. The analysis of the answers to the questions provided a meta-perspective on the quality and efficiency of the SQAA operation; our aim was to establish a feedback loop in monitoring satisfaction of stakeholders with the SQAA operation.

In preparing the self-evaluation report, findings from annual reports on the SQAA work and operation, business reports and information of the SQAA operation obtained at meetings with various stakeholders, monthly SQAA Council sessions, conferences, participation in national and international project and inter-sectoral groups etc. were taken into account.

Preparation of the action plan and implementation of all planned activities show that SQAA began to successfully accomplish the priority strategic objective set until 2013, i.e.

establishment and development of quality assurance system of SQAA. Although the activities aimed at achieving this strategic objective only began in 2012, it can be estimated that the delay caused by the efforts to develop and upgrade the external quality assurance system as a result of the establishment of SQAA in 2010 was compensated by the implementation of a number of activities.

Since this strategic objective requires not just the establishment of the SQAA quality assurance system but also its continuous development, we believe that the activities should be pursued on an annual basis and upgraded with further activities listed in Chapter 4 of this Report.

### **1.3. STRUCTURE OF THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT**

The first part of the self-evaluation report presents the subject of self-evaluation, time perspective and its purpose and goal.

Chapter 2 presents the development and operation of SQAA. It shows composition and operation of SQAA, operation of the SQAA Council as the decision-making body, of the Appeal Committee, Director and the staff; the SQAA acts; the SQAA accreditation decisions; training and register of experts, and membership and participation in international organisations.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how the second and third part of ESG are being observed and implemented.

Chapter 4 contains assessment of the accomplishment of the set SQAA priority strategic objectives until 2013 and the tasks performed specified in the action plan and the recommendations to improve the SQAA operation.

The Annexes to the Report provide: analysis of opinions (of all stakeholders regarding the SQAA operation), tertiary education system in Slovenia, legal bases, internal and external SQAA acts and annual reports.

## 2. SQAA DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION

### 2.1. Historical development (NCQHE, OHE, CHERS, SQAA)

There are several milestones concerning the external quality assurance system in higher education in Slovenia:

1994	Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia (hereinafter: the Council) established by the <u>Higher Education Act</u> (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 67/1993; hereinafter ZViS) in 1994 began to implement duties associated with accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions. It was established as an independent professional body composed of experts in the field of higher education. Through the granting of accreditation and observance of European development guidelines, quality culture was being developed and regulatory bases were being made, in addition to quality assurance in the study process.
1996	In 1996, <i>the National Commission for the Quality of Higher Education (hereinafter: NCQHE)</i> was established at the university level on the initiative of the Rectors' Conference to enable development of the internal and external quality system in the Slovenian higher education area subject to European development policies.
2004	The 2004 amendment of ZViS renamed the Council into the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia (CHERS). In addition to accreditations, it was assigned new duties (habilitations of higher education teachers, researchers and faculty assistants at private higher education institutions). These amendments to ZViS also provided for a quality agency for higher education; however, it was never established. Some tasks pertaining to external quality assurance (external evaluations) were performed by NCQHE further on.
2007	The 2006 ZViS amendments extended the responsibilities of CHERS to the field of evaluations of study programmes, of scientific-research, artistic and professional work, of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. It assumed these duties from NCQHE in 2007, which had been until then responsible for managing evaluation procedures in higher education. It functioned through three senates (for accreditation, evaluation and habilitation).
2007	In 2007, a CHERS Specialist Service, the Office of Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia (OHE) was established as a body of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (hereinafter: MHEST). As the Office was not an independent budget user, the <u>2008 ZViS amendment</u> transformed it, together with CHERS, into the so-called "other state body", which was CHERS with its Secretariat, Specialist Service for performing administrative, technical and expert tasks. Notwithstanding the fact that CHERS, the duties of which are further pursued by SQAA, had no formally established procedures for regular monitoring, assessing and assuring of its own quality, it carried out surveys among stakeholders in the external evaluation procedures and gathered opinions of experts (evaluators) on the course of evaluations, thereby improving the quality of its work. The questionnaires were primarily intended to gain information regarding the performed external evaluations, satisfaction with the work of CHERS Secretariat and satisfaction with evaluation committees' work. Questionnaires on the satisfaction with external evaluations were intended for both management of institutions / colleges and students. Members of the staff participating in external evaluations assessed the work of evaluation committees,

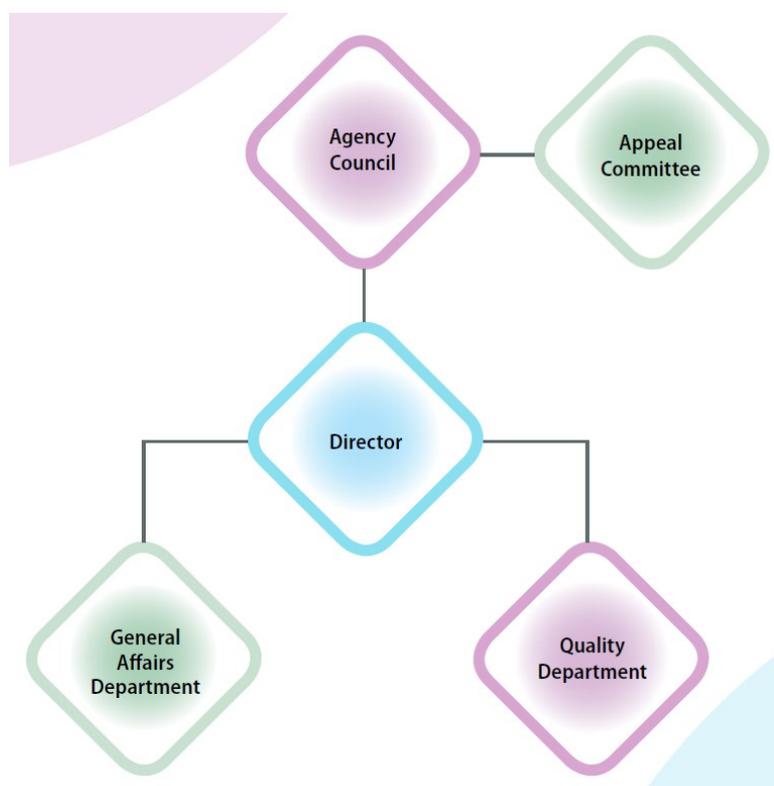
	<p>and members of evaluation committees assessed the work of the CHERS staff. Analysis of external evaluation reports and analysis of findings from self-evaluation reports were also prepared. Results of surveys and analyses were published, and the meta-report of the Senate for Evaluation entitled 'Monitoring, assessing and assuring quality in the Slovene higher education area in 2007 and 2008' (Annex 10) was translated into English. The work of CHERS is also described in the Report on the Work of the Senate for Evaluation at the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education entitled 'Monitoring, assessing and assuring quality in the Slovene higher education area in 2009' (Annex 11). Based on the findings of both reports, the proposal for drafting the external evaluation report was supplemented, good practice examples for writing self-evaluation reports were presented, the visit protocol was amended, and organisation and implementation of the site visit to the institution / college were improved, as well as the cooperation between CHERS and stakeholders. On 10 July 2009, the Senate organised a conference for experts (evaluators) approved by CHERS, who had in 2007, 2008 and 2009 taken part in external evaluations of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. The conference featured the meta-report by the Senate for Evaluation, and the main goal was to provide an exchange of experience between experts and solve open issues and any difficulties that had arisen during the work of experts and the CHERS staff. An active discussion led to the drafting of several proposals to improve evaluation procedures work and training of experts. It was established that external evaluations were at a high professional level, which was also confirmed by the experienced foreign experts participating in evaluation procedures. Conclusions of the conference were summarised in the recommendations for improvement as follows: calibration of experts (organisation of workshops aimed at unifying the manner of assessment of experts); standardisation of evaluation reports; improvement of cooperation with stakeholders (in particular with quality assurance committees at higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges); regulation and unification of translating applications into English, agreement of deadlines suggested in evaluation reports to eliminate weaknesses with the management of the higher education institution / higher vocational college under assessment; organisation and consistent follow-up of the weaknesses established in external evaluations of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. All the above mentioned bodies (Council, NCQHE and CHERS) stressed the consideration of ESG, implementation of evaluations in accordance with ESG and autonomy.</p>
<p><b>2010</b></p>	<p>Based on <u>2009 ZViS amendment</u>, SQAA was established in 2010 as a non-governmental direct budget user and public authorisation holder by a <u>Resolution on the Founding of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education</u> (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 114/2009; hereinafter: Resolution on the Founding of SQAA) in order to, upon ESG consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ professionalise evaluation procedures and include stakeholders in the decision-making process;</li> <li>▪ carry out its task in a transparent manner, be responsible to the public and observe the principle of impartiality;</li> <li>▪ conduct procedures according to the pre-set criteria, monitor procedures and control them in order to eliminate weaknesses.</li> </ul> <p>The 2009 ZViS amendment provided for organisational changes of the quality assurance body for higher education. All working committees of CHERS which</p>

provided expert aid to the CHERS staff and members in dealing with applications and adoption of decisions were abolished. The 2009 ZViS amendment appointed the role of CHERS sectoral committees and reviewers (external experts in accreditation procedures) and evaluators (external experts in evaluation procedures) to groups of experts.

## 2.2.SQAA composition and operation

SQAA became operational in March 2010. It has three bodies: the SQAA Council, the Director and the Appeal Committee. It is organised into two internal organisational units led by the Director, which are the Quality Department and the General Affairs Department.

Figure 1: Organisational chart of SQAA



Duties of SQAA are laid down in Article 51.f of ZViS (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 32/2012-official consolidated text, 40/2012-ZUJF, 57/2012-ZPCP-2D, 109/2012).

The 2009 ZViS amendment provided for formation of the SQAA Council by 1 March 2010, and appointment of the Appeal Committee and preparation and adoption of all SQAA acts by 1 May 2010. Because the constitutive session of the SQAA Council took place on 14 April 2010 and because of the much needed coordination with stakeholders from higher education, which had not been anticipated by the legislator, preparation and adoption of Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 95/2010, 17/2011,

51/2012 and 6/2013; hereinafter: the Accreditation Criteria) moved to November 2010. The Accreditation Criteria entered into force on 2 December 2010, which led to a more than six-month delay in the submission and dealing with accreditation and external evaluation applications according to the new criteria. Nevertheless, the external quality assessment was not interrupted, since the SQAA Council had to decide in accreditation procedures inherited from CHERS according to the previous criteria.

Since its establishment, SQAA has been responsible for development and operation of the quality assurance system in the Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education in compliance with ESG. It also strives for the implementation of the priority strategic objectives until 2013, which is clearly evident from its work presented below.

### **2.2.1. SQAA Council as the first-instance decision-making body**

The highest decision-making body is the SQAA Council. Its duties are laid down in Article 51.h of ZViS. They include appointment and dismissal of the Director and the Appeal Committee, definition of procedures and criteria for accreditation, external evaluation, for entry of experts in the SQAA register and definition of other acts, deciding on accreditations and external evaluations, appointment of groups of experts.

The SQAA Council decides at regular and extraordinary sessions and acts in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the SQAA Council adopted on the 13<sup>th</sup> session on 16 October 2010. Regular sessions are planned once monthly (normally every third Thursday of the month).

By the end of December 2012, the SQAA Council held 59 sessions. Minutes from the sessions show that initially, the Council dealt primarily with legal and substantive bases for its operation (constitution, adoption of the Rules of Procedure and other internal procedural acts etc.) and adopted new criteria and other acts. In that time, it already adopted decisions on accreditations according to the old criteria. Almost all criteria (Accreditation Criteria, ECTS Criteria, Criteria for Transferring, Minimum Standards for the Election to Titles, Criteria for Experts) were adopted at the end of 2010.

The SQAA Council started to appoint groups of experts according to the new criteria. It adopted the SQAA mission and vision and additionally the Criteria for Transnational Higher Education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 18/2012; hereinafter: the TNHE Criteria), the Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 9/2011; hereinafter: the Evaluation Criteria) and the Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes for Teacher Education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 94/2011). Since April 2011, SQAA has been focused on accreditation procedures. The SQAA Council also devoted several sessions and working sessions to the adoption of SQAA strategy, important documents and acts. In September 2011, the first management started to report the events during the sessions, and the SQAA Council began to gather detailed information on the relationship between SQAA and stakeholders at the national and international level on a regular basis.

In the first half of 2012, the SQAA Council was also solving the issues related to the growing problems with the SQAA management and requirements of the employees' Union associated therewith, in addition to doing its regular tasks. The first management of SQAA was dismissed on the 48<sup>th</sup> session on 24 April 2012. In spite of the difficulties, the SQAA Council encouraged development of procedures for the evaluation of criteria

and external evaluation and self-evaluation of SQAA, in which the Council members and a large part of the SQAA staff were actively involved through the working and project groups. This is how the SQAA operation was assured in the long-term not posing a threat to its autonomy, operation and independence. The second half of 2012 was marked by intense efforts of SQAA to change the ZViS amendment proposal, which interfered with the SQAA Council independence.

The SQAA Council has always strived for improvement of accreditation procedures and quality assurance system.

SQAA provides special training for Council members when they commence their term. One training of this kind was carried out in 2010, after the SQAA Council had been appointed, and another one will take place in 2013 when members of the SQAA Council are replaced pursuant to ZViS (a half of the members have the term of 3 years and the second half 6 years).

### **2.2.2. Appeal Committee as the second-instance decision-making body**

The Appeal Committee is appointed by the SQAA Council on the basis of public call. The Appeal Committee is composed of the president and two members. Each member has a deputy. In performing its duties, it observes the Rules of Procedure of the SQAA Appeal Committee adopted on 11 February 2011.

The constitutive session of the SQAA Appeal Committee was held on 1 February 2011. By the end of 2012, it held seven sessions and decided in nineteen matters (of which 18 appeals and one request for deciding through the supervisory right). Their decisions were as follows:

- in six matters, the Appeal Committee dismissed the appeal (and thus upheld the decision of the first-instance body);
- in eleven matters, the appeal was upheld, the challenged decision annulled and the matter returned to the SQAA Council for readjudication;
- in one matter, the appeal was partly dismissed and partly upheld, therefore in the latter part, the challenged decision was annulled and the matter returned to the SQAA Council for readjudication;
- in one matter, the challenged decision was partly declared void, and the application for annulment through the supervisory right rejected.

If the appeal is upheld, the Appeal Committee returns the matter to the SQAA Council for readjudication in accordance with provisions of ZViS. Decision of the Appeal Committee is complete. Judicial dispute may be initiated against it.

From an overview of matters dealt with, it can be established that in majority of cases the appellants asserted all three grounds for appeal from the first paragraph of Article 237 of General Administrative Procedure Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 80/1999, 70/2000, 52/2002, 73/2004, 22/2005-official consolidated text, 119/2005, 24/2006-official consolidated text, 105/2006-ZUS-1, 126/2007, 65/2008, 47/2009 Constitutional Court Decision: U-I-54/06-32 (48/2009 corr.), 8/2010; hereinafter: ZUP). Namely, the decisions were challenged for the following reasons:

- alleged violations of the substantive rules;

- allegedly incompletely or incorrectly established state of facts, and
- alleged violations of procedural provisions.

In their decisions, the Appeal Committee emphasised on several occasions the importance of one of the fundamental principles of administrative procedure, i.e. principle of substantive truth. The decision-making body may take its decision only after thorough evaluation of each piece of evidence and all evidence as a whole, and on the grounds of success of the overall procedure, and shall clearly state its reasoning in the decision. In this connection, it is also important that in case the application is incomplete or unclear, the applicant is required to supplement it. The call to the applicant to supplement the application must be clear.

In appeals, an objection on the existence of conflict of interests also appeared. The Appeal Committee took the position that merely the fact that a person deciding or participating in procedures comes from competitive institution by the appellant's opinion is not by itself a proof of grounds for existence of conflict of interests.

### **2.2.3. Director**

The duties of the Director are laid down in Article 51.i of ZVIS. The Director represents and acts on behalf of the Agency, organises and manages activities and operations of the Agency and makes decisions regarding labour rights of the employees. He or she attends to the implementation of decisions adopted by the SQAA Council and carries out other duties in accordance with law.

The Government of the Republic of Slovenia appointed the Acting Director on 19 February 2010 and the SQAA Council appointed the Director for the term of five years on 25 August 2010 (hereinafter: the first management). Due to many procedures, the management primarily focused on the fundamental activity, accreditations and evaluations, with a stress on strict, legal and formal verification of meeting minimum SQAA standards. Towards the end of 2011, it started to develop the international activity and the SQAA internal quality system more intensely.

