

REPORT ON WORK AND OPERATION
of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for
Higher Education

IN 2013

**"Quality – hard to get,
easy to lose."**

Introduction

For the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter the Agency), 2013 was highly intense. In addition to its permanent assignments – accreditations, re-accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges – the Agency also hosted a group of international evaluators, who performed the external evaluation of the Agency's operation according to Parts 2 and 3 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The principal basis for the work of the group of international evaluators was the comprehensive self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2010-2012, prepared in its final version and adopted in March 2013. The evaluators' report was complimentary, and, in the summer of 2013, the Agency submitted the application for entry into the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). On 19 October 2003, the EQAR committee decided to accept the Agency into the register.

The Director, appointed in March 2013, assumed his duties on 2 April 2013. In 2013, the Agency Council, being the highest decision-making body of the Agency, elected a new president. Work and financial plan for 2013 was only adopted in September 2013, mostly because we wanted to compile it on the basis of recommendations from the official report on the international evaluation of the Agency performed in April 2013. The Agency received the report in August 2013.

Work and financial plan for 2013 thus included the action (operational) work plan based on international recommendations.

In 2013, one of the important strategic objectives of the Agency was achieved - entry in EQAR. In 2013, the Agency strived for more active and direct cooperation with stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education, in terms of improving both the internal and the external quality systems. In doing so, it connected with many international associations within different networks. The Agency is active in ECA (European Consortium of Accreditation), CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) and INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education). In December 2013, it signed the MULTRA project. The purpose of the Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes (MULTRA) is mainly to simplify accreditation procedures for joint study programmes.

Although many believe that introducing quality culture in tertiary education is the responsibility of higher education institutions themselves, I think that successful and transparent operation of the Agency at home and abroad has equal importance for the development of our entire higher education system.



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However, it must be done in close cooperation with all stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education area.

Ljubljana, May 2014

Ivan Leban, Director

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FROM THE AGENCY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE PERIOD 2011-2016

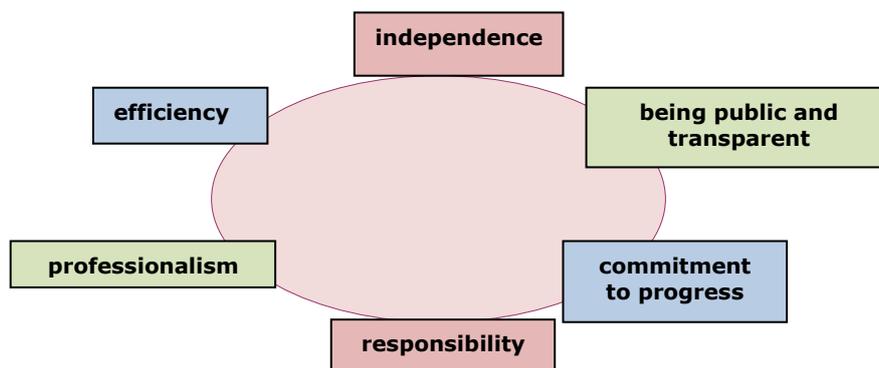
Mission

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

Vision

The Agency shall, with its system of quality assurance development, contribute to 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



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE AGENCY (as specified in the Agency Development Strategy for the Period 2011-2016, adopted by the Agency Council in November 2011):

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

Priority objectives set by 2013 are:

- transformation of the quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education;
- establishment and development of the quality assurance system of the Agency;
- participation in the development of higher education and higher vocational education in Slovenia.

ASSIGNMENTS IN WORK AND FINANCIAL PLAN FOR 2013 AND THE OVERVIEW OF HOW THEY WERE REALISED

Work and Financial Plan for 2013 (hereinafter the Work Plan) was adopted at the Agency Council's session on 19 September 2013. By adopting the Work Plan, the action (operational) plan for self-evaluation of the Agency for 2013 was also adopted, which included the renewal of internal acts of the Agency, the revision of the training and implementation of the training for Agency experts, the preparation of the self-evaluation report for 2013 and preparation for the admission in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereinafter the ENQA).

Summary of the concluding section of the Work Plan:

In addition to the activities the Agency has to perform by the law and other acts of the Agency, 2013 should be devoted to international recognition of the Agency. Next to accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions and study programmes, and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges, the Agency should perform the following activities:

- providing smooth operation of the Agency, particularly in terms of resolving the acute financial and staffing issues;
- completion of self-evaluation of the Agency for 2010-2012 and preparation for ECA+ESU and MULTRA external evaluation, as well as applying for EQAR membership;
- revision of the training programme for candidates for entry into the register of experts, analyses of accreditation and external evaluation reports and other required materials;
- active cooperation with stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education at workshops and professional conferences;
- participation in international projects related to the Agency's work;
- cooperation with foreign agencies;
- renewal of the Criteria for Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes and of the application form as their integral part;
- collection of data from higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, experts and other stakeholders on Agency's work, analysis of

survey questionnaires and, on the basis of survey results, adoption of measures for improvements;

- selection of and cooperation with the contractor for the establishment of a comprehensive information system of the Agency;
- planning of participation at various conferences and workshops at home and abroad;
- translation of all materials important for the Agency into English, and maintaining the Agency's website;
- participation in amending the higher education legislation;

For the Agency, gaining trust of all stakeholders and general public in the work of the Agency and strengthening its visibility in Slovenia is of great importance. In September 2013, the Agency Director is expected to begin with regular visits to higher education institutions in Slovenia. The Agency strived for the assurance and improvement of its own quality, being the foundation for efficient, with all stakeholders agreed upon and generally acknowledged external quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education. In 2013, the Agency is expected to be entered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (hereinafter EQAR) and get ready to become a member of ENQA.

To sum up, the main strategic focuses of the Agency for 2013 were the following:

- establishment and development of the quality assurance system of the Agency;
- transformation of the quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education; and
- participation in the development of higher education in Slovenia.

The stated strategic focuses are related to a concern for quality work of the Agency by means of self-evaluation and external evaluation of the Agency, cooperation with external stakeholders and establishment of an efficient and mutually agreed upon system of external quality assurance and cooperation with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) subject to European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG; hereinafter ESG).

Concrete tasks of the Agency for 2013 are given below. Different reports are adopted at the end of the year: Self-Evaluation Report for 2013, Business Report for 2013 (the Agency Council was acquainted with it at its 78th session on 17 April 2014), and the entire Report on Work and Operation for 2013 (the Agency Council approved it at its 79th session on 15 May 2014). The present report partly summarises the contents from these reports. Therefore, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who participated in compiling the reports.

The Report on Work shows how the tasks from the Work Plan have been realised, first briefly through the overview of the performance of the Agency Council as the highest first-instance decision-making body of the Agency, of the Appeal Committee as the second-instance decision-making body and of the Director.

Then, the success of the Agency in realising the set tasks is shown by the order of chapters in the Work Plan for 2013, as follows:

- accreditations of higher educational institutions and study programmes and evaluations of higher vocational colleges;
- establishment of a comprehensive information system of the Agency;
- training of the experts who cooperate with the Agency operation;
- two new position financed by the ESF funds;
- participation in the development of higher education in Slovenia;
- international cooperation, preparation for the Agency's membership in ENQA;
- financial and human resources.

OVERVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE OF FIRST- AND SECOND-INSTANCE DECISION-MAKING BODIES OF THE AGENCY

I. AGENCY COUNCIL

The Agency Council is the highest decision-making body of the Agency. The members of the Council shall act professionally, autonomously and independently, and in their actions, shall not be bound by decisions, positions, statements and instructions of institutions which appointed them or any other institution. In carrying out their tasks and decision-making, the members of the Agency Council shall follow the principles of preventing the conflicts of interests and impartiality. To this end, they sign a special statement binding them to respect the principles set out. The Agency Council is composed of eleven members (summarised from the Higher Education Act; hereinafter HEA).

According to the Rules of Procedure, the Agency Council sessions are held every third Thursday in each calendar month, except for July and August. They can also meet at extraordinary or correspondence sessions. In 2013, the Council met at 15 sessions; 11 regular, 3 correspondence and 1 "election" session. Compared to preceding years, the number of sessions was reduced; the situation is being normalised. A typical agenda is as follows: the review and approval of the minutes from the previous session, the review of decision realisation, important events between the two sessions, appeals, quality assurance (dealing with and deciding on the accreditation and re-accreditation applications for higher education institutions and study programmes, and for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges; dealing with and deciding on the applications for the

accreditation of the changes of study programmes; the appointment of the groups of experts), quality assurance acts and miscellaneous.

In 2013, 476 decisions were adopted by the Agency Council at its sessions.