In April 2012, the SQAA Council replaced the management and appointed the experienced member of the SQAA staff, Tatjana Debevec, the Acting Director (hereinafter: the second management). The second management first prepared a new working and financial plan for 2012 in compliance with the set strategic objectives until 2013. It sped up the resolution of the growing number of accreditation and evaluation procedures. At the same time, it has been systematically improving relationships with stakeholders, the international activity of SQAA, developing the internal and external quality assurance system and participating professionally in the development of the Slovenian higher education system.

The public call for the Director was initiated in the middle of 2012 but failed in the first two tenders. In the time when the self-evaluation report was being prepared, the third public call for director ended. Despite the long-term procedure for selecting a new director, such SQAA operation was assured in the long-term not posing a threat to its autonomy, operation and independence.

#### **2.2.4. Quality Department and General Affairs Department**

Employees in the Quality Department conduct accreditation and evaluation procedures and provide support to the SQAA management and the Council. In conducting the procedures, they review the applications, call upon the applicants to supplement the applications and intermediate between the applicant, SQAA and groups of experts. They cooperate with experts, advise them and monitor and support the organisation and implementation of site visits in accreditation and evaluation procedures. For the SQAA Council, they prepare materials for decision-making and conduct oral hearings.

Individual members of staff in the Quality Department prepare minutes of the Council sessions, proposals for constituting groups of experts, keep records prescribed by law, attend to the archives, maintain the SQAA web site and participate in working and project groups of the Council. For councillors, these groups prepare materials and proposals for the adoption of the SQAA acts, self-evaluation of SQAA, gather and prepare proposals for the introduction of extraordinary evaluations and proposals of candidates to be entered in the register of experts. Most of them were also involved in the implementation of the action plan. Certain employees are, as the SQAA representatives, actively involved in international development projects such as JOQAR, ECApedia, Crossroads, MULTRA and CeQuInt, and participate in different working and inter-sectoral groups at the national level (e.g. Bologna experts, National qualifications framework).

The General Affairs Department provides expert support to the management in staffing-related procedures and in legal and financial issues. It assists the Quality Department in solving financial issues and legal issues in conducting procedures. It assures that the Council conducts the sessions in compliance with the Rules of Procedure and other regulations, and provides legal advice to working and project groups of the Council. The legal service of the General Affairs Department provides comprehensive support to the functioning of the Appeal Committee.

### **2.3. Review of the work performed by SQAA**

In its operation, SQAA has primarily focused on the following areas:

- accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions, their study programmes and higher vocational colleges;
- statutory and implementing acts;
- SQAA Rules and internal acts;
- experts, training sessions, conferences;
- cooperation with stakeholders and general public and proposals to amend legislation;
- international cooperation.

#### **2.3.1. Decisions of the SQAA Council in accreditation and evaluation procedures**

Conducting accreditation and evaluation procedures is the basic activity of SQAA.

SQAA assumed 216 applications from CHERS, of which:

- 95 applications for accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions (including some notifications of study programmes); accreditation procedures of three study programmes have not been completed.
- 121 applications for changes of study programmes. All procedures have been completed.

Since the start of its operation, the SQAA Council has adopted 407 accreditation decisions (as of 11 December 2012):

Accreditation was granted to:

- 245 first-, second- and third-cycle study programmes and supplementary study programmes, of which 66 study programmes were granted re-accreditation;
- 9 private higher education institutions, of which one was granted re-accreditation;
- 2 university members;
- more than 120 changes of study programmes.

Accreditation was not granted to:

- 26 study programmes;
- 4 higher education institutions.

SQAA also performs external evaluations of higher vocational colleges; opinion on the achievement of standards prescribed by law was issued for 6 higher vocational colleges.

The SQAA Council has made decisions at 59 sessions (as of 11 December 2012) and adopted 2161 decisions.

### 2.3.2. SQAA criteria

Since May 2010, the SQAA Council has dealt with and approved a number of implementing acts and the Accreditation Proposal form (hereinafter: the form), which is an integral part of the Accreditation Criteria. Since the start of its operation, it has adopted a series of legal acts and documents published on the SQAA website. They are:

Criteria for the Accreditation and Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 95/2010, 17/2011, 51/2011 and 6/2013), in force since 2 December 2010
Criteria for Transferring between Study Programmes (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 95/2010 and 17/2011; hereinafter: Criteria for Transferring), in force since 2 December 2010
Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 9/2011), in force since 14 February 2011
Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes for Teacher Education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 94/2011), in force since 28 November 2011
Criteria for Entry into Register of Experts (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 95/2010, 17/2011 and 22/2012; hereinafter: Criteria for Experts), in force since 2 December 2010
Criteria for the Allocation of Credits to Study Programmes under ECTS (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 95/2010; hereinafter: ECTS Criteria), in force since 2 December 2010

<p>Minimum Standards for the Election to the Title of Higher Education Teacher, Researcher and Faculty Assistant at Higher Education Institutions (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 95/2010, 17/2011; hereinafter; Minimum Standards for the Election to Titles), in force since 2 December 2010</p>
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<p>Criteria for Transnational Higher Education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 18/2012), in force since 24 March 2012</p>
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The Accreditation Criteria are the basic act regulating quality in higher education. Working groups composed of the SQAA Council members, the SQAA management and employees were appointed to prepare the Accreditation Criteria. After the proposals for the Accreditation Criteria had been harmonised at the SQAA Council, the Accreditation Criteria were presented to the stakeholders (representatives of Slovenian universities, private higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, the Slovenian Student Union, employers and competent national bodies) and to the public at conferences, giving them the opportunity to comment. The SQAA Council dealt with the comments and subsequently adopted the final Accreditation Criteria, which were then published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia and on the SQAA website, including the English translation of the Accreditation Criteria.

SQAA continuously assessed the Accreditation Criteria and established within accreditation and evaluation procedures that they were sometimes either not specific enough or did not include all the particularities of study programmes or higher education institutions. The most ambiguities were found in the assessment of scientific-research and staffing structure of higher education institutions and study programmes. Different interpretations associated with the ambiguity in the criteria in these two areas were first encountered by the experts appointed to accreditation and evaluation procedures, followed by the SQAA Council in the decision-making process and the Quality Department in the preparation of decisions.

In some parts, the stakeholders consider the criteria incomplete, as evident from the survey findings listed in Annex 1. The majority of weaknesses were observed in provisions for re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes. Experts, SQAA staff and the SQAA Appeal Committee pointed to these problems. The Accreditation Criteria do not provide sufficient regulations of branches of a higher education institution and of transformation of a higher education institution (including the procedure), which is also associated with legal bases.

Representatives of higher education institutions saw the most weaknesses in difficulties when filling in, storing and submitting the form and in its contents. They viewed filling in the forms as unnecessary additional administration.

In the beginning of 2012, the working group for the revision of the Accreditation Criteria was constituted, composed of the SQAA Council members and the SQAA staff. In the summer of 2012, the working group prepared the draft revised criteria and different forms on the basis of the established weaknesses and presented them to the SQAA Council. Due to the proposed amendments to ZViS in September 2012 that would considerably affect the draft criteria changes, the work of the group for the preparation of the amended criteria slowed down a little. The group resumed with active work after the ZViS amendment had been adopted in the beginning of 2013. The final harmonisation within the working group is underway; the draft Accreditation Criteria amendment is expected to be presented to the SQAA Council at the end of March 2013.

### **2.3.3. Internal acts and strategic documents of SQAA**

In 2010, the Rules of Procedure of the SQAA Council were adopted and the work plan for 2010 was approved. SQAA also specified the Rules of Procedure of the SQAA Appeal Committee and the procedure and criteria for selecting members of the Appeal Committee.

In the first half of 2011, the 2010 Business Report of SQAA and the 2011 Work Plan of SQAA were adopted. In the middle of 2012, the Work Programme of SQAA including the financial plan for 2012 was adopted. After several hearings and requested improvements of reporting, the SQAA Council granted consent to the 2011 Report on Work and Operation of the Agency (Annex 4). Because of the reduced funding, the new SQAA management prepared a special plan for the execution of the 2012 budget in the middle of 2012. At the end of 2012, the overview SQAA document containing statistical data on the two-year SQAA work was published on the website.

SQAA started to develop its vision and mission towards the end of 2010, and in the beginning of 2011 organised a workshop on the subject of mission, vision, values and strategic objectives of SQAA. The consolidated and adopted document was published on the SQAA website. Operation and mission of SQAA are prescribed in more detail in the Resolution on the Founding of SQAA and in ZViS, and SQAA thus first focused on its principal activity and assured continuous implementation of accreditation and evaluation procedures. In November 2011, the SQAA Quality Manual (Annex 7) and the SQAA Strategy for 2011–2016 (Annex 8) were adopted. In the first half of 2012, the SQAA commitment was also published on the website.

At the end of 2012, the SQAA presentation brochure and the revised Manual for Experts (Annex 9) were prepared.

### **2.3.4. Training and conferences for experts**

#### **2.3.4.1. Training**

After the Criteria for Experts had been adopted, a public call for candidates for entry in the register of experts was published in the beginning of 2011. The committee for review of applications of the candidates for entry in the register of experts was appointed, composed of the SQAA Council members, and a training programme for candidates was prepared.

The SQAA Council dealt with and approved the training programme for the candidates for entry in the register of experts and the training programme of the Slovenian Student Union according to which candidates for student experts are being trained, which is a precondition to take part in the SQAA training. Student candidates thus learn about the role and duties of members of groups of experts before they participate in the training for entry in the SQAA register of experts.

According to the training programme for the SQAA experts, the training attendees learned about the regulations and their application and actively participated in workshops. The last training day was meant for simulation of a site visit. In five training sessions conducted by SQAA in 2011, the quality assessment expert candidates and all of the SQAA staff participated, while the management and some SQAA Council members had a role in the implementation of training sessions. In February 2011, the first experts

who met the criteria referred to in the Criteria for Experts were entered in the registry of experts.

SQAA continuously gathered comments on the training programme for candidates for experts. Proposals to improve the training included: clear interpretation of the SQAA criteria and the balance between the time needed to gain skills and the substantive explanation of the criteria. The SQAA Council considered the training programme too focused on stressing administrative procedures and regulations. SQAA plans to make a thorough revision of the training programme, which is presented in Chapter 3.1.4 of this Report.

In the beginning of 2011, the Training Manual for Candidates for entry into the SQAA Register of Experts was prepared and later supplemented on the request of the SQAA Council, inter alia to include the visit protocol. A need for thorough changes of the manual for experts was observed regarding self-evaluation procedures. The manual was revised in 2012 (Annex 9).

#### **2.3.4.2. Conferences**

In November 2011, SQAA carried out the first conference for SQAA experts where the participants were informed about the Agency for Science and Higher Education Croatia (AZVO), about the issues of alignment of the Slovenian quality system with ESG, trends in developing quality system in Europe and about good practice examples in communication and managing groups of experts. Various workshops covering the issue of criteria application, microdynamics of site visits, preparation of reports of groups of experts and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges were organised.

In February 2012, a SQAA symposium took place in Ljubljana featuring foreign experts who presented their experience in quality assurance in higher education. In December 2012, the second all-day conference was organised for the SQAA experts. At the introductory plenary sessions, representatives of SQAA presented duties of SQAA, its work and achievements, particularly regarding contacts with stakeholders and experts. The proposal for the revised Manual for Experts was presented at two parallel workshops; the first workshop put more emphasis on the preparation, organisation and implementation of site visits, while the second one was more focused on the compilation and writing of joint reports of the groups of experts.

Changes in the Manual for Experts mostly concern the preparation of the visit protocol, more detailed definition of the duties of the president and members of the group of experts and of the SQAA staff, uniform cooperation between the experts and the Agency, calibration of assessments and decision-making of experts, improvement and unification of the reporting and preservation of the autonomy of external assessments. Proposals from the conference have been taken into account in the final Manual for Experts. The SQAA Council members also took an active part in all conferences.

### **2.3.5. Register and appointment of groups of experts**

In accordance with Article 51.u of ZViS, SQAA keeps the register of experts for accreditations and external evaluations.

As of end of 2012, 129 Slovenian experts and 16 students were entered in the register of experts. In obtaining foreign experts, SQAA cooperates mainly with the following quality assurance agencies:

- Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance;
- Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatia;
- in October 2012, a cooperation contract with the German agency ASIIN was signed to obtain foreign experts in natural science and technical areas.

SQAA also uses publicly accessible lists and evaluation reports to invite foreign Bologna experts from different European countries and quality experts to participate. Foreign experts so far appointed to the groups by SQAA come from the following countries: Croatia, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Spain, United Kingdom, France, Czech Republic and Bulgaria.

The SQAA Council has been continuously introducing improvements into the procedures of appointing groups of experts, such as systematic verification of availability of foreign and domestic experts, detailed check of bibliographic and biographic information on experts and prompt coordination between the Council and the staff conducting the procedures. Certain improvements were also introduced by the management, such as transfer of the duty to communicate with experts to two employees.

SQAA supports inclusion of foreign and Slovenian students from foreign higher education institutions into groups of experts, which will be taken into account in evaluation and revision of the SQAA acts. Since 2011, SQAA has experienced problems with a small number of experts in certain fields of study, and the Criteria for Experts were amended accordingly. On the basis of the amendment, experts may be entered in the register upon invitation by the SQAA Council, without a public call (beginning of 2012). A list of shortage areas has been prepared to limit the public call for experts (the second half of 2012).

### **2.3.6. Cooperation with stakeholders and general public**

On its website, SQAA publishes final decisions on accreditations of higher education institutions, their study programmes and on evaluations of higher vocational colleges. The website is kept up-to-date and includes all contact data of the staff, the SQAA acts, topical contents, open competitions and job vacancies, comments and press releases. It also features frequently asked questions and answers regarding the completion of the form and the procedures. SQAA tries to promptly eliminate any problems and deficiencies.

In the second half of 2011, the SQAA Council adopted the public information and communication plan; the information on the SQAA Council work and achievements is periodically published on the website.

Members of the Council, the management and the SQAA staff regularly attend and participate in expert meetings (conferences, meetings, training) organised by

stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education. SQAA also cooperates with stakeholders at the international level by attending international symposia and participating in joint projects with international organisations in the area of quality assurance in higher education. In the second half of 2012, international participation of SQAA was greatly expanded and reinforced.

SQAA directly assists stakeholders by providing regular counselling and cooperation. They often received advice concerning the submission of accreditation or evaluation applications, particularly the submission of electronic form. In April 2011, the SQAA Council adopted the decision enabling the applicants, higher education institutions, to submit their applications in the PDF or Word format until the overall electronic support of SQAA (establishment of new e-system) would be introduced. To assist in filling in the form, the guide for filling in the form was prepared. Assisted by an ICT service provider, SQAA additionally provided information and technical support to the applicants in filling in and submitting the electronic form. In order to facilitate the applicants' work, the amended guide for filling in the form was adopted in 2012, primarily for the re-accreditation procedure of a higher education institution (e.g. university).

Since the beginning of its operation, SQAA has prepared proposals for the amendment of umbrella acts in the field of higher education and higher vocational education:

<b>2011</b>	In 2011, it addressed the regulation of accreditation procedures from the perspective of the obligation or rationality of observing the General Administrative Procedure Act (ZUP), particularly in applying the institute of oral hearing in evidence procedures.
<b>2011</b>	In the summer of 2011, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (hereinafter: MESCS) submitted proposals for amending the Post-secondary Vocational Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 86/2004; hereinafter; ZVSI) relating to the statutory provision of a comprehensive quality assurance system in higher vocational education.
<b>2012</b>	In 2012, it prepared several proposals for amending ZViS and submitted them to MESCS, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ transition to institutional evaluation and reduced duration of accreditation from 7 to 5 years,</li> <li>▪ mutatis mutandis application of ZUP is proposed to replace subsidiary application of ZUP,</li> <li>▪ conditions to appoint a member or deputy member of the Appeal Committee should be eased,</li> <li>▪ after having received negative decision in the re-accreditation procedure, the applicants must always be allowed to remedy the established weaknesses.</li> </ul>
<b>2012</b>	In the autumn of 2012, MESCS submitted the proposal for ZViS amendment, which laid down the SQAA Council composition and organisation in a different manner, for public consultation. According to SQAA, the proposal for ZViS amendment was unacceptable, as it posed a threat to SQAA autonomy. Universities, the Slovenian Student Union and the unions in the field of education shared this opinion. SQAA presented its position several times to MESCS, to the National Assembly Committee for Higher Education, to the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia and in public debates, and also cautioned the general public of other inconsistencies in the amendment.
<b>2012</b>	In 2012, it proposed regulation of the provisions of ZViS which specify

	transnational higher education (TNHE), since the ambiguously defined tasks of SQAA provided no warranty for issuing consent to TNHE contracts.
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Proposals for legislation amendment were prepared by the SQAA Council based on its experience, experience of the management and the staff in conducting accreditation and evaluation procedures and based on stakeholder cooperation.