Considering the large number of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges (the overview data according to the Isced classification are given on the next page), the Agency Council is highly burdened with decision-making on each application. Due to many accreditation and evaluation decisions, the Council also addressed more and more frequent appeals against the decisions. All procedures are conducted in accordance with the General Administrative Procedure Act. In addition to this primary activity, the Council members also dealt with current issues of the Agency's operation. At the sessions, transnational education and the issue of branches were addressed.

In the beginning of 2013, Council members participated in drafting the self-evaluation report of the Agency for 201-2012 and the Agency's presentation brochure. They dealt with the Business Report for 2012 and the Agency's Work Plan for 2013. They were particularly active in preparing the training programme for experts and at the traditional annual conference for all experts of the Agency entered in the register of experts. The renewal of the Higher Education Act (HEA-1) was planned for 2013. The Act was to interfere with the Agency's operation; therefore, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (hereinafter MESS) invited the Agency Council members to participate in the working group for the renewal of the Act.

Council members also attended different conferences. Participation at the meeting of the Slovenian Rectors' Conference is worth particular mention. The President of the Council is also a member of the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education. In 2013, the Agency Council also intensely dealt with human resource relate issues. In March 2013, after having performed three public calls, it appointed the Director. Some Council members were also replaced: Dr Dušanka Janežič, Dr Karmen Kern Pipan, Dr Jernej Letnar Černič and Alen Brkić became new members.

INDICATIVE OVERVIEW OF STUDY PROGRAMMES ACCORDING TO ISCED – MESS REGISTER, SITUATION AS OF 8 OCT. 2013 2012/2013

| Isced | Description | UL | UM | UPR | Finšš | UNG | PRIVATE | No. of prog. |
|-------|--|----|----|-----|-------|-----|---------|--------------|
| 14 | Teacher training and education science | 79 | 41 | 19 | | | | 139 |
| 21 | Arts | 29 | 2 | 1 | | | 6 | 38 |
| 22 | Humanities | 89 | 29 | 22 | | 7 | 9 | 156 |
| 31 | Social and behavioural science | 61 | 10 | 14 | 4 | | 12 | 101 |



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|-------------|------------------------------------|--------|--------|-------|-----|-----|--------|------------|
| 32 | Journalism and information | 7 | | | | 2 | 9 | |
| 34 | Business and administration | 25 | 18 | 10 | | 59 | 112 | |
| 38 | Law | 3 | 6 | 1 | | 6 | 16 | |
| 42 | Life sciences | 13 | 5 | 8 | 4 | | 30 | |
| 44 | Physical sciences | 13 | 7 | | 3 | | 23 | |
| 46 | Mathematics and statistics | 9 | 4 | 6 | | | 19 | |
| 48 | Computing | 5 | 7 | 2 | | 3 | 17 | |
| 52 | Engineering and engineering trades | 14 | 38 | 1 | | 6 | 59 | |
| 54 | Manufacturing and processing | 14 | 2 | | 2 | 9 | 27 | |
| 58 | Architecture and building | 17 | 7 | | 1 | | 25 | |
| 62 | Agriculture, forestry and fishery | 14 | 12 | 2 | 1 | | 29 | |
| 64 | Veterinary | 6 | | | | | 6 | |
| 72 | Health | 21 | 5 | 4 | | 12 | 42 | |
| 76 | Social services | 7 | | | | | 7 | |
| 81 | Personal services | 5 | 5 | 7 | | 6 | 23 | |
| 84 | Transport services | 7 | 4 | | | | 11 | |
| 85 | Environmental protection | 2 | 1 | | | 7 | 10 | |
| 86 | Security services | 2 | 5 | | | | 7 | |
| Inter disc. | | 7 | | 1 | 1 | 3 | 12 | |
| | TOTAL | 449 | 208 | 98 | 4 | 19 | 140 | 918 |
| | % | 48.9 | 22.7 | 10.7 | | 2.1 | 15.3 | |
| | No. of students | 48,826 | 19,368 | 6,606 | 247 | 512 | 10,201 | 85,760 |

At the Agency Council session in June 2013, the Council elected the new president of the Council, Prof Dr Andreja Kocijančič, because the term of office of Prof Dr Maja Makovec Brenčič expired. Dr Aleš Rotar was elected Deputy Council President at the same session.