### 2.3.7. Membership and active participation in international organisations

SQAA inherited full membership from CHERS in the European Consortium for Accreditation - ECA Consortium and full membership in the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – CEENQA. It actively participates in the ECA Consortium projects as shown in the table below.

	<p>Grossroads (the main aim of Grossroads is to present qualifications granted within state-approved or accredited European higher education institutions and study programmes in the form of a register. These qualifications are presented from the aspect of the higher education system, of which the information on national quality assurance and accreditation bodies and bodies for recognition of acquired qualifications makes part).</p> <p>ECApedia (ECApedia tries to combine the useful knowledge from all aspects of quality systems in higher education. It is composed of two modules, the first relating to the training of European quality assurance experts and the other to the quality of joint study programmes. The project is currently being developed.)</p>
	<p>MULTRA (within the JOQAR project, SQAA is also included in the MULTRA project – Mutual Recognition of accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes and strives to become its full member.)</p> <p>JOQAR (Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded). The general aim of the project is to facilitate the treatment of Erasmus – Mundus (and joint study programmes in general), particularly in the fields of accreditation and recognition. Project partnership involves quality assurance agencies and accreditation agencies and bodies (services) for recognition of qualifications. SQAA participates in the Steering group and in the Working group. In December 2012, evaluation of the joint master study programme EMMIR – Migration and Intercultural Relations implemented by seven higher education institutions from Germany, Norway, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Sudan and Uganda was performed. The evaluation was coordinated by SQAA and was performed at the University of Oldenburg; the report of the group of experts will provide the basis for adopting decision on re-accreditation. The procedure will be performed according to the principle of reciprocity between all participating quality assurance agencies.</p>
	<p>CeQuInt (Certificate for Quality of Internationalisation). The purpose of the project selected within the Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus): Erasmus Multilateral projects in September 2012 is to improve and promote the internationalisation process in higher education. The project also aims at developing methodology to measure internationalisation at both programme and institutional levels. Successful evaluation will lead to the European internationalisation certificate providing findings as to whether the study programme or higher education institution has successfully included international and intercultural dimension into its purpose, activity and transfer of higher education. SQAA participates in the project in the Steering group. It is responsible for selecting the study programme and conducting evaluation. The</p>

	evaluation with the international group of experts from the field of higher education internationalisation will not be intended for the assessment of quality standards aimed at granting accreditation or re-accreditation but for assessing the standards of internationalisation quality and awarding the certificate.
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### **3. SQAA AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE ESG**

#### **3.1. SQAA AND ESG 2**

##### **3.1.1. ESG 2.1: Use of internal quality assurance procedures**

The established internal quality assurance system of a higher education institution and a higher vocational college or regular self-evaluation is the foundation for external quality assessment. It is also something the SQAA Council must take into consideration when adopting decisions. In the procedure of accreditation and external evaluation of higher education institutions, their study programmes and higher vocational colleges, SQAA follows the provisions of ZViS and the adopted Accreditation Criteria. The Accreditation Criteria determine that each higher education institution and higher vocational college has to adopt a quality manual or other relevant regulation in which the self-evaluation procedures, method of work and actions for improving the quality of its work are defined.

How shall the higher education institution establish the quality system is being assessed in initial accreditations, while in re-accreditation procedures, the overall functioning of the higher education institution or organisation and implementation of an individual study programme, and above all, the progress and development of the internal quality assurance system and efficiency of its functioning are being assessed by the external evaluation. The procedure is laid down in greater detail in Article 37 of the Accreditation Criteria, while the areas of assessment are listed in Article 25 thereof, and are as follows:

- integration with the environment;
- functioning of the higher education institution;
- human resources;
- students;
- material conditions (premises, equipment, library and information activity, and funding);
- quality assurance, innovation and development orientation.

The study programmes are mainly assessed by the organisation and provision of education, while taking the above stated areas into consideration. A higher education institution must prove that it regularly monitors the study programme provision (professional, scientific-research or artistic activity of the higher education institution linked to the study programme), examines the satisfaction of its staff and students, monitors the student workload according to ECTS, their learning outcomes, etc. and that, on the basis of the findings, adequately changes, enhances and supplements the study programme.

Also, the external evaluations of higher vocational colleges are based on the assessment of self-evaluation reports and system of monitoring and improving the overall quality of college.

### **3.1.2. ESG 2.2: DEVELOPMENT OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES**

In 2010, SQAA adopted the new Accreditation Criteria and Evaluation Criteria, as stated in the Subsection 2.3.3. In this regard, it took the provisions of ZViS and the experience of CHERS in conduct of accreditation and evaluation procedures, into consideration.

The purpose and objectives of the external quality assurance processes were presented to all stakeholders upon adoption of the legislation, whereby they have also actively participated. Also, SQAA submitted the drafts of Accreditation Criteria and Evaluation Criteria and other regulations to all stakeholders for comments. Most comments referred to the Accreditation Criteria, namely: use of uniform terminology in the regulation; consideration of the autonomy of universities; too much data is required in the form while only necessary information should be collected; in case of international comparability of the study programme, the comparability of learning outcomes or competences should be left out; the criteria and procedures defined for the initial accreditation and re-accreditation are not consistent; data are unnecessarily submitted multiple times; resubmission of annexes; and electronic form.

From January till April 2011, presentations of the new criteria and form (as their integral part) have been taking place at higher education institutions in Slovenia. On the basis thereof, the guide for filling in the form was drawn up, and is published on the SQAA website. The electronic form has been in use since the beginning of 2011. Despite its testing before actual use, difficulties in completing, saving and submitting the form were reported to SQAA by the applicants. The majority of difficulties have been resolved, certain are still being resolved, while the resolution of some shall be possible with the establishment of a new overall information system. In the self-evaluation procedures, SQAA established that thorough modification of the criteria and form is related therewith. In this connection, a lot of work has already been done in 2012. In 2013, we plan to adopt the revised Accreditation Criteria and Evaluation Criteria, and simultaneously, design and establish a more efficient information system.

The TNHE Criteria required a lot of coordination with stakeholders, since the provision of ZViS (Article 33.c) limited TNHE to only one form, namely franchise. The majority of comments by the stakeholders referred to the inclusion of additional methods and forms of TNHE; this has been pointed out to the ministry responsible for higher education several times. Thus, not all comments and proposals by the stakeholders could have been considered, since the provisions of Article 33.c of ZViS would have to be changed first to this end.

As part of the self-evaluation of SQAA, we have decided to examine how the implementation of all adopted criteria will be successful in practice, and their comprehensibility and applicability for the stakeholders (higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, experts, and the SQAA Council and staff). Thus, in the questionnaires, submitted to all stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education, we have been asking about the usefulness and clarity of procedures and criteria. The results of the survey are presented in Annex 1. In addition, the SQAA Council and staff were, on an on-going basis, monitoring the interpretation of the Accreditation Criteria in practice – in dealing with the applications for accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes, upon external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, site visits of higher education institutions, in cooperation with the groups of experts, through counselling and consultations with the stakeholders, etc.

Since SQAA is aware of the importance of cooperation with the stakeholders, all criteria and other regulations and the SQAA Council decisions are published on the SQAA website.

On the website, a forum is also set up – FAQ (<http://www.nakvis.si/akreditacije/faq.html>) – currently intended to provide information about the most frequently asked questions and responses regarding completion of the form and procedures. With establishment of the new information system, FAQ shall be replaced with a forum for open questions.

### **3.1.3. ESG 2.3: CRITERIA FOR DECISIONS**

Based on ZViS (Article 51.o to 51.r), the Accreditation Criteria determine that the higher education institutions and study programmes, in order to become state-approved, have to obtain accreditation by the SQAA Council. The initial accreditation and each re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes shall apply for a maximum of seven (7) years.

All procedures for initial accreditation and re-accreditation are conducted in accordance with ZUP. ZViS and Accreditation Criteria determine the duration of procedures, namely:

- the procedure of initial accreditation of a higher education institution should be concluded within 6 months following the application completion (i.e. 3 months for the report of group of experts to be prepared, and 3 months for the decision of SQAA Council to be adopted once the report has been prepared);
- the procedure of initial accreditation of a study programme should be concluded within 7 months following the application completion (i.e. 3 months for the report of group of experts to be prepared, 1 month for possible comments of the institution on the report of the group of experts, and 3 months for the decision of SQAA Council to be adopted after the deadline for submitting comments);
- the procedure for re-accreditation of a study programme and a higher education institution should be concluded within 9 months following the application completion (i.e. appointment of a group of experts within 1 month after the application is completed, 3 months for the report of group of experts to be prepared, 1 month for possible comments of the institution on the report of the group of experts, 1 month for final evaluation report to be prepared, and 3 months for the decision of SQAA Council to be adopted).

As regards the actual duration of procedures, the delay in submission of joint report of the group of experts and in preparation of the material for decision-making by the SQAA Council, time for the submission of comments by the applicant and the date of adopting decision at the SQAA Council session have to be considered. As a rule, decisions are adopted once a month.

Based on the Quality Manual, SQAA adopted procedural rules defining the conduct of accreditation and evaluation procedures within SQAA in more detail and thereby assuring equal treatment of all applicants. The rules are published on the website, in the Manual for Experts, the SQAA presentation brochure and other documents.

Independence and objectivity of deciding in accreditation and external evaluation procedures are also assured through the SQAA Council composition, independent groups of experts, and other mechanisms as are, for example, the possibility of appeal and of supplementing the application till deciding in the matter takes place, response to the report of the group of experts, etc.

The SQAA adopts decisions on initial accreditation or re-accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions and opinions on compliance with standards laid down by law for re-accreditation of higher vocational colleges on the basis of reports prepared by the groups of experts (joint report in the initial accreditation procedure or evaluation report in the re-accreditation procedure) and self-evaluation reports of an institution/college. Institutions/colleges also have a possibility to remedy any weaknesses within set deadlines.

All Council decisions may be appealed against. The appeals are considered by the Appeal Committee.

SQAA strives for transparent and professional conduct of its employees, experts and members of the SQAA Council, consistent use and uniform interpretation of the criteria, thus, the entire staff and members of the Council are constantly undergoing education and are studying decisions of the Appeal Committee, and by consistent work and evaluation of every piece of evidence, they put their efforts in objective decision-making, fully explained to the applicants in the decisions. In addition, SQAA provides prompt responses to questions regarding interpretation of the criteria and procedures.

Through self-evaluation procedures, SQAA established that this area has to be even more systematically regulated. A lot has already been determined in the Manual for Experts, the updating of responses relating to explanation of the criteria on the website is being prepared, and by the revision of acts, it aims to define even clearer criteria that will enable as uniform and consistent interpretation as possible.

#### **3.1.4. ESG 2.4: PROCESSES FIT FOR PURPOSE**

The procedures of external quality assurance, conducted by SQAA (accreditation and evaluation) follow the pre-set objectives of assuring and improving quality of higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and study programmes. The examination and assessment of the application, appointment of group of independent experts, site visit of the higher education institution or higher professional college (except in cases of initial accreditation and accreditation of the study programme's changes when site visits are rare), preparation of joint report of the group of experts, the response of the applicant to the joint report (except in cases of initial accreditation or transformation of higher education institution), and assessing and decision-making by the SQAA Council are typical for all types of accreditations and external evaluations. In addition, in the procedures of re-accreditation and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, the emphasis lies on constant progress and improvement of quality.

SQAA has established register of independent experts. The basis for the register is set out in Article 51.u of ZViS. Individuals, who would like to be entered in the register of experts, should respond to the public call or the SQAA Council invitation. SQAA collects applications and promptly establishes whether the candidates fulfil the conditions listed in the Criteria for Entry in the Register of Experts.

SQAA provides that in the groups of experts, carrying out the assessments of the individual study programmes, the experts from the field of study or scientific field of the study programme or for which the higher education institution is registered, are appointed. In accordance with ZViS, the group is composed of a minimum three experts from whom at least one is Slovenian and one foreign, while the third one is a student. Thus, SQAA dedicates special attention to the appointment of foreign experts, while for the Slovenian experts (including students), SQAA frequently organises trainings for the entry in the register of experts and conferences at which attendees exchange experience and examples of good practice and solve open issues and problems jointly with the representatives of SQAA.

In 2011, there were five trainings of the candidates for entry in the register of experts. After each training, all participants completed surveys, in which they were asked about their satisfaction with the training programme. From the responses, it is evident that they were satisfied with the trainings, but they were also of an opinion that more time should be dedicated to the presentation of legislation, acts and criteria, to simulation, discussion and presentation of the course of evaluation, and to writing of report and conduct of interviews. Based on these comments, and experiences of the SQAA staff with the groups of experts and the site visits at the higher educational institutions and higher vocational colleges, we thoroughly revised the Manual for Experts (Annex 9) in 2012. This manual presents the grounds for revision of the training programme, thus, there were no trainings for the candidates for experts carried out in 2012, but they are planned for 2013.

The revised Manual for Experts describes in more detail the role of experts and other stakeholders in accreditation procedures, especially external evaluation, and gives recommendations for the preparation of high-quality joint reports and guidelines for standardised organisation and implementation of site visits. This way SQAA clearly and precisely expresses the expectations towards experts, and its desire for uniform and comparative assessments. In addition, it will be a useful guide through the accreditation and evaluation procedures for experts and other stakeholders (applicants, SQAA staff, and interested public).

Under previous management, SQAA was discouraging experts from giving recommendations for improving quality and was imposing on them to merely assess the achievement of minimum standards under legislative and regulatory provisions at trainings of the candidates for entry in the register of experts. On the proposals of the new management, SQAA staff and members of the SQAA Council, and on requests of the assessed higher education institutions, we have begun redirecting experts to give recommendations in reports and at site visits as it has already been done at CHERS. We have formalised this process by specifying substantive guidance for writing reports of the group of experts in the revised Manual for Experts. The draft of the Manual for Experts has been at first harmonised among the members of the SQAA working group for self-evaluation, and then at meetings with all employees of SQAA. The revised Manual for Experts was presented by SQAA at the all-day conference of experts on 18 December 2012. Their response was extremely positive, especially of those who have already participated in external evaluations of CHERS and were including their recommendations in evaluation reports with success. On the basis of comments and supplements given by the experts at the conference, the Manual for Experts was supplemented, and is planned to be published on the website and issued in printed form in March 2013.

The latest reports of the groups of experts are transparent and contain justifications. They also contain recommendations for improvements which assist applicants.

The revision of the training programme, by which the candidates for experts shall be educated in 2013, is also anticipated in the action plan. The objective of the revision is to provide higher qualifications of experts, better and more uniform work (professionalism, efficiency and success), and to meet the expectations of stakeholders expressed in surveys on their satisfaction. The candidates for entry in the register of experts will have to mainly study the legislation, criteria and Manual for Experts before entering the organised training. The training will be focused on clarifying open issues, explaining provisions of the criteria and content of the Manual for Experts, discussing examples of good and bad practice, informing of specifics in procedures and assessments, practical workshops (simulation of assessments) for the initial accreditation, re-accreditation and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges. An important part of training will be workshops on writing expert reports. With regard to the training revision and entry of experts in the register of experts, it is also anticipated that the candidates shall be tested in practice as additional members of the group of experts, while their work shall be assessed by the members of the group of experts and SQAA. This assessment would be one of the foundations for entry in the register.

### **3.1.5. ESG 2.5: REPORTING**

An independent group of experts which is assessing an application prepares a joint report. When it carries out a site visit of higher education institution / higher vocational college, the president of the group clearly and unambiguously presents all of the most important findings (strengths, possibilities for improvement and inconsistencies) to be included in the evaluation report, to the management of institution / college and other attendees at the end of site visit. Also, at the end of site visit, the president informs the applicant about its right to submit comments to written report of the group of experts.

Reports are drawn-up by the areas of assessment from the Accreditation Criteria or by the areas of assessment from the Evaluation Criteria.

Joint report is one of the bases for the SQAA Council decisions. The applicant can submit comments to the report. Should the experts assess that the applicant does not comply with the conditions or criteria laid down by the law, by the Accreditation Criteria or the Evaluation Criteria, they have to be appropriately substantiate this in the report. The report is composed as a harmonised whole.

Reports in initial accreditation procedures are final. This means that the first joint report delivered by the group of experts remains unchanged. Although, in the procedures of re-accreditation or external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, the group of experts examines applicant's eventual response to the evaluation report. The group estimates whether the actual situation has changed, and whether it will amend the report or not, within one month after having received the response. This way, it is assured that experts re-examine their findings.

Upon self-evaluation, the analysis of different reports of the groups of experts in the initial accreditation and re-accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programmes was performed. From the reports, selected as examples of good practice by the SQAA staff, it is evident that the group of experts gave a comprehensive opinion on the matter assessed with justifications and recommendations for improvement, and pointed out irregularities or weaknesses, while the other reports –

examples of bad practice – in majority of cases included only the situation / transcript from the application without establishment of actual situation and opinion of the group of experts or recommendations for improvement. The results of analysis are presented in the final findings of self-evaluation report and have been considered in the revised SQAA Manual for Experts, a vast chapter of which is dedicated to the composition and writing of reports.

### **3.1.6. ESG 2.6: FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES**

Follow-up procedures are included in all re-accreditation procedures, since the progress made by the higher education institution from the initial until the last accreditation of study programme or higher education institution (as a rule, every seven years) is monitored. Precisely for this reason the evaluation report also contains the experts' recommendations for improvement.

In accordance with the accreditation criteria, a quality manual proposal, in which self-evaluation procedures, competences, method of work and actions for monitoring and improving the quality of work are defined, is also required from the higher education institutions in the initial accreditation procedure. Quality manual has to be in line with the strategic documents of the institution (mission, vision and strategy).

In the re-accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programmes, the group of experts assesses organisation and provision of education, ascertains the quality of pedagogical, scientific-research, professional and / or artistic activities, and pays special attention to the quality system of higher education institution or to self-evaluation procedures, and to taking stock on progress. A cornerstone in the re-accreditation procedure is the self-evaluation report of an institution.

In the re-accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programmes the SQAA Council may either decide that the re-accreditation is granted for seven years or for a shorter period (up to a maximum of three years) or that it is not granted. For maximum of three years re-accreditation is granted if the weaknesses identified in the functioning of higher education institution or in the provision of study programme are such that they can be remedied in less than three years. In accordance with the Article 48 of the Accreditation Criteria, the SQAA Council shall set a time limit within which the higher education institution shall remedy weaknesses, namely:

- half a year in the case of smaller weaknesses;
- one year in the case of deviations from standards relating to the pedagogical, scientific and research qualifications of staff.

After expiry of the deadline for remedying the weaknesses, new external evaluation is carried out by another group of experts. The latter assesses the compliance with the conditions, and above all, is focused on how weaknesses or inconsistencies have been remedied due to which re-accreditation was granted for a shorter period. Then, the SQAA Council adopts one of the following decisions: to grant re-accreditation to the higher education institution or study programme for seven years or to not grant it. In case the SQAA Council does not grant the re-accreditation, the study programme is no longer state-approved.

An important role in following-up quality of a higher education institution, study programme or higher vocational college is also played by the instrument of extraordinary

evaluation (Articles 7, 37 and 49 of the Accreditation Criteria). Specific feature of the latter is that it may be carried out whenever before the expiry of the seven-year period for which the accreditation has been granted. It can be carried out at the incentive of institution or college, founders, the ministry responsible for higher education, students or other higher education stakeholders when there are reasonable grounds to suspect the existence of serious infringements in the operation of a higher education institution or the provision of a study programme. An extraordinary evaluation is (with the exception of procedure initiation) carried out by the same procedure as an external evaluation, and ends with a decision on re-accreditation.

If the SQAA Council adopts the decision on granting the re-accreditation of higher education institution or study programme for seven years, the higher education institution is expected to follow the findings of evaluation report of the group of experts and, and on the basis thereof follow the recommendations of the SQAA Council and the group of experts in the spirit of quality improvement. SQAA examines the compliance with recommendations upon the analysis of self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions which is one of the tasks of SQAA according to ZViS.

Follow-up procedures in higher vocational education are similar, and are performed at least every five years.

### 3.1.7. ESG 2.7: PERIODIC REVIEWS

Article 51.o of ZViS determines that the initial accreditation is granted for the maximum period of seven years, and then, the study programme / higher education institution has to be re-accredited. In the re-accreditation procedure, the progress made by the higher education institution in the period from the first / last accreditation is monitored.

In accordance with ZViS and the fact that the majority of study programmes, prepared on the basis of Bologna process, have been accredited in the period from 2007 until 2009, SQAA prepared a plan of re-accreditations in 2011, namely for the period until 2014. It is published on the SQAA website.

In the procedure for re-accreditation of a study programme or a higher education institution, the latter has to annex the following documents to the application (Article 34 of the Accreditation Criteria):

	the self-evaluation report of the higher education institution for the academic year before which external evaluation was carried out, and analysis of all the areas of functioning of the higher education institution from all the years since the last accreditation, with identified weaknesses and measures to remedy them;
	the establishment act and the statute of the higher education institution;
	the mission, vision and strategy of the higher education institution;
	the annual work programme of the higher education institution, for the last calendar year before the external evaluation and for the calendar year in which the external evaluation is taking place;
	the financial report of the higher education institution for the last calendar year;
	quality manual;
	proofs of the quality of higher education teachers, researchers and faculty assistants as recognised by the profession;
	analyses of the results of student surveys or other forms of monitoring the opinion of students on the quality of the provision of the study programme for

	the last three academic years; if less than three years have passed since the last accreditation, for the entire period since the last accreditation;
	analyses of the results of surveys and other forms of monitoring graduates of the higher education institution;
	a list of records kept by the higher education institution.

Similar documents have to be annexed by a higher vocational college in the external evaluation procedure (Article 17 of the Evaluation Criteria). Accreditation of the higher vocational college is granted for the maximum period of five years.

In re-accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programmes (Article 26 of the Accreditation Criteria) and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges (Article 9 of the Evaluation Criteria), the progress is assessed according to the following criteria:

	an enhanced, formalised and publicly accessible strategy, procedures and measures;
	the development and regular use of formal tools to ensure the system of quality, documented monitoring of achievements in the provision of study programmes, the learning outcomes of students and the evaluation of relevant stakeholders;
	a stable staff structure and the development thereof;
	the constant connection and cooperation of staff, students and other stakeholders with the environment;
	suitable and stable conditions and resources (inputs) guaranteeing the quality provision of study programmes and the current development thereof;
	the constant collection and analysis of data important for the efficient management and provision of study programmes and related support activities;
	identification of errors and weaknesses in the provision of study programmes in the self-evaluation process, and their elimination in the overall functioning of the institution / study programme;
	the organisation of public access to information on the results of the provision of study programmes, the learning outcomes of students and the scientific, research, artistic and professional achievements of staff;
	the regular presentation and organisation of discussion of self-evaluation reports or other documented findings of self-evaluation in all management bodies for the sake of the autonomous and responsible management of activities and the running of the higher education institution, the quality provision of study programmes and the development of the latter.

### 3.1.8. ESG 2.8: SYSTEM-WIDE ANALYSES

SQAA regularly monitors the development and quality culture in the Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education area. The two reports on monitoring, assessing and assuring quality in the Slovene higher education area, one for 2007 and 2008, and the other for 2009, prepared within the Senate for Evaluation at CHERS, have been published. The main purpose of these documents was to offer, on the basis of performed analyses, insights into the functioning of external evaluation system, examples of good practice and adopted measures to everyone interested. The analysis of the self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges has been intended to encourage improvement of internal quality systems. The reports were also intended for bodies, responsible for preparing and amending legislation in the

field of higher education, and they offered guidelines for further development and strengthening of the role of students and external stakeholders in the self-evaluation procedures of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. Both documents are publicly accessible on the SQAA website. Due to frequent amendments of ZViS, understaffing in the first year of the SQAA operation, organisational changes, delays in dealing with the applications and late adoption of the Accreditation Criteria, the preparation of meta-report for the period of the last three years (2010–2012) is planned for the end of 2013. The meta-report shall be prepared on the basis of analysis of the quality system in the Slovenian higher education area – based on the analysis of collected self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, surveys on satisfaction with the SQAA operation, surveys on satisfaction with the external evaluations, and based on the analysis of joint reports of the groups of experts and other collected data.

### **3.2.SQAA AND ESG 3**

#### **3.2.1. ESG 3.1: USE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

SQAA is constantly verifying efficiency and applicability of the established quality assurance system for higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, thus the Accreditation Criteria have been amended and supplemented several times. In the self-evaluation procedure, SQAA has also been thoroughly assessing the adequacy and applicability of the Accreditation Criteria for stakeholders. Based on the findings, the Criteria are being revised; the revision is in its final phase. In addition, the SQAA Manual for Experts was revised (Annex 9), while in the first half of 2013, the updated training programme for experts will be prepared.

The external quality assurance procedures are consistently used; higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges are familiar with them and on the basis thereof and in accordance with the Accreditation Criteria (Articles 14 and 32) and Evaluation Criteria (Article 15), they are developing their own internal quality system.

SQAA examines whether a higher education institution regularly monitors the provision of a study programme (by surveying and other procedures of monitoring students and graduates, and the student workload according to ECTS – see ETSC Criteria) and, based on the findings, adequately develops, improves and supplements the study process or study programme. One of the areas of assessment in the procedure of initial accreditation or re-accreditation is the area of students, defined in more detail in Article 12 (initial accreditation) and Article 30 (re-accreditation) of the Accreditation Criteria. It is envisaged that in its application for accreditation the higher education institution indicates anticipated competences and learning outcomes, which graduates of an individual study programme are going to acquire. The higher education institution must prove that the rules (criteria) for assessing students are clearly defined and published (syllabus must contain methods of assessment and knowledge examination, including the proportion of each method). It must also publish a regulation in which methods of student assessment are clearly defined.

One of the areas of assessment for the initial accreditation or re-accreditation is also human resources, mainly higher education teachers and assistants (Articles 11 and 29 of the Accreditation Criteria). SQAA adopted the Minimum Standards for the Election to

Titles, to which all higher education institutions have to conform. They also have to provide for permanent pedagogical qualification of teachers.

Verifying conditions for functioning and provision of study programmes (Articles 17 to 20 of the Accreditation Criteria): besides data supporting the provision of material conditions (ICT, library, suitable premises for provision of study programmes, etc.), the institutions also have to provide counselling to students (tutoring system, care for students with special needs, etc. as is specifically stated in the articles referring to students).

Information system and public information: in the accreditation procedure, the institutions have to prove that they have an adequate ICT system established which offers support for analysis of study (transition rate, employability of graduates, students' satisfaction with the study, effectiveness of teachers, students' profile, costs and resources provided for teaching, and indicators of the institution's success). They also have to prove that they regularly inform the interested public about their work (e.g. publication of self-evaluation report and other reports on the operation of the institution), and that all data on the study programme and institution are publicly accessible.

Quality assurance system (Article 14 of the Accreditation Criteria): In the accreditation procedure, higher education institutions have to prove permanent concern for quality assurance (regular self-evaluation, and monitoring and constant improving of quality based on documented findings), innovation and development orientation.

### **3.2.2. ESG 3.2: OFFICIAL STATUS**

SQAA was founded with the Resolution on the Founding of SQAA under Article 51.e. of ZViS by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. It began to work in March 2010, since CHERS ceased to exist on 28 February 2010.

SQAA is a legal entity under public law, and a direct non-governmental budget spending authority in accordance with the regulations from the area of public finance. The founder of SQAA is the Republic of Slovenia, and the founder's rights and obligations are exercised by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia.

ZViS determines that SQAA shall be autonomous and independent in its actions. It shall be bound by the principles of professionalism, impartiality, legality and political neutrality.

The tasks and competences of SQAA are set out in Article 51.f of the ZViS and Article 8 of the Resolution on the Founding of SQAA, i.e. expert and development tasks in higher education and regulatory tasks for external quality assurance in higher education and higher vocational education. Accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes, and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges, are part of external quality assurance. Upon granted accreditation, study programmes become state-approved. SQAA performs statutory duties in the public interest, namely with the aim to provide for continuous, expert and independent assistance in constant improvement of quality in higher education.

The SQAA bodies are the following: the SQAA Council, the Appeal Committee and the Director.

SQAA has a full membership in the European Consortium for Accreditation – ECA and Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – CEENQA (it has inherited the membership in both associations from CHERS).

### **3.2.3. ESG 3.3: ACTIVITIES**

The main activities of SQAA (Article 51.f ZViS) are related to accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges. SQAA assumed the stated activities from CHERS (mainly from the Senate for Accreditation and the Senate for Evaluation).

Accreditations in 1994, initially without site visits of the higher education institutions, mark the beginning of quality assurance system in Slovenia. Once the NCQHE was founded, a strong emphasis was given to preparation of criteria for evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes, and to encouragement of higher education institutions to regularly use self-evaluation procedures and write annual reports. In 2006, the first pilot external evaluations were performed. By transferring the tasks (external evaluation) from NCQHE to the Senate for Evaluation at CHERS, the site visits of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges have been systematically introduced to the system of external quality assurance. The assessments were performed by the group of experts, in which the representatives of students, the Slovenian experts from the area of higher education, experts from the business sector or non-business sector and foreign experts were included. During this period, the Senate for Evaluation at CHERS has also been collecting and analysing self-evaluation reports of institutions / colleges and publishing the analyses in its reports. And, the Senate for the Accreditation has begun performing site visits of premises and equipment as part of the initial accreditation procedures of private higher education institutions. Once established, SQAA assumed tasks, related to accreditation and evaluation, from CHERS. It also upgraded the system of external quality assurance by organising training of experts more regularly.

Accreditations and evaluations are carried out regularly.

In addition to the above stated activities, SQAA performs other activities, set out by the Resolution on the Founding of SQAA, as follows:

- to maintain publicly available records of accredited higher education institutions and study programmes;
- to cooperate with higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, counselling, and promoting self-evaluations;
- to cooperate with international institutions or bodies for quality assurance in higher education;
- to carry out development tasks in the field for which it was founded.

In the context of self-evaluation, all stakeholders in the Slovenian higher education area participated in the overall assessment of SQAA, i.e. from the perspective of organisation of work, professionalism, compliance with regulations and conducting procedures. Experts who assessed higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and study programmes, were also assessed. The more detailed analysis is presented in Annex 1.

Two external evaluations of SQAA are planned for 2013; the first is going to be performed by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) due to participation in the MULTRA project, while at the end of the year, the external evaluation of ENQA

Association due to assessment of compliance with ESG and membership in ENQA, is planned.

### **3.2.4. ESG 3.4: RESOURCES**

#### **3.2.4.1. Human resources**

SQAA began its work in March 2010 with 10 employees (5 members of the staff in the Quality Department, 4 members of the staff in the General Affairs Department, and the Acting Director). On 31 December 2012, SQAA had 19 employees. The salaries of 9 employees are financed from the national budget, while the other 10 are employed through the ESF project (European Social Fund, hereinafter: ESF). At the beginning of 2013, employment of two additional members of the staff is planned, while employment of another one is planned. All three shall be financed from the ESF funds. In the first half of the 2013, there should be 22 members of the staff employed in total. Since the ESG project shall be finished by the end of 2014, the SQAA management announced in the human resources plan for 2013 and 2014 that more funds will have to be provided in the budget for salaries by 2015.

Adequate qualification and professional competence of employees for professional and efficient work is the rationale of human resources policy. The systematisation of workplaces with specified requirements to fill a vacancy and description of tasks at this position is given in the Act on Internal Organisation and Systematisation of Workplaces within the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency.

In their work, the employees have to consistently observe all valid and binding legal acts and keep track of developments and changes. Also, they act in accordance with rules of profession, and must constantly train and improve their expertise, whereby the conditions for their professional development and training is provided for by the Director.

Especially in 2012, the staff has been extremely engaged. In addition to the SQAA fundamental activity, related to external quality assurance system or conduct of accreditation and evaluation procedures, the operation in the fields related to the SQAA self-evaluation, inter-sectoral and international cooperation strengthened as follows:

- collection and analysis of self-evaluation reports, analysis of reports of groups of experts, and analysis of surveys performed on satisfaction with the SQAA operation;
- the Manual for Experts has been prepared, and the training of experts is being revised;
- participation in the group of Bologna experts and in the group for forming the Slovenian qualifications framework (SQF), have strengthened;
- ZViS Amendment Proposal has been prepared; the amendments to the Accreditation Criteria are in the final phase;
- strengthening of international cooperation and preparation for the establishment of the comprehensive SQAA information system.