Self-evaluation of the Agency for 2010-2012 and 2013

In 2013, the Agency's operation was for the first time assessed by an independent international group of experts (hereinafter international group of evaluators). In 2012, the Agency decided to first ask for an independent external international evaluation by the European Consortium for Accreditation – ECA Consortium (hereinafter ECA) and then to be entered in EQAR. The evaluation group also included a representative from the European Students Union (hereinafter ESU). The chair of the group was Dr R. Heusser (ECA), and the

other members were Prof M. Socha (PKA – Poland), Dr M. Frederiks (NVAO – the Netherlands) and A. Presacariu (ESU). The Agency prepared a comprehensive self-evaluation report for 2010-2012. At the 2012 December session, the Agency Council was acquainted in more detail with the draft report and provided recommendations in terms of contents. In January 2013, it processed the proposal for the self-evaluation report and provided additional comments. Consent to the report was given at the 62nd session on 13 March 2013.

External evaluation of the Agency in April 2013 was successful, and the Agency was entered in EQAR in October 2013. At that time, in accordance with the action plan, self-evaluation for 2013 was already underway (analyses of surveys, data collection, surveying of the staff ...), while at the end of the year, the preparation of the self-evaluation report for 2013 was initiated. This report will be attached to the Agency's application to become member of ENQA, planned for 2014.

Mission and assignments of ENQA and EQAR are rather similar, but they do have some distinctive features.

EQAR is, most of all, a transparent information tool for all stakeholders in the higher education area and represents a list of trustworthy quality assurance agencies in European higher education. EQAR is managed by E4 organisations as founding members, in cooperation with the European governments and other social partners, which form part of the Bologna process – BFUG.

While the objective of EQAR is to manage a list of reliable quality assurance agencies in the European education, ENQA, through its full members, strives for quality assurance and improvement in the European higher education, and acts as a driving force for the development of quality assurance systems in all Bologna declaration signatory countries. Entry in EQAR shows the current "record" of reliable agencies in Europe, while ENQA, through its cooperation with its members (and potential members) wants to contribute to a continuous development of quality and to establishing quality culture at higher education institutions in each Member State. ENQA was established in 2000.

Entry in EQAR and MULTRA

In the majority of European countries, quality assurance agencies periodically evaluate (and some of them accredit) higher education institutions and/or their study programmes. EQAR is a register of such agencies, i.e. a list of agencies which act in accordance with the ESG. The register is freely available to anyone on the website www.eqar.eu. The proposal for setting up EQAR was presented in May 2007 at the London conference of ministers responsible for higher education. After having received ministerial approval, **four members of E4 Group** – ENQA, EUA (European University Association; hereinafter EUA), ESU and EURASHE (European Association of Higher Education Institutions; hereinafter EURASHE) established EQAR on 4 March 2008.

EUA represents 850 universities and rectors' conferences from 47 European countries. It has a key role in the Bologna process and in influencing the EU policy on higher education, research and innovations. EUA is the largest and the most comprehensive organisation representing universities in Europe with 17 million of enrolled students. ESU is the umbrella organisation of 47 national student organisations from 39 countries. It unites students irrespective of their political beliefs, religion, ethnic or cultural identity, sexual orientation or social position. EURASHE is the European association of higher education institutions which offer professionally-oriented study programmes and are engaged with applied research within the Bologna process. Currently, it comprises approximately 1,400 higher education institutions from 40 countries within and outside the European higher education area.

EQAR is a register of agencies aimed at providing clear and objective information on reliable quality assurance agencies in higher education operating in Europe and elsewhere. The agencies can thus perform their mission to a more wide extent (if so permitted by national legislation) in the European higher education area. The (voluntary) admission of an agency to the Register is based on their compliance with ESG. Decisions on the entry in the Register are made by the Register's executive committee, composed of independent experts for quality assurance in higher education; two are appointed from ENQA, two by EUA, two by EURASHE, two by ESU and two by BUSINESSEUROPE from Education International. In 2013, members from five Bologna declaration signatory countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and Turkey) were present as observers when the applications were considered.

In July 2013, final reports on the international evaluation of the Agency were received, showing whether and how the Agency acted in accordance with 16 ESG standards (Parts 2 and 3) in accordance with the ECA Code of Good Practice. The basis for the Agency's evaluation were the self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2010-2012 and findings from the site visit between 22 and 24 April 2013 of a four-member international group of evaluators, who conducted a series of interviews. The group prepared two reports which are publicly available on the Agency's website (www.nakvis.si). The reports are complimentary for the Agency – it fully complies with 7 ESG standards out of 16, substantially with 8 standards and partially with 1 standard. It must be noted that the international group of evaluators did not find any non-compliances of the Agency's operation with ESG. Assessments of the compliance are as follows: “fully, substantially, partially and non-compliant to ESG”.