Moreover, the staff participated in different conferences, workshops and trainings both at home and abroad. In the future, we will strive for even closer cooperation and exchange of staff, also with other agencies for quality assurance in the European higher education area.

In the beginning of 2012, SQAA surveyed its employees for the first time. The survey was a means for them to express their opinions on interpersonal relationships, motivation, possibilities for career development, organisation, and satisfaction with the SQAA management and functioning of the SQAA Council. The analyses performed in time of first management show general dissatisfaction with the organisation, management and operation of SQAA, poor motivation of the staff (except in three cases, in which members of the staff gave to all statements in the survey grade 5, i.e. "I completely agree"), poorer possibilities for professional education and training, lack of information, etc. Almost all members of the staff have shown great commitment to high-quality of their work, and willingness to undertake further efforts when required. Although the surveys on satisfaction of employees have not been repeated yet, the replacement of the first management resulted in significant improvement of relationships between the employees, management and the SQAA Council, and of the relationship between SQAA and stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education. The efficiency of members of the staff improved, and the conflicts and communication noise reduced. Externally, SQAA actively participates in the preparation of the ZViS amendment proposals and once again in international projects and in the group of Bologna experts as well as in the preparation of the Slovenian qualifications framework.

Annual staff interviews with the Director and method of interviewing are defined in more detail in the SQAA Quality Manual (Annex 7). The objective is to assess and review the work performed in the previous year (including the method of work and relationships between members of the staff), and to draw up the work plan for the next year including anticipated results.

Recently, employees have been actively participating in the management, particularly by means of the following:

- recommendations and comments on regular meetings;
- participation in debates on the ZViS amendment proposals;
- active participation in preparation of the SQAA important documents and legal acts;
- active participation in the SQAA self-evaluation.

The integrity plan is a documented process of planning, implementing, monitoring, reviewing and taking action in managing risks of corruption and other non-ethical conduct within an individual institution. According to the Integrity and Prevention of Corruption Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 69/2011-UPB2; hereinafter: ZIntPK), SQAA is also obliged to draw up the integrity plan. Thus, a working group was appointed to examine risk factors in the SQAA organisational environment. They were examined in the following three areas: organisational conditions (transparency and quality of regulations and internal acts), staff (professional knowledge and ethical conduct in implementing laws and other regulations) and work processes (their organisation and course). The established risks, including the proposed corrective actions, holders and deadlines for their implementation (the risk registry) have been confirmed by the management on 25 May 2012. To monitor the integrity plan, a plan administrator has been appointed who reports on the implementation of integrity plan to the management. The integrity plan shall be redrawn every two years.

For the SQAA staff, the Code of Ethics for Civil Servants applies (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 8/2001), the aim of which is to build and preserve high professional and ethical standards of the employees, strengthen loyalty to the Agency,

transparency and accountability of its operation and social standing. A draft of the Code of Ethics for the SQAA Experts is also being prepared.

#### **3.2.4.2. Financial resources**

SQAA is a direct non-governmental budget spending authority. Until 2014, it will be financed in part from the EU (ESF) funds. The financial resources for SQAA to implement the planned activities are integration and project ones as follows:

- the first come from the national budget and include the budgetary part of the total and a part upon the activation of project funds (15%);
- the latter come from ESF (85%), and are intended solely for reimbursement of costs related to accreditations and external evaluations;

It should be emphasised that all costs of accreditations and external evaluations, carried out by SQAA in the Republic of Slovenia, are wholly borne by SQAA (salaries of employees, meeting fees for members of the SQAA Council and Appeal Committee, material costs, costs of groups of experts and training of the candidates for entry in the SQAA register of experts, cooperation and participation in the meetings of working groups, inter-sectoral groups, international working groups, and participation at international conferences, workshops, etc.).

In 2012, the SQAA budgetary resources reduced for 32 % due to the general national saving, i.e. from € 823,954 to € 565,495 mainly for the items of quality, investments and materials costs. In addition, the ESF funds have also been significantly reduced in the first half of 2012.

Despite a variety of austerity measures, adopted by SQAA and by which the use of budgetary resources has already been reduced in amending budget in 2011 and also at the beginning of 2012 (i.e. more or less limited to payment of necessary monthly expenditures), the funds available at the end of May 2012 would not be sufficient for the implementation of fundamental activities.

The significant reduction of both the budget and ESF funds would result in SQAA not carrying out the legally prescribed tasks, above all accreditations and evaluations. The two responsible ministries have been called upon by the SQAA management to improve the financial situation several times; eventually, the management succeeded. Already in June 2012, SQAA acquired additional EUR 432,107.19 from the ESF funds (in total, there were EUR 912,188.19 available for 2012), with the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, that were sufficient for non-interrupted implementation of all tasks. In addition, SQAA acquired by negotiations additional EUR 41,720.00 from the budget at the end of 2012, whereby all liabilities towards members of the SQAA Council have been settled, the rent and operating costs paid, and all necessary licensed equipment bought.

#### **3.2.4.3. Information and communication resources**

When SQAA was established, MHEST was temporary providing IT support, but since October 2011, SQAA has been independent in terms of IT.

The document management system currently in use is Lotus Notes SPIS 4 which is free of charge.

The plans for the future pertain to the financial situation of SQAA, and area mainly concerned with the purchase of new hardware and replacement of work stations.

SQAA is already using standardised electronic form for applications for accreditation and external evaluation to be submitted and dealt with. This form enables monitoring of the state (status) of individual applications and communication between the staff and applicants regarding possible weaknesses related thereto, but some difficulties are occurring. Both the applicants and staff are pointing out the weaknesses of the electronic form or electronic submission and dealing with the applications in procedures. The current design of the electronic operation does not enable essential updating of the system. For more transparent and safer operation of higher quality, a thoroughly modified electronic form is required to remedy weaknesses and enable continuous development and updating in accordance with the requirements and nature of the work performed by SQAA. Further development was precisely outlined in 2012 as follows:

- based on the obtained experience, the procedures related to dealing with the applications for accreditations and external evaluations and for reporting information to other stakeholders (applicant – SQAA – MESCS) were drawn up in detail. The provider was selected (under the legislation defining public procurement) to transform the requirements of SQAA into adequate elaborate and estimate the value of works, being the basis for implementation of public procurement (under the Public Procurement Act – ZJN-2);
- it is planned for the public procurement to be implemented by the end of 2013 (preparation of the tender documentation, production of elaborate and selection of provider). Electronic form should be prepared by the beginning of 2014.

SQAA set up its website in March 2012. It contains all necessary information on the SQAA operation and public records that are kept up to date. The website is still being improved. For reasons of better transparency, the archive has been formed, in which all publications on the website are saved.

### 3.2.5. ESG 3.5: MISSION STATEMENT

The SQAA strategic documents have been harmonised with the SQAA staff before they were adopted by the SQAA Council. To this end, there was a consultation of employees with the SQAA Council members on the strategy, mission, vision and values of SQAA organised at the beginning of March of 2011. The harmonised mission, vision and values of SQAA are the following:

#### **Mission**

The Agency provides for development and operation of the quality assurance system in the Slovenian higher education area. It operates responsibly, both formally and substantially, and counsels all stakeholders and participants in tertiary education in line with the European and global directions of development.

#### **Vision**

The Agency shall, with its system of quality assurance development, contribute to the higher education in Slovenia being of high quality in terms of education and research, internationally recognisable, competitive and equally integrated in the global higher education area.

## Values



For targeted realisation of its mission, vision and values, SQAA prepared the SQAA Strategy for the period 2011–2016 (hereinafter: Strategy) – Annex 8.

Strategic development pillars of SQAA are the following.

- quality = (self-)responsibility;
- professionalization of quality assessment;
- building of trust in the national quality assurance system and in SQAA;
- being international – following the international standards and admission of SQAA to the European quality associations and their activities, and cooperation with related foreign agencies.

The fundamental strategic objectives by the end of 2016 arise from the purpose of the SQAA establishment, current events, objectives of quality assurance and development in the international and national environment, and are following guidelines of the National Education Programme (NPHE) 2011–2020. They are as follows:

	development and functioning of the quality assurance system in the Republic of Slovenia
	monitoring progress and strengthening quality culture in higher education
	presenting the role, importance and quality of SQAA operation in public for better recognition
	co-creating and developing higher education policy in the field of quality
	encouraging the quality of transnational education
	admission of SQAA to the international associations (ENQA and EQAR)
	providing high quality counselling services of SQAA by professionally trained personnel.

In the period until 2013, the SQAA operation will mainly focus on the following:

- participating in development of higher education in Slovenia;
- transformation of the quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education; and
- further development of the SQAA quality assurance system.

SQAA will verify implementation of the SQAA Strategy at the end of each calendar year, and precisely examine causes of possible deviations from planned activities.

### 3.2.6. ESG 3.6: INDEPENDENCE

SQAA is autonomous and independent in its actions. It is bound by the following principles:

	professionalism;	
	impartiality;	
	legality and;	
	political neutrality.	

The purpose of the SQAA operation is as follows:

	quality assurance in higher education;
	professionalization of quality assessment;
	building trust into the quality assessment system;
	operating in line with the European standards, especially following the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), prepared by ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESU.

The SQAA Council, as the highest decision-making body, is bound to independence. In accordance with Article 51.h of ZViS, the rectors and vice-chancellors of universities, deans, members of senates of universities, of the universities' members or of private higher education institutions or other organisations providing higher education, and headmasters or directors of higher vocational colleges, may not be appointed to the SQAA Council. Thus, the independence of SQAA is also shown in the procedure for appointment of the SQAA Council members, in which 11 members are appointed by diverse stakeholders in higher education as follows:

- three members are appointed by the Rectors Conference,
- one member is appointed by representative association of private higher education institutions,
- one member is appointed by the representative association of higher vocational colleges,
- two members are appointed by the representative organisation of students in cooperation with the student councils,
- one member is appointed by the representative employers' associations by agreement,
- one member is appointed by the representative unions from the field of higher education by agreement,
- two members are appointed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia based on public invitation, namely one from among the experts in the field of higher education or its quality assurance who study or work in the Republic of Slovenia,

and the other one from among the experts in the field of higher education or its quality assurance who study or work abroad.

The SQAA Council members are appointed for the term of six years, while the student representatives for the term of two years. Student's term is prematurely terminated in case he / she loses student status. An individual member may be re-appointed, but for maximum two consecutive terms. The members appoint the President and Vice President of the SQAA Council from among themselves. Upon the SQAA Council's constitution, half of non-student members are appointed for the term of three years. The SQAA Council selects members with three-year term by lot. Once the three-year term of members selected by lot is over, new members are appointed in accordance with Article 51.h of ZViS. In carrying out their tasks and decision-making, the members of the SQAA Council follow the principles of preventing conflicts of interests and impartiality. To this end, they sign a special statement binding them to respect the principles set out in this Article. In case of possible impartiality or conflict of interests, the SQAA Council members exclude themselves from discussions and voting on matters.

To ensure independence and impartiality, the Council members exclude themselves from discussion and voting in procedures regarding higher education institutions at which they work or study programmes in which they participate. Rules of Procedure of the SQAA Council do not determine in which cases the SQAA Council members should exclude themselves. Nevertheless, the analysis of cases of exclusion shows that the SQAA Council members have been excluding themselves consistently. Some members of the SQAA Council excluded themselves more frequently than others, mainly depending on their involvement in matters which were discussed and decided on.

In average, there were 5 cases of exclusion per session; until 59<sup>th</sup> session of the SQAA Council session (until December 2012), there were 161 cases of exclusion in total.

Statement of conflict of interest prevention and impartiality is also signed by experts before their entry in the register of experts; in addition, they are asked to declare possible conflict of interests or impartiality in the assessed matter before their appointment to the group of experts.

In accordance with ZUP, the same principle applies for the SQAA staff. In all cases, the merits of the conflict of interests can be a reason for exclusion of an expert, member of the staff or member of the SQAA Council from the procedure, and grounds for appeal.

In June 2011, the SQAA Council was informed about the pressure exercised on experts for the first time. So far, the SQAA Council dealt with a few cases like this, and some in which the applicant did not agree with the appointed group of experts, mainly on the grounds of partiality. It has granted one request to exclude experts on the grounds of partiality and non-compliance with the criteria in external evaluation to date. Namely, it has adopted decision to exclude the group of experts and appoint a new one.

Once the group of experts is appointed, the applicant is informed about its members. During the entire conduct of procedure, the applicant has the possibility to request exclusion of an individual expert on grounds of partiality or reasonable doubt in his / hers professionalism. The request for exclusion of an expert is decided by the SQAA Council.

In event of conflict of interests between the SQAA Council members, individual members exclude themselves from discussion and voting.

The independence of SQAA is also evident by the method of its financing, since it is a direct non-governmental budget spending authority.

### **3.2.7. ESG 3.7: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE CRITERIA AND PROCESSES USED BY THE AGENCIES**

Pursuant to Article 51.f of ZViS, SQAA set out the procedures and criteria for external evaluation and accreditation, and other criteria. In accordance with Article 51.e of ZViS, SQAA decides on individual rights and requests of clients following the procedure set out in ZUP.

All criteria and procedures which the SQAA Council harmonised with stakeholders in higher education and adopted are published. Internal quality assurance procedures of higher education institutions are in accordance with the Accreditation Criteria defined in more detail in the Quality Manual. Self-evaluation reports are the basis for deciding on the applications for re-accreditation or issuing opinions on compliance with standards laid down by law for higher vocational colleges. As a rule, in the accreditation and external evaluation procedures, the groups of experts are appointed to carry out assessments (except in changes of study programmes or transformations of higher education institutions, for which the appointment of the group of experts is not always necessary). In the procedures of re-accreditation and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, site visits are mandatory. Once the assessment is carried out, the group of experts prepares the joint report which is one of the fundamental supporting documents for decision-making by the SQAA Council.

The reports of the groups of experts have not been published yet, however, the decisions adopted by the SQAA Council are published.

The process of decision-making by the SQAA Council is set out in Article 44 (initial accreditation) and Article 48 (re-accreditation) of the Accreditation Criteria. The procedure for accreditation is a two-step procedure; namely against the decisions adopted by the SQAA Council as the body of first instance, an appeal may be submitted to the body of second instance, i.e. Appeal Committee. The Appeal Committee is appointed by the SQAA Council based on public invitation, and is composed of three members, whereby each member has a deputy. The deputy replaces the member in the decision-making process in case of his / her absence or exclusion. The conditions for appointment of the Committee member are laid down in Article 51.j of ZViS.

The Appeal Committee decides in appeals against the following:

- decisions adopted by the SQAA Council in the procedures for accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes,
- decisions adopted by the SQAA Council on granting consent to transformation of higher education institutions and changes of study programmes.

If the appeal is upheld, the matter is returned to the SQAA Council for readjudication. Decision of the Appeal Committee is complete. Judicial dispute (judicial procedure) may be initiated against it.

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the SQAA Appeal Committee, the work of the Committee is public; this is assured by the publication of decisions on the SQAA website.

### **3.2.8. ESG 3.8: ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURES**

All decision adopted by the SQAA Council pursuant to ZViS (Article 51.f) are published on the SQAA website. All acts of the SQAA Council, annual reports on work and analyses of SQAA are also public. In this connection, the SQAA Council follows the principle of transparency and accessibility. The Director submits the report on work and operation of SQAA to the founder once a year, until 31 May at the latest. This report is also regularly published on the website.

In 2012, SQAA prepared the Self-evaluation Report; in accordance with the SQAA Quality Manual. The report will be prepared each year and will be the basis for further improvements and remedy of established weaknesses. SQAA will regularly publish these reports on its website.

SQAA adopted its SQAA Quality Manual (Annex 7) in 2011. The main purpose of the SQAA Quality Manual is to provide for the SQAA quality system to be constantly established and assured, with a special emphasis on the development of quality culture.

## **4. FINAL ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The purpose of the SQAA self-evaluation is to:

- gain insight into how successfully and effectively internal processes at SQAA are conducted;
- assess implementation of the priority strategic objectives set by SQAA until 2013;
- evaluate implementation of the second and third part of ESG;
- specify recommendations to improve the SQAA operation.

Insight into how successful and efficient the SQAA operation was is provided by an in-depth presentation of its activity in Chapter 2 of this Report and by the presentation of implementation of the second and third part of ESG in Chapter 3.