Upon the entry in the Register, the EQAR Committee provided the following, additional opinion related to the fulfilment of ESG:

ESG 2.1: The Agency should devote particular attention to reinforcing internal quality assurance systems at higher educational institutions. This is particularly important for the transition from programme accreditations to predominantly institutional accreditation planned for 2017.

ESG 2.5: The EQAR Committee received the Agency's explanation regarding the decisions of the Agency Council on publicity of experts' evaluation reports after the Council's decisions became final. The Committee believe that this should be standard practice and will specifically check it upon the next external evaluation of the Agency.

ESG 2.6 and 2.8: Because this was the first external evaluation of the Agency, the Committee expects that in the future, the Agency will fully develop suitable follow-up procedures and prepare system-wide analyses. This will also be a point of specific attention during the next external evaluation of the Agency.

ESG 3.4: The EQAR Committee was acquainted with concerns regarding the Agency's operation and financial sustainability after funding from the European Structural Fund (ESF) expires in 2015. The EQAR Committee expects from the Agency to submit a report (see § 6.1 EQAR procedures) as soon as the situation changes, including an analysis on how the sustainability of funding will be assured after 2014.

ESG 3.8: The EQAR Committee further established that the Agency lacked a consistent and formalised internal quality assurance system, and recommended that the internal quality assurance processes be appropriately set up.

The timeline of the admission procedure in EQAR:

- evaluation visit of ECA and ESU to the Agency between 22 and 24 April 2013;
- report on the external evaluation of the Agency on 23 July 2013;
- response of the Agency to the report on 26 July 2013;
- final report on the external evaluation of the Agency on 14 August 2013;
- application for the entry in EQAR submitted on 21 August 2013;
- approval of a complete application on 22 August 2013;
- additional explanation required on 18 September 2013;
- response of the Agency on 30 September 2013;
- decision adopted at the EQAR Committee on 19 October 2013;
- web notification www.eqar.eu on 23 October 2013.

Entry in the Register is valid until 31 July 2018.

In The Hague, the Netherlands, on 11 December 2008, the Agency signed the declaration of accession to the MULTRA project (Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes; hereinafter MULTRA) within ECA. ECA was established in 2003 and currently comprises 17 member agencies from 11 countries, including Slovenia. This consortium advocates for the principle of joint European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and strives for the direct mutual recognition of accreditation results of individual countries. The first step in this direction was signing 12 bilateral mutual recognition agreements.

Each new agency which wants to join the MULTRA group must fulfil many requirements and allow a site visit to an international group of evaluators, who prepare a special report on the agency's operation in accordance with 17 rules prepared by ECA (ECA Code of Good Practice). If the report is positive, all 12 agencies, members of MULTRA, must give their consent to the accession.

All preparations for the accession to MULTRA were carried out by the Agency staff in 2012 and in the beginning of 2013. The group of ECA evaluators came in April 2013. The group composed of Prof M. Socha (PKA - Poland) - Chair, Dr R. Heusser (ECA), Dr M. Frederiks (NVAO - the Netherlands) and A. Presacariu (ESU) saw a group of Agency's experts at work during the external evaluation of the University of Maribor. The committee's report is published and available on the Agency's website. All 12 agencies, members of MULTRA, gave consent to our Agency's access to the MULTRA group. The Agency was recommended to dedicate more attention to the consideration of learning outcomes when accrediting study programmes.

The agreement entered into force on 11 December 2013 and remains valid for three years.

By entering EQAR and accessing MULTRA, the Agency is committed to the internationalisation of higher education in Slovenia and European higher education area. The Agency's role and importance in the international area thus grow, which contributes to increased visibility of Slovenian higher education and to the recognition of Slovenian diplomas in the world.

Amendments to the Higher Education Act (HEA)

Since 1991, almost every new Slovenian Government has undertaken to amend the Higher Education Act (HEA). These procedures directly affect the Agency's operation, which must then amend its implementing acts and adjust its operation accordingly. In 2013, this also happened.