This chapter indicates the implementation of the priority strategic objectives set by SQAA until 2013:

1. participating in development of higher education in Slovenia;
2. transformation of the quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education;
3. establishment and development of the quality assurance system of SQAA.

Recommendations to improve the SQAA operation have been defined pursuant to the above objectives.

For each strategic objective, activities carried out to achieve it are indicated in brief; they are presented in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3 of this Report. Finally, recommendations that could contribute to improved SQAA operation and more successful achievement of each strategic objective are provided.

Recommendations for improvement are based on the findings from the SQAA annual reports on work and on opinions of different stakeholders thereon. Overview of the implementation of tasks defined in the action plan also constitutes an important basis for the recommendations. This is how SQAA gained an opportunity for critical self-reflection.

It should be noted that all strategic objectives of SQAA are closely related. E.g. activities carried out to achieve a particular strategic objective had a(n) (in)direct impact on other activities and on the implementation of other strategic objectives.

#### **4.1. First strategic objective until 2013: participating in development of higher education in Slovenia**

This subsection lists activities implemented to achieve the first priority strategic objective of SQAA until 2013, its assessment and recommendations for improvement.

<b>IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES FROM 2010 TO 2012</b>	
<b>Statutory and implementing acts</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ preparation of proposals for ZViS amendment, which were subsequently submitted to MESCS</li> <li>▪ preparation of proposals for ZVSI amendment, which were subsequently submitted to MESCS</li> <li>▪ presentation of the opinion and proposals to MESCS and the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia regarding the ZViS amendment</li> <li>▪ preparation of proposals for the ZviS amendment in the part governing transnational higher education (TNHE) and their submission to MESCS</li> </ul>
<b>Cooperation with stakeholders</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ organisation of a symposium on the subject of quality assurance (2012)</li> <li>▪ presentation of the SQAA activity at various events (visiting lectures, conferences, seminars)</li> <li>▪ strengthening participation in national project groups, bodies and inter-sectoral groups (National Teams of Bologna Experts, National Group for Preparing National Qualifications Framework)</li> <li>▪ regular organisation of working sessions with different higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges</li> </ul>
<b>ASSESSMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FIRST STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE</b>	
As far as the first strategic objective relating to the participation in the development of higher education in Slovenia is concerned, SQAA succeeded in achieving it through various activities. Nevertheless, these activities should be further pursued in the future and even reinforced.	
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ further active participation in amendments of important legal acts</li> <li>▪ improving the SQAA quality manual</li> <li>▪ organisation and participation in different quality assurance-related events</li> <li>▪ periodical meetings with all stakeholders</li> </ul>

#### 4.2. Second strategic objective until 2013: quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES FROM 2010 TO 2012
<p><b>Accreditation procedures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 407 accreditation decisions were adopted (initial accreditations and re-accreditations)</li> <li>▪ 7 opinions on compliance with standards laid down by law for higher vocational colleges</li> <li>▪ regular publishing of final decisions in accreditation and evaluation procedures</li> <li>▪ prompt reporting on the accredited institutions and study programmes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Adoption and revision of acts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 15 acts adopted</li> <li>▪ the Accreditation Criteria revised</li> <li>▪ the form revised</li> </ul>
<p><b>Training of experts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ register of experts established and regularly updated</li> <li>▪ manual for experts prepared and adopted</li> <li>▪ five training sessions and two conferences for experts carried out</li> <li>▪ manual for experts thoroughly revised and presented to the SQAA experts at the all-day conference</li> </ul>
<p><b>External quality assurance system</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ SQAA autonomy preserved</li> <li>▪ analysis of questionnaires and opinions of all higher education stakeholders on the external quality assurance system performed</li> <li>▪ self-evaluation reports of the institutions collected</li> <li>▪ reports of the groups of experts analysed</li> </ul>
ASSESSMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SECOND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE
<p>The above activities of SQAA clearly show the efforts to achieve the priority strategic objective relating to the quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education and its development. SQAA made great progress in all above-mentioned fields; however, some tasks have not been fully accomplished, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ revision of the criteria and the form are being harmonised by the SQAA Council and the stakeholders. Revision of the criteria is expected to be completed by the middle of 2013;</li> <li>▪ based on the revision of the manual for experts, revision of training for experts is planned by June 2013;</li> <li>▪ as far as collection of self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges is concerned, their quality assurance systems are being analysed, which is expected to be finished by the middle of 2013.</li> </ul> <p>All tasks are planned to be finished in 2013, which is in accordance with the strategic objective and the deadline specified for its implementation.</p>
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ interpretation of the Accreditation Criteria</li> <li>▪ simplification of procedures related to the Accreditation Criteria and the Evaluation Criteria</li> <li>▪ publication of reports by groups of experts</li> <li>▪ introduction of applicants' action plans to implement recommendations of the groups of experts and thus improve the operation of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges</li> </ul>

- development of analytical and development activities
- preparation of periodical (once to twice per year) substantive analyses on the accreditations granted and external evaluations according to various indicators (in Slovenian and English) and publication of news on the SQAA operation

#### **4.3. Third strategic objective until 2013: establishment and development of the quality assurance system of SQAA**

Preparation of the action plan and implementation of the planned activities show that SQAA began to successfully accomplish the priority strategic objective set until 2013, i.e. establishment and development of quality assurance system of SQAA.

The activities carried out in this field, assessment of implementation of the third priority strategic objective of SQAA until 2013 and recommendations for improvement are listed below.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES FROM 2010 TO 2012
<b>Internal quality assurance measures and procedures</b>
<b>Organisation of work</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ working processes related to accreditation procedures established</li> <li>▪ reorganisation of work resulting in increased efficiency of the SQAA operation</li> <li>▪ harmonisation of conducting procedures among the staff</li> <li>▪ analysis of the available financial and human resources to carry out accreditation procedures</li> </ul>
<b>Information system</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ establishment of information system</li> <li>▪ upgrade of information system</li> <li>▪ setting up the website in Slovenian and English</li> <li>▪ preparation of the SQAA presentation brochure in Slovenian and English</li> <li>▪ selection of the contractor to prepare tender documentation for establishment of comprehensive information system of the Agency</li> </ul>
<b>Self-evaluation and preparation for external evaluation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ adoption of the action plan and implementation of activities</li> <li>▪ preparation of the draft self-evaluation report</li> </ul>
<b>Training of the staff</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ regular participation in conferences and meetings organised by stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education and visits of the staff to foreign agencies</li> </ul>
<b>International cooperation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ reinforcement of cooperation with international organisations by participating in joint projects in the field of quality assurance</li> <li>▪ establishment of cooperation with foreign agencies in accreditation procedures</li> <li>▪ establishment of cooperation with foreign agencies in exchange of experts</li> </ul>
ASSESSMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE THIRD STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE
<p>SQAA made great progress in this strategic objective in all above-mentioned fields; however, some activities have not been fully accomplished, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ establishment of comprehensive information system; public contract will be awarded by the end of 2013 and information system will be established in the beginning of 2014;</li> <li>▪ SQAA presentation brochure will be printed in March 2013.</li> </ul>

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- regular annual self-evaluations and preparation of an action plan to eliminate deficiencies
- regulation of human resources, financial and material resources after 2014
- continuous calibration of the SQAA staff, the Council members and experts in order to strengthen autonomy and reputation of SQAA
- obtaining a management system certificate (e.g. SIQ)
- active inclusion of the SQAA Council members as external observers in site visits to higher education institutions or higher vocational colleges (at least three times per year)
- preparation and adoption of the plan for education and training of the staff in Slovenia and abroad
- strengthening international cooperation (memberships in associations, participation in projects)
- making comparative analyses with foreign agencies
- establishing a web forum for open issues and interactive exchange of opinions among all stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education
- prompt updating of SQAA website (in Slovenian and English)

Based on the analysis of the SQAA operation, the assessment of the set priority strategic objectives of SQAA and the assessment of implementation of the second and third part of ESG, a considerable progress and development in the SQAA operation can be observed.

## LIST OF ANNEXES

Annex 1:	Analysis of surveys 2012
Annex 2:	Tertiary education system in Slovenia
<b>Acts</b>	
Annex 3:	ZViS (Higher Education Act)
<b>Internal acts of SQAA</b>	
Annex 4:	Report on Work and Operation of the Agency in 2011
Annex 5:	2012 Business Report on the Work of the Agency
Annex 6:	Work and Financial Plan for 2012
Annex 7:	SQAA Quality Manual
Annex 8:	SQAA Strategy Summary (2011–2016)
<b>External acts of SQAA</b>	
Annex 9:	SQAA Manual for Experts
<b>Annual reports</b>	
Annex 10:	2007 and 2008 Meta-report
Annex 11:	Report on the Work of Senate 2009

## ANNEX 1

### ANALYSIS OF SURVEYS 2012

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of surveys performed in 2012 as one of the methods to assess satisfaction of all stakeholders with the SQAA operation.

The analysis of the SQAA operation was performed at two levels. The first one included 'internal stakeholders' such as: the SQAA Council, the SQAA experts entered in the register of experts and the SQAA staff. The other level included 'external stakeholders' such as: higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, professional associations and MESCS.

In addition to gaining an insight into the assessment of the SQAA operation as a whole, we also wanted to obtain the assessment of stakeholders related to external evaluation, which constitutes an important element in the re-accreditation procedure of a study programme or a higher education institution and external evaluation of a higher vocational college.

We decided to carry out a quantitative analysis in order to obtain as many respondents as possible. According to the above levels of stakeholders and differences between them, four types of questionnaires adapted to each stakeholder type were prepared.

Even though the analysis was performed in 2012, the questionnaire was not limited to the assessment of the SQAA operation in the past calendar year but was aimed at obtaining the assessment on the entire period of its activity (until July 2012). It should be noted that the assessments concerning the management relate to the first management and reflect the situation from March 2010 to April 2012. Surveys on the satisfaction of the staff with the second management have not been performed but a significant shift in positive direction can be observed, both in the field of the SQAA organisation and management, cooperation with domestic and international stakeholders and in the field of quality system improvement and observing strategic focuses and implementation of their objectives.

The questionnaires were sent to e-mail addresses of all stakeholders. Since four types of questionnaire had been prepared, the methodology associated with the number of respondents is described in more detail in the following chapters.

Findings of the analysis of the SQAA operation are presented below. The first subsection describes the assessment of the SQAA operation from the perspective of the SQAA Council. The second subsection relates to the assessment of the SQAA operation provided by the experts entered in the register. The third subsection includes the assessment by the SQAA staff.

Assessment of satisfaction with the SQAA operation from the perspective of external stakeholders is given in the fourth subsection, also including the assessment of satisfaction with external evaluation both by stakeholders and the SQAA staff.

We are aware that different methods (both quantitative and qualitative) of assessing satisfaction with the work and operation of SQAA will have to be introduced more systematically.

## SATISFACTION OF THE COUNCIL, EXPERTS AND THE SQAA STAFF

### Survey among the SQAA Council members

The purpose of the survey questionnaire was to obtain answers related to certain statements regarding the SQAA operation by the SQAA Council members for the period since the founding of SQAA, i.e. March 2010, until July 2012 when the survey was conducted.

The questionnaire comprised the following thematic areas:

- assessment of satisfaction with the SQAA Council performance;
- assessment of satisfaction with the SQAA Council sessions;
- assessment of contribution of individual members of the SQAA Council;
- assessment of mutual cooperation with SQAA.

Each thematic area included statements with which the SQAA Council agreed or disagreed: Each statement was assessed as follows: 5 – I completely agree, 4 – I agree, 3 – I neither agree nor disagree, 2 – I do not agree, 1 – I completely disagree.

The questionnaire was sent by e-mail to all eleven SQAA Council members in July 2012. It was completed by ten members, which constitutes a 91% response with respect to the SQAA Council composition.

Based on the data analysis, it can be observed that the highest average values (4.4) were given to the thematic area relating to the assessment of the contribution of individual members of the SQAA Council. The lowest average values (2.7) were given to the thematic area relating to the cooperation between the SQAA Council and SQAA.

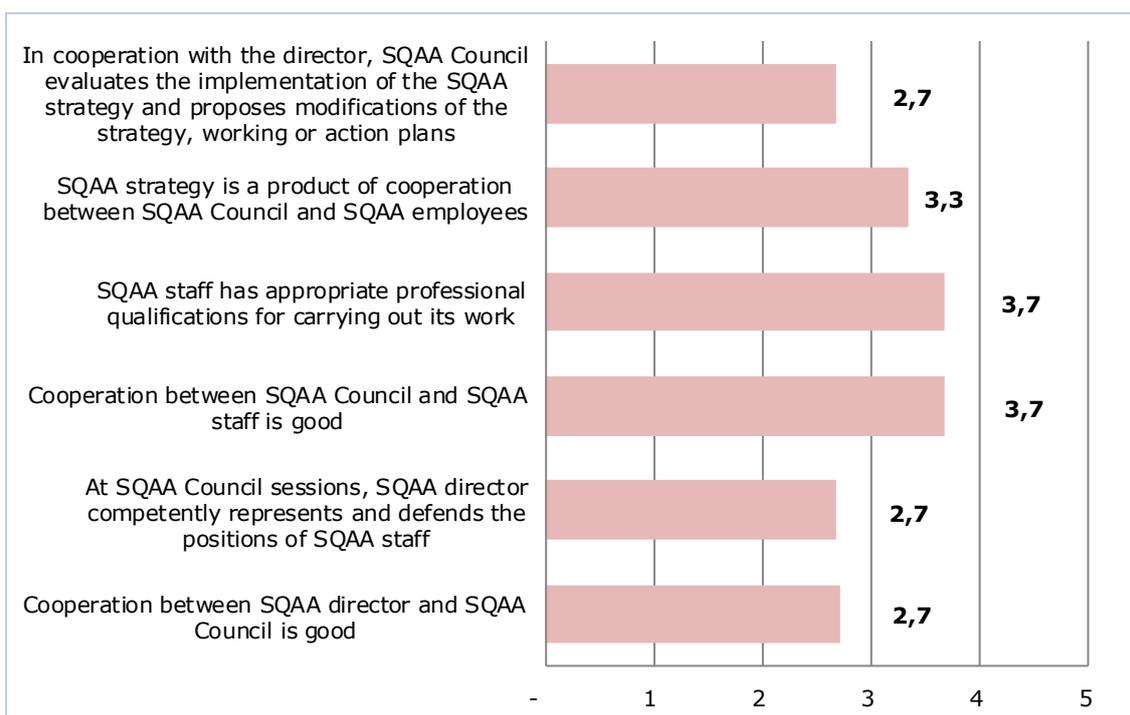
**Graph 1: Assessment of SQAA operation by the SQAA Council according to thematic area**



The data show that the SQAA Council members agree with statements from the thematic area 'assessment of the contribution of individual members of the SQAA Council'. Considering that the statements in this thematic area have a positive connotation such as: 1) I prepare intensely for the sessions and I know exactly what will be discussed and

decided upon; 2) I actively participate in the SQAA Council sessions; 3) I believe that my opinion is taken into account; 4) I am not bound by any decisions, positions or instructions of others in decision-making at the sessions; 5) expert opinions I prepare are helpful for the SQAA Council decision-making; the analysis of answers in this thematic area indicates that the SQAA Council members actively participate in discussions and thoroughly prepare their opinions, which are helpful for the SQAA Council decision-making.

**Graph 2: Assessment of mutual cooperation with SQAA by the SQAA Council**



The lowest average values (2.7) were given to the following three statements: 1) cooperation between the Director and the SQAA Council is good; 2) at the SQAA Council sessions, the Director competently represents and defends the positions of the SQAA staff and provides adequate explanations as to the external operation and representation of the Agency; 3) in cooperation with the Director, the SQAA Council evaluates the implementation of the SQAA strategy and proposes modifications of the strategy, working or action plans. Since the value 2-3 indicates disagreement, it can be established that the SQAA Council members disagreed with the abovementioned statements relating to the activity of the first management and its cooperation with the SQAA Council.

Higher average values (3.7) were given to the statements below: 1) cooperation between the SQAA Council and the SQAA staff is good; 2) the SQAA staff have appropriate qualifications for carrying out their work. The values show that the SQAA Council members neither disagreed nor agreed with the above statements, indicating that there was good cooperation between the SQAA Council and the SQAA staff, but improvements can still be made.

The lowest average values in assessing the satisfaction of the SQAA Council performance were given to the statement 'all stakeholders find the SQAA Council members

trustworthy (2.5). The statement 'the contents of the materials for session is sufficient to be discussed at the session' received average value (3.3).