MESS presented potential changes in the HEA amendment. Summary from the explanation of the changes: "In EU Member States, higher education institutions are autonomous, despite the different perception of the autonomy. In any case, institutional autonomy, unlike personal autonomy of research and teaching - is placed in the national framework of supervision and of the enforcement of accountability to the state, taxpayers and society in general regarding the activities of universities and their use of public resources. A general trend towards increased institutional autonomy can be seen due to the belief that the universities with more autonomy have better ability to focus on their specific advantages and to adjust to the ever-changing environment at the local, regional and international level. Greater institutional autonomy must be balanced with suitable mechanisms of enforcing accountability.

In addition to the transition from programme to institutional accreditation and only initial accreditation of new study programmes (there are more than

400 programmes per one million people in the Republic of Slovenia, in EU = 200 programmes), the Act also regulates the definitions of individual terms so far not defined (branch, place of implementation, head office, location, eVš), reduces duration of accreditation validity from 7 to 5 years, amends conditions for establishing new universities, faculties and higher education institutions (currently, there are 100 institutions), stipulates different structure of the Appeal Committee at the Agency etc. The proposed Act regulates in more detail the procedure of awarding concessions, allows for granting public authorities to higher education institutions, defines public service, changes forms of study from full-time and part-time study to free full-time and part-time study and payable full-time and part-time study, amends the procedure of entry into the record of higher education institutions and the procedure of the call for enrolment, enables higher autonomy of its bodies and the manner of specifying the highest positions within a higher education institution.

Due to the letter of formal notice by the European Commission (compliance with basic freedoms of the EU), the proposed Act regulates the transnational higher education. The Act will allow for such education to be implemented in the Republic of Slovenia in function of the host country by the study programme holder, a foreign higher education institution. The latter will have to fulfil quality assurance criteria in higher education and will be approved as appropriate by the Agency or a foreign quality assurance body in accordance with the criteria of the sending country, if the country is a EU Member State. For third countries, the foreign quality assurance body will have to be registered in EQAR or internationally recognised in terms of acting according to quality assurance standards and guidelines for higher education, which will be determined by the Agency. The accreditation of a programme provided by a foreign educational institution will not be necessary if the programme is accredited as a joint study programme."

The Agency actively participated in drafting of HEA amendments; the drafting group was chaired by the former president of the Agency Council, Prof Dr Maja Makovec Brenčič. Many discussions were held, several working versions of the amended Act were drafted; however, the Act's future is unclear due to the Government's resignation (in May 2014).

The Agency's documents and operation

In 2013, the Agency Council processed various important documents and was promptly informed on the Agency's operation via regular reports at the Agency Council sessions (events during two sessions). At the 2013 March session, it approved the Report on Work and Operation of the Agency for 2012 prepared by the Acting Director. At the same time, it approved the self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2010-2012.

Due to the replacement of the Agency's management in April 2013 and the visit of the international group of evaluators (who prepared highly relevant recommendations for the Agency's work), the Agency Council processed the Work and Financial Plan of the Agency for 2013 later than usual, together with the action plan for the preparation of the self-evaluation report, and adopted it no earlier than in September 2013 (the Council did not meet in July and August).

In 2013, the Agency Council processed the following documents:

- self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2010-2012;
- business report for 2012;
- Agency's presentation brochure;
- it was acquainted with the Agency's work instructions;
- report of international evaluators for the entry in EQAR;
- report of international evaluators for the accession to MULTRA;
- it was acquainted with the draft audit report of the Court of Audit (confidential).

All accreditation and evaluation procedures dealt with by the Council, in particular decision-making, are highly sensitive. Therefore, they must be carried out responsibly, with a high degree of tact. Objectivity and professionalism are essential.

Both the Agency Council members and the Agency staff and experts in accreditation and evaluation procedures must act with deliberation and competence at all times. In doing their jobs, unbiased attitude is required.

Whenever a possible conflict of interests was detected, the Agency staff, experts and the Agency Council members consistently excluded themselves from accreditation and evaluation procedures. The violation of the principle of impartiality can be a reason for premature compulsory dismissal of a member of the Agency Council or of the groups of experts. If experts are caught in the conflict of interests or violate the above principle, the Agency Council appoints other experts to the groups of experts; if a member of the Agency staff is in such position, this constitutes a professional misconduct.