As far as assessments of satisfaction of members with the SQAA Council sessions are concerned, it can be concluded that all members believed that the sessions were convened in accordance with the annual plan or as required, that adequate technical support was available, that the sessions were conducted in a way allowing for effective discussion, encouraging new ideas and proposals, and that the agendas were well-prepared and items in consistent order.

### **Survey on satisfaction of SQAA experts**

The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about SQAA performance for the period between the establishment of SQAA (i.e. April 2010) and July 2012, when the analysis was conducted. The respondents were experts entered in the register of experts.

The questionnaire was divided into the following thematic areas:

- General satisfaction with SQAA performance<sup>1</sup>;
- assessment of procedures and criteria for initial accreditation and cooperation with SQAA<sup>2</sup>;
- assessment of procedures and criteria for re-accreditation and cooperation with SQAA<sup>3</sup>;

Individual thematic areas contained certain statements in relation to which the experts could express their agreement or disagreement. The respondents rated every statement with a value. The meaning of values was as follows: 5 - I entirely agree, 4 - I agree, 3 - I neither agree nor disagree, 2 - I disagree, 1 - I entirely disagree.

The questionnaire was sent by e-mail in July 2012 to the experts who participated in external evaluations. It was completed by 18 experts which represents a response rate of 15 % considering the number of all experts entered in the registry in July, 2012 (N=118). Three out of 18 experts participated in procedures at the University of Ljubljana, one at the University of Maribor and the rest in the procedures at higher vocational colleges. Most of the procedures were related to site visits to higher education institutions.

In the first thematic area named "general satisfaction with SQAA performance", experts rated appropriate composition of groups of experts (by areas of assessment as well as in terms of experience and competences and the contribution of foreign experts who contributed to better assessment with international experience), practice and a general overview of the application with an average value of 5 (I entirely agree). Only slightly lower (an average value of 4.5) was their assessment of usefulness of the training of experts from the perspective of conducting the assessment which means that the experts agree their training has been useful.

In the second thematic area of the questionnaire where the assessment of procedures and criteria for initial accreditation was assessed, the following statements were rated

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<sup>1</sup> The area was assessed by all experts

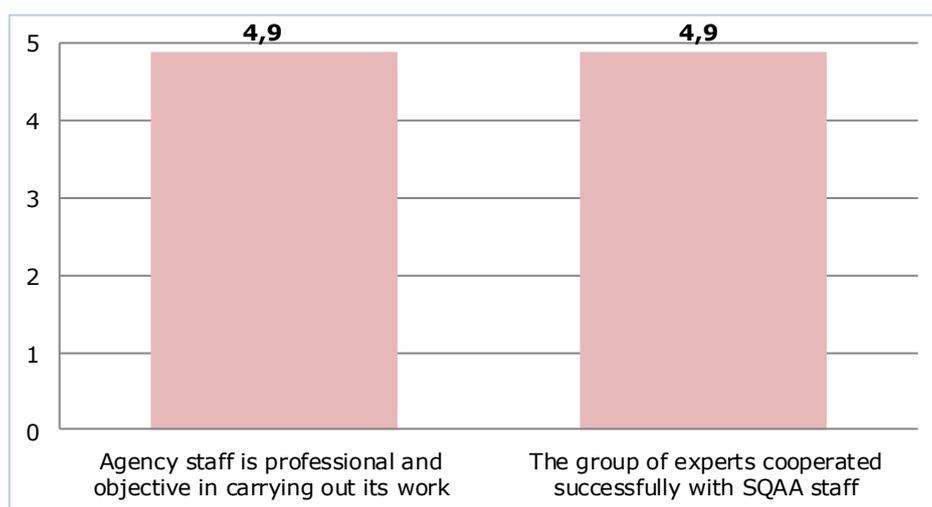
<sup>2</sup> The area was only assessed by experts participating in initial accreditations

<sup>3</sup> The area was only assessed by experts participating in re-accreditation

with an average value of 4.0: 1) assessment procedures in initial accreditation are appropriately prescribed and unambiguous; 2) initial accreditation criteria are clear and useful; 3) guidance for the preparation of reports on the assessment of higher education institutions or study programmes is clear. These average values indicate that the experts agree that initial accreditation procedures and criteria as well as guidance for the preparation of reports are clear and useful.

Experts assessed cooperation with the SQAA staff as very good. They entirely agree (average value 4.8) that materials for assessment of applications were delivered in time, prepared professionally and adequately transparent, that SQAA staff was professional and objective in carrying out their tasks (average value 4.9), that they were always available for explanations and questions during assessments, that they provided useful assistance to the group of experts and, last but not least, that the group of experts successfully cooperated with SQAA staff (average value 4.9).

**Graph 3: Evaluation of SQAA staff by the experts**

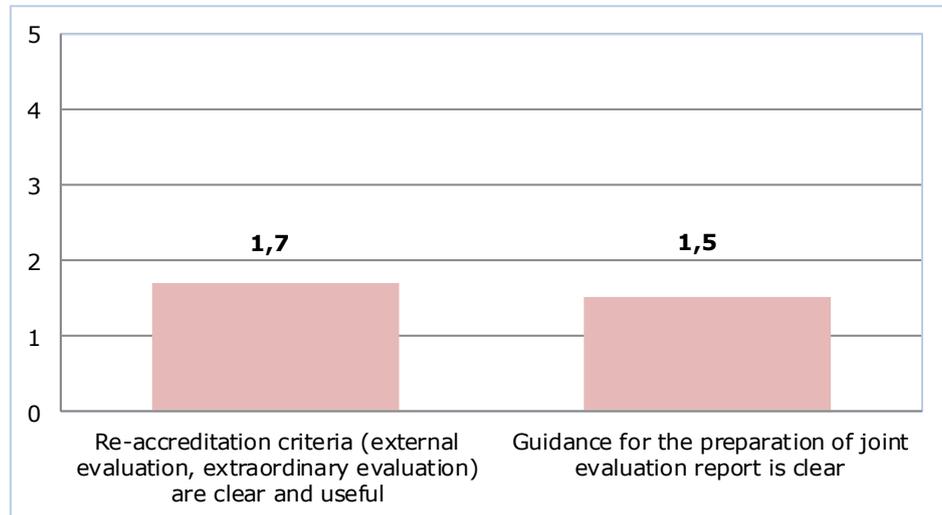


Six out of eleven experts who participated in the site visits within initial accreditation procedures assessed site visits to higher education institutions. They agreed that the quality of implementation of site visits to higher education institutions was of high level (average value 4.0) and that the site visits were carried out in accordance with expectations of higher education institutions.

In the third thematic area, the experts that participated in re-accreditation procedures neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that assessment procedures in re-accreditation or external evaluation (extraordinary evaluation) are appropriately prescribed and unambiguous; however, they agreed with the statement that the group of experts had sufficient time for the preparation of joint evaluation report (average value 5).

Experts (N=6) disagree with the statement that re-accreditation criteria are clear and useful (average value 1.7). They also disagree with the statement that guidance for the preparation of the evaluation report is clear (average value 1.5)

**Graph 4: Assessment of clarity of criteria (re-accreditation and guidance for report preparation)**



### Survey on satisfaction of SQAA staff

The purpose of the questionnaire analysis was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about the operation of SQAA for the period between the establishment of SQAA (i.e. March 2010) and March 2012. The respondents were the SQAA staff. It needs to be pointed out again that the assessment of the performance of the SQAA management relates to the first management and reflects the situation till April 2012 when the new management was appointed.

The questionnaire was divided into the following thematic areas:

- assessment of satisfaction at work and cooperation among the staff;
- attitude towards quality, motivation and enthusiasm;
- career development;
- assessment of Agency's organisation;
- assessment of the attitude towards SQAA Council;
- assessment of the quality and adequacy of information received by the Agency.

Every thematic area included certain statements in relation to which SQAA staff expressed their agreement or disagreement. The respondents rated every statement with a value. The meaning of values was as follows: 5 - I entirely agree, 4 - I agree, 3 - I neither agree nor disagree, 2 - I disagree, 1 - I entirely disagree.

The questionnaire was completed in March 2012 by 19 Agency staff which was 90 % of all staff at that time.

In the first thematic area "evaluation of satisfaction at work and cooperation among employees", the staff rated the statement "I am satisfied with work I carry out" with an average value of 4 (I agree) while they expressed their disagreement with the statement "I am satisfied with the management of SQAA" (average value 1).

In the second thematic area "attitude towards quality, motivation and enthusiasm" the staff rated (I entirely disagree) their familiarity with the decisions adopted by the management and clarity of working tasks and obligations with an average value of 1. They expressed their willingness to accept additional workload (average value 5 - I agree) whenever this is required in relation to their work.

In the third thematic area called "career development" staff expressed their opinion on statements related to evaluation of conditions for training, upgrading knowledge, and criteria, system and possibilities for promotion. Most of the staff disagreed with the statement (average value 1) that a promotion system exists at SQAA, enabling the best staff to be appointed to the best positions.

The fourth thematic area called "evaluation of Agency's organisation" where the staff expressed their opinion as to statements related to organisation of work in the sector they are employed in, working conditions at SQAA in terms of space, equipment, information technology, involvement in SQAA management, organisation of SQAA, etc. The staff rated statements related to organisation of work and involvement in the management and governance of SQAA with the average value of 2 (I disagree).

In the thematic area "attitude towards SQAA Council" the staff agreed with statements related to good cooperation with members of the SQAA Council (average value 4). The staff disagreed with the statement "SQAA Council appreciates the professional work of Agency staff" (average value 2). In the sixth area "assessment of quality and adequacy of information received by the Agency" the staff expressed their disagreement with statements presented (average value 1.5).

## **SURVEY ON SATISFACTION OF STAKEHOLDERS WITH SQAA PERFORMANCE**

The purpose of the questionnaire analysis was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about SQAA performance for the period between SQAA establishment (i.e. March 2010) and July 2012 when the analysis was carried out. The respondents were external stakeholders.

The questionnaire was divided into the following thematic areas:

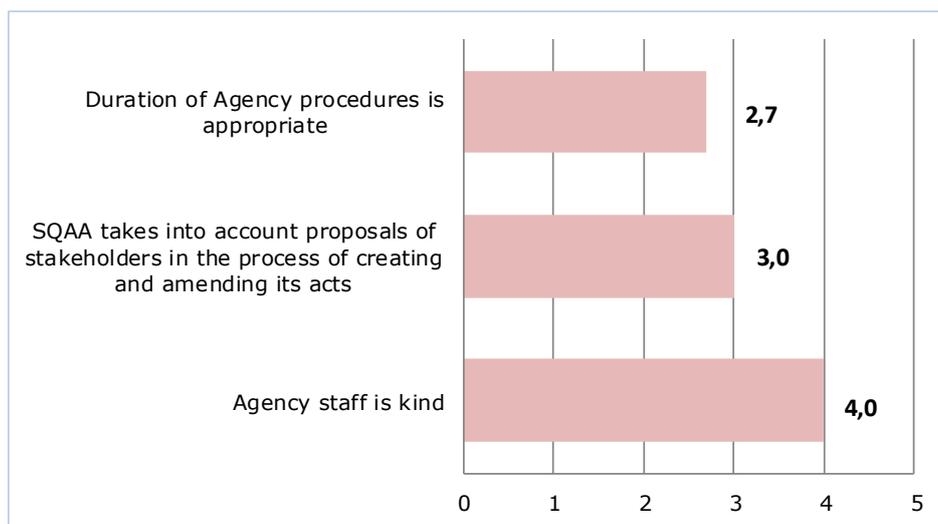
- assessment of SQAA performance;
- assessment of professional performance of groups of experts;
- assessment of satisfaction with SQAA Council performance;
- assessment of satisfaction with SQAA management performance.

Every thematic area included certain statements in relation to which stakeholders expressed their agreement or disagreement. The respondents rated every statement with a value. The meaning of values was as follows: 5 - I entirely agree, 4 - I agree, 3 - I neither agree nor disagree, 2 - I disagree, 1 - I entirely disagree.

In June and July 2012, the questionnaire was distributed to all universities, private higher education institutions, associations of private higher education institutions, the Association of higher vocational colleges of the Republic of Slovenia, Slovenian Student Union, and MESCS. 42 stakeholders completed the questionnaire. Of the returned questionnaires, 7 were sent from universities or university members, 21 from private higher education institutions, 12 from higher vocational colleges, one from state administration and one from a professional association.

The majority of the procedures in which stakeholders cooperated with SQAA (N=22) were associated with the procedure of initial accreditation of a study programme. Slightly less than a half of the above mentioned stakeholders (N=10) also had an experience with re-accreditation procedures, while (N=9) had an experience with the procedure of changing of study programmes. Six stakeholders had an experience only with the submission of the application for re-accreditation, of these 4 were private higher education institutions and 2 were higher vocational colleges.

**Graph 5: Evaluation of SQAA performance - stakeholders**



Based on the analysis of replies within the first area "evaluation of the SQAA performance" we observe that stakeholders (N=42) disagree with the statement that the duration of SQAA procedures is appropriate (average value 2.7). Stakeholders neither disagree nor agree with the statement that "the Agency takes into account opinions and proposals of stakeholders in the process of creating and amending its acts" (average value 3.0).

They neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement "you find the groups of experts trustworthy" (average value 3.0). The highest average value was attributed to the statement "Agency staff is kind" (average value 4.0).

The statements in the area "assessment of professional performance of groups of experts" were rated with an average value of 3.0 which means that they neither agree nor disagree with the following statements: composition of groups of experts is appropriate; groups of experts carry out their work independently and professionally; groups of experts are trustworthy and, last but not least, final reports are objective and summarise the actual situation and findings of groups of experts are useful for the institutions in the further development of their quality systems.

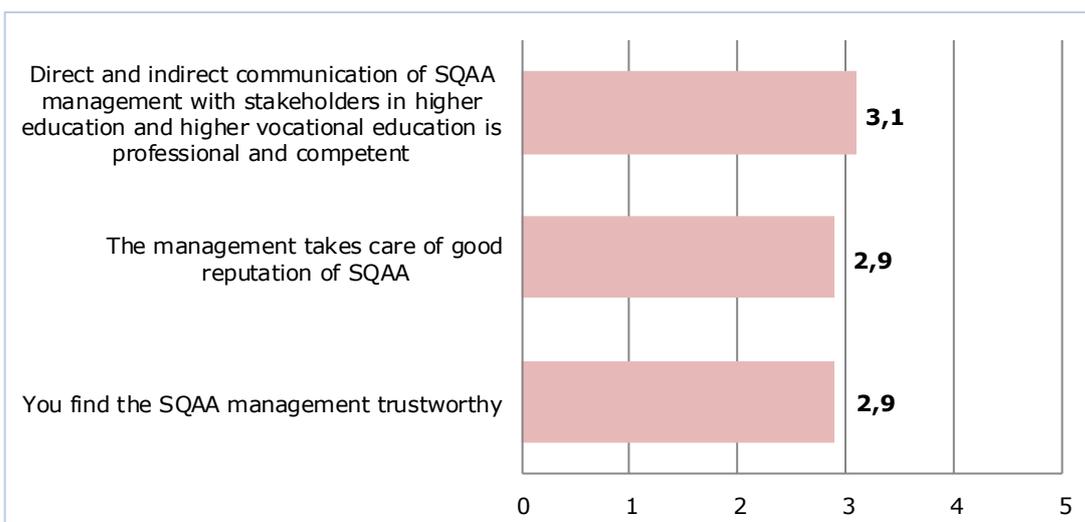
**Graph 6: Evaluation of experts' work by stakeholders**



In the area "evaluation of satisfaction with SQAA Council performance", an average value given by stakeholders as to the work of SQAA Council was 3 (I neither agree nor disagree).

From the table presented below, the attitude of stakeholders towards the first management of SQAA is evident. The average value of 2.9 was given by the respondents to the statement "the management takes care of good reputation of SQAA" and "you find the SQAA management trustworthy".

**Graph 7: Evaluation of SQAA management**



The largest number of suggestions and remarks was given by stakeholders with regard to intelligibility and usefulness of SQAA Council acts. They mostly responded to the questions in the questionnaire as in previous thematic areas, with the average value of 3.

They neither agree nor disagree with the statements that the criteria for initial accreditation or re-accreditation of higher education institutions, their branches and study programmes (also of joint programmes and in the case of issuing consents to agreements for the implementation of transnational education) are intelligible and useful.

They neither agree nor disagree with the statements that Criteria for Transferring and Criteria for Experts are intelligible and useful, that the form and the guidelines for completing the questionnaires are transparent, and that the requested supplements in the procedures of accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes are intelligible and useful.

A higher average value of 4 (I agree) was given to documents "Evaluation Criteria", "ECTS Criteria", "Accreditation Criteria" and "Minimum Standards for the Election to Titles" which are, according to their opinion, intelligible and useful.

## **EXTERNAL EVALUATION SURVEY**

### **The management of higher education institutions / higher vocational colleges and students**

The purpose of the questionnaire analysis was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about external evaluation. The respondents were higher education institutions or higher vocational colleges in which external evaluation has been carried out. Respondents rated every statement with a value from 1 to 5: 5 - very satisfied / I entirely agree and 1 - extremely dissatisfied / I entirely disagree.

The questionnaires were distributed after the completed site visits of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges in June 2012. During the preparation of self-evaluation report, 20 questionnaires were returned by higher education institutions or higher vocational colleges where external evaluation had been carried out.

The average value of responds to the majority of questions was 5. A slightly lower average value (4) can be identified only in relation to familiarity of members of groups of experts with particularities of higher education institutions / higher vocational colleges or the assessed study programmes.

From the replies to the answers it can be assumed that management of the surveyed higher education institutions / higher vocational colleges and students are generally satisfied with external evaluations carried out, planning of site visits and preparation of schedules, informing of higher education institutions / higher vocational colleges with the purpose of evaluation at introductory meetings, suitability of site visit schedules, implementation and duration of interviews, selection of interviewees, selection, intelligibility, order and adaptation of questions posed to all interviewees (also students), equality and opportunities for objective expression of opinions by all interviewees, efficiency, equal cooperation and efforts of the group of experts to identify actual problems, summarising of findings and analysing of the situation, the manner of the presentation of final findings at the final meeting and making of recommendations for improvement.

In descriptive responds, management of higher education institutions / higher vocational colleges generally expressed satisfaction with evaluations carried out, some of them raised the issue of the use of foreign language during the site visits and called for the

improvement of knowledge in the area of higher education. Some respondents expected more concrete recommendations for improvement. Occasionally certain issues were eliminated from the assessment, such as continuation of third-cycle studies, awards and scholarships, some respondents missed the placement of study programmes in the context of the modified educational process paradigm, i.e. assessment of the existing situation with regard to the strategy.

### **SQAA staff**

The purpose of the questionnaire analysis was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about external evaluation. The respondents were members of SQAA staff who were in charge of the procedures of external evaluation of higher education institutions or higher vocational colleges in which external evaluation had been carried out. Respondents rated every statement with a value from 1 to 5: 5 - very satisfied / I entirely agree and 1 - extremely dissatisfied / I entirely disagree.

The questionnaires were distributed after the completed site visits of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges in June 2012. During the preparation of self-evaluation report, 15 questionnaires were completed by members of SQAA staff who were in charge of the procedures of external evaluation of higher education institutions or higher vocational colleges.

Like the representatives of the management of higher education institutions or higher vocational colleges, SQAA staff was also satisfied with the evaluations which were carried out. Most questions were rated with an average value of 4.

On the basis of values with which the presented statements were rated it can be assumed that, with regard to the implementation of external evaluations, the Agency staff is satisfied with the level of preparation of the groups of experts, schedules and planning of site visits, informing of higher education institutions / higher vocational colleges at introductory meetings, selection and order of questions asked, the manner of conducting interviews, selection of interviewees, selection, intelligibility, order and adaptation of questions asked, opportunities for objective expression of opinions, efficiency of the group of experts, efforts of the group of experts to identify actual problems, equal treatment of all interviewees, familiarity of members of the group of experts with particularities of a higher education institution / higher vocational college or a study programme under assessment, correct perception and analysis of the situation, the manner of presentation of final findings at the final meeting, taking into account of opinions of all members of the group of experts during the preparation of final findings and the joint report, correct summarising of findings at the final meeting, their justification and taking into account recommendations of the SQAA staff.

In descriptive replies, the SQAA staff pointed out the issue of key findings presented at the final meeting not being sufficiently concrete and clear, reluctance of foreign experts to participate in evaluations and lack of their familiarity with the higher vocational college system. Some pointed out the lack of coordination and organisation by the president of the group, unequal consideration of opinions of members of the group of experts (a student and a foreign expert) and imposing of one's own opinion on other members of the group of experts. In some cases the SQAA staff pointed out inappropriate qualifications of experts as well as unclear criteria and procedure for assessing distance learning. In certain cases the questions were overly suggestive.



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Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije  
za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

s · q · a · a

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education



*Naložba v vašo prihodnost*

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Evropski socialni sklad

They also pointed out improvisation during the site visits and deviations from the schedule, which, according to their opinion, should be specified in more detail and harmonised while also taking into account particularities of a higher education institution or a higher vocational college. SQAA could give clearer instructions as to site visits and writing of joint reports. Some of the respondents suggested that at the final meeting, objective presentation of findings by using the SWOT matrix would be required. It would make sense to involve foreign experts more in the preparation of site visits and to improve harmonisation within larger groups of experts.

## ANNEX 2:

### TERTIARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN SLOVENIA

#### Higher vocational colleges and higher education institutions

Tertiary education in Slovenia encompasses higher vocational education and higher education. Higher education in Slovenia is regulated by ZViS as follows: it regulates status-related issues of higher education institutions, conditions for carrying out higher education activities; it defines public service in higher education and regulates the manner of its financing. The studies are carried out at universities or their members – faculties, art academies and higher vocational colleges, at the only public faculty and at private higher education institutions. These can merge into an association of private higher education institutions. All public and private higher education institutions must be accredited and entered into the register of higher education institutions at the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (Eurydice). Higher vocational education in Slovenia is regulated by ZVSI. It is carried out by public and private higher vocational colleges. Higher vocational colleges may be independent or organisational units of larger education centres that may also include secondary schools and business to business education centres. The latter enable direct connection with enterprises and contribute to employment of graduates (Eurydice).

Both tertiary education sub-systems are interconnected. Upon fulfilling the conditions, students may transfer from higher vocational study programmes to first-cycle study programmes. Decisions in this regard are made by higher education institutions. Credit transfer system of studies, diploma supplement, accreditation of study programmes and quality system have been implemented in the entire tertiary education (Eurydice). Although higher vocational colleges are defined in ZVSI, conducting of external evaluations of higher vocational colleges is also stipulated in article 51.f of ZViS as one of the SQA tasks beside accreditations and external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes. According to data of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (November 2012), four universities are entered into the register of higher education institutions in the Republic of Slovenia: University of Ljubljana (public university), University of Maribor (public university), University of Primorska (public university), University of Nova Gorica (private university) and international association of universities EMUNI university. 35 private higher educational institutions are entered into the register, of which 1 art academy, 17 faculties and 17 professional colleges. According to data of the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges Secretariat, 47 higher vocational colleges operate in the Republic of Slovenia.

**Table 1: Number of higher vocational colleges and higher education institutions in the Republic of Slovenia (November, 2012)**

	No. of academies	No. of faculties	No. of professional colleges	Total
University of Ljubljana	3	23	/	26
University of Maribor	/	17	/	17
University of Primorska	/	6	/	6
University of Nova Gorica	/	5	2	7
Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI)	/	1	/	1
Private higher education institutions	1	17	17	35
Higher vocational colleges				47
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>139</b>

Source: Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges Secretariat and proper calculation

Under ZViS, universities are autonomous higher education institutions in the fields of science-research, art and education. Their mission is to develop science, professionalism and art. They are multi-disciplinary institutions composed of faculties, art academies and professional colleges, while they may also include research centres, various laboratories, etc. Through the educational process, they enable students to acquire knowledge and competences required for further education or employment. For the establishment of an university, conditions for provision of study programmes in all three cycles and in at least three fields under Frascati classification must be fulfilled.

A faculty carries out scientific-research and educational work in the fields of one or more related or interconnected scientific disciplines and takes care of their development. Conditions for providing study programmes in at least two cycles have to be fulfilled for its establishment.

An art academy carries out artistic and educational work in the fields of one or several related or interconnected artistic disciplines and takes care of their development. Conditions for at least two cycles must be fulfilled for its establishment.

A professional college carries out educational activity in the fields of one or more related or interconnected professions and takes care of their development. Conditions for at least first cycle must be fulfilled for the establishment of a professional college. A professional college may also carry out research activities if so stipulated in the constituent instrument and if it fulfils conditions to do so. If it is established in the accreditation procedure that the college has appropriate higher education teachers and fulfils the conditions for carrying out scientific-research or artistic activities, it may also carry out master's study programmes; otherwise, it may do so only in cooperation with universities, faculties or art academies (Eurydice).

Apart from study programmes for acquiring education, all higher education institutions may also carry out transnational higher education and organise various forms of informal learning, such as courses, summer schools, training programmes, etc. Here they cooperate with other partners from higher education, higher vocational education or the business sector.

### **Higher vocational education and higher education**

The higher education system which was introduced in 1994 was composed of undergraduate and post-graduate studies. Undergraduate studies were composed of higher vocational (3 to 4 years) and university (4 to 6 years) study programmes, while the professional title acquired after graduation was "university B.Sc. ..." and "B.Sc. ...". Post-graduate studies were composed of specialisation (1 to 2 years of professional studies), master's studies (2 years of research-oriented studies) and doctoral studies (4 years of scientific-research work).

With the Bologna declaration which was signed in 1999 by ministers responsible for higher education from nineteen European countries, among them also Slovenia, the tertiary education in Slovenia was entirely changed. In Slovenia, wider interest in the Bologna process and the implementation of the Lisbon strategy, signed in 2000, started to be expressed only after 2002. For the introduction of all recommendations given by the Bologna declaration and the Lisbon strategy, Slovenia had to adopt a series of legal background documents in the area of tertiary education. In December 2003, the Decree on budgetary financing of higher education and other university member institutions from

2004 till 2008 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 72/2004) was adopted. With this Decree, financial autonomy of universities (independence in distributing the funds, human resource management, shaping of norms, quality assurance) increased with a goal to stimulate the restructuring and rationalisation of operation and study programmes and to reorient towards monitoring of results (learning outcomes, qualification of graduates) and quality. In the following year (May 2004), the Act Amending the Higher Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 63/04) was adopted; this was the basis for the implementation of three priority tasks of the Bologna process, thus introducing fundamental changes: 1) adoption of a higher education system with two or three main cycles; 2) introduction of a system with easily recognisable and comparable levels; 3) introduction of the national quality assurance system.

However, during the reading of the Act Amending the Higher Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 63/04) in the parliament, an issue remained open regarding what should be the relation between the graduates of study programmes adopted before the enforcement of this act and the graduates of study programmes under the Bologna declaration. Thus, the Act Amending the Higher Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 94/2006) eliminated the legal void as to the relation between graduates of former and new study programmes. Education under old and new study programmes is clearly classified by the Decree on the introduction and use of classification system of education and training (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 46/2006), as presented in the table below:

**Table 2: Comparison between the levels of education according to "old" and Bologna study programmes**

LEVELS OF EDUCATION ACCORDING TO PREVIOUS STUDY PROGRAMMES	LEVEL	LEVELS OF EDUCATION ACCORDING TO NEW "BOLOGNA" STUDY PROGRAMMES
vocational programmes (up to 1994), professional vocational programmes	<b>6/1</b>	
specialisation after vocational programmes, undergraduate professional programmes	<b>6/2</b>	professional programmes (1st cycle) university programmes (1st cycle)
specialisation after professional higher programmes, university programmes	<b>7</b>	professional master (2nd cycle)
specialisation after university programmes, master of science (BEFORE the name)	<b>8/1</b>	
doctor of science (BEFORE the name)	<b>8/2</b>	doctor of science (3rd Bologna cycle)

Source: Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports

Pursuant to the Act Amending the Higher Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 94/2006):

- the level of education acquired under vocational study programmes adopted before 1 January 1994 and the level of education acquired under professional vocational study programmes adopted before 11 June 2004 (hereinafter: pre-Bologna study programmes) is equal to the level of education acquired under first-cycle Bologna professional higher education study programmes;

- the level of education acquired under pre-Bologna university study programmes is equal to the level of education acquired under second-cycle Bologna study programmes;
- the level of education acquired under pre-Bologna professional higher education study programmes, including the completed specialisation study programme, is equal to the level of education acquired under second-cycle Bologna study programmes;
- the level of education acquired under pre-Bologna master's study programmes and the level of education acquired under previous university study programmes, including the completed specialisation study programme, is equal to the level of education acquired under third-cycle Bologna study programmes;
- the level of education acquired under previous doctoral study programmes is equal to the level of education acquired under third-cycle Bologna study programmes.

The Act Amending the Higher Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 63/04) introduced the three-cycle structure of study programmes. Student workload in study programmes is evaluated by ECTS credits. Every year of a study programme includes 60 ECTS credits. Professional higher education study programmes and university study programmes typically include 180 to 240 ECTS credits and last between three and four years.

Master's study programmes include between 60 and 120 credits and last between one and two years; therefore, the total duration of study programmes in the same field, including the first-cycle study programme, is five years. Masters' study programmes consisting of 60 credits allow students who have completed first-cycle studies consisting of 180 credits to complete additional course units in order to obtain the total 120 credits necessary to complete the master's study programme. The duration of studies under study programmes leading to professions regulated by EU directives must be coordinated with these directives. Uniform master's study programmes for other professions in the Republic of Slovenia include 300 ECTS credits and last five years.

Doctoral study programmes include 180 credits and last three years. Studies under first- and second-cycle study programmes may also be provided in parts as defined by the study programme.

Supplementary study programmes include a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 60 credits.

The first Bologna study programmes were offered in the 2005/2006 study year. Gradual introduction of the Bologna reform was completed in the 2009/2010 study year. Students in non-Bologna study programmes must complete their studies in the 2015/2016 study year. After this date, the studies will be allowed to be completed only under reformed study programmes. According to data from the call for enrolment in undergraduate and uniform master's study programmes in the study year 2012/2013, a total of 333 university and higher education study programmes and uniform master's study programmes were offered.

**Table 3: Number of offered university, higher education and uniform master's study programmes in the study year 2012/13**

	<b>No. of university, higher education and uniform master's study programmes</b>	<b>Total</b>
University of Ljubljana	159	159
University of Maribor	86	86
University of Primorska	33	33
University of Nova Gorica	6	6
Subsidised private higher education institutions	16	16
Unsubsidised private higher education institution	39	39
<b>Total</b>		<b>333</b>

Source: Higher Education Application and Information Service of the University of Ljubljana and proper calculation

First-cycle study programmes are university and professional higher education study programmes. Uniform master's study programmes leading directly to the master's degree are formed if they educate for professions regulated by EU directives or special regulations of the Republic of Slovenia. Starting with 2011, the financing of studies is regulated by the new Decree on budgetary financing of higher education institutions and other institutions – NPB1 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 7/11, 34/11 Constitutional Court Decision and 64/12). Funds for first- and second-cycle study activities of public higher education institutions and study programmes under concessions at private higher education institutions are provided from the state budget. The state provides financing of: 1) regular undergraduate studies (including uniform master's studies) and 2) regular studies under second-cycle study programmes. By giving consent to the call for enrolment, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia decides every year which study programmes and how many places are financed for regular studies (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, 2013).

**Table 4: Number of offered master's and doctoral study programmes in the study year 2012/2013**

	<b>No. of master's study programmes</b>	<b>No. of doctoral study programmes</b>	<b>Total</b>
University of Ljubljana	100	21	121
University of Maribor	65	34	99
University of Primorska	24	11	35
University of Nova Gorica	2		2
Subsidised private higher education institutions	7		7
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>264</b>

Source: Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports and proper calculation

Second-cycle study programmes include master's study programmes and uniform master's study programmes. The third cycle includes doctoral study programmes. Joint study programmes are enabled as well within all cycles. Enrolment conditions are generally stipulated by the ZViS, while they are further specified in individual study programmes. Upon the fulfilment of certain conditions, transfer between study programmes within the same cycle is possible. Graduates obtain their diploma and professional or academic title as stipulated in the Professional and Academic Titles Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 47/1998, 55/2003, 83/2003-official consolidated text, 61/2006). Along with a diploma, a diploma supplement has also been issued since 2000. Teaching language at higher education institutions is Slovenian. Under the conditions stipulated in Article 8 of the ZViS and pursuant to the statute of a higher education institution, an institution may also carry out study programmes or their parts in a foreign language.