Experts, trainings, conferences

In the autumn of 2013, the Council addressed and approved the revised training programme for candidates for entry in the register of experts. The goals of the revised programme are comparable to the goals in the previous one (candidates acquire competences for working in groups of experts, reviewing documentation (applications with evidence), visiting institutions/colleges and writing reports) but much more emphasis is put on practical training with concrete examples (examples from "real" accreditation procedures). New is the second part where candidates are obliged to participate either in a site visit within the procedure of initial accreditation of a higher education institution or a study programme or in

a site visit within the evaluation procedure. On the basis of successful completion of training, the opinion of a staff member and the group of experts the candidate joins, the Council decides on his/her entry in the register. The Council confirmed again that the Slovenian Student Union (SSU) continues to train student candidates, which is a condition for their training at the Agency.

The Committee for the opening of applications of candidates for entry in the register of experts, composed of Council members, convened twice in 2103. It considered 21 applications, of which 15 were submitted by students. Namely, in the beginning of 2013, the Council addressed the issue of the lack of student experts in the register, more precisely, the lack of doctoral students and higher vocational college students.

By the end of 2013, the Council entered 138 Slovenian experts and 15 student experts in the register of experts. In 2013, upon a special invitation, it entered 8 experts in poorly represented areas and experts with management experience and experience in the field of quality in higher education. 2 student experts were entered after they successfully completed the second part of training which started in the autumn of 2013. The Council will decide on the rest of the candidates one by one, as they carry out their site visits to institutions or colleges.

In 2013, the Council appointed 110 groups of experts for assessments in accreditation and evaluation procedures. Some groups assessed several study programmes at a time due to joint procedures. Most appointments took place in the beginning and in the end of 2013.

On 24 and 25 October and 8 November 2013, the first training of candidates for the entry in the Agency's register of experts took place according to the new training programme.

After the training, a survey on the satisfaction of training participants was carried out. 19 out of 33 participants completed the web questionnaire. The suitability of the training programme and lecturers, cooperation with the staff and suitability of covered topics, the approach and the examples of good practice were rated with a very high average value of 4.7 on the 1-5 scale, with 5 being excellent, or "I fully agree". The following recommendations were provided: more time (at least three days) between the first and the second training day because the first task was so complex; the contents presented should be more coordinated to avoid duplication; the staff should also be available during holidays.

The Council suggested that fewer external and foreign experts participate in trainings, as the majority of important contents are covered by the Agency staff. This would reduce the duration of the training, limit duplication of contents and decrease training costs. Lecturers should thus include one external domestic expert, one student expert and one foreign expert.

The trainings for experts will continue in 2014.

On 18 December 2013, the Agency organised the regular annual conference for the experts entered in the register of experts. The first part of the conference addressed the issue of students with special needs and was attended by the representatives of the Association of Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia and of the Organisation of the Disabled Students of Slovenia. The second part focused on a detailed presentation of the accreditation criteria, uniform forms for writing reports, site visit protocol and a case study of the initial accreditation of a study programme, based on which the Council's expectations towards the reports of the groups of experts were presented.

On 19 December 2013, training for students of higher vocational colleges to become quality assessment experts was held at the SSU seat. At the training, the Agency Council members and the Director lectured.

Accreditation procedures

In addition to deciding on the accreditations of study programmes, higher education institutions and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges, and dealing with issues associated to the assessment of the current legislation and the accreditation criteria regarding the fulfilment of conditions for scientific-research work, regarding the suitability of lecturers, their teaching and research work, the Council also discussed how procedures should be rationalised and joined, it strived for better oral hearings, more willingness for conducting hearings and for higher cooperation of the Council members, for systematic improvement of the quality of decision-writing and for the assistance of the Council members in doing it.

Some Agency Council members are also active as external evaluators in international committees in assessing foreign higher education institutions.

Cooperation with stakeholders

Throughout the year, the President and members of the Agency Council attended working meetings, conferences, debates and other events associated with higher education, and they continuously considered initiatives and questions of different stakeholders. They are in constant contact with the Agency staff.

Besides attending the events associated with the amendments to the legislation, criteria and training of the Agency experts, the Council mainly cooperated with the management and other representatives of universities or higher education institutions and with the representatives of MESS in relation to eVŠ information system and the entry in the register of higher education institutions, prompt transition to institutional accreditation, coordination concerning study areas and professional titles, and in relation to transnational education, increased budgetary funds for the Agency's operation, etc.

The Council regularly dealt with questions asked by different stakeholders and with anonymous notices (regarding the assessment of distance learning, branches abroad etc.), and various initiatives and notifications of irregularities at higher education institutions. In connection therewith, it also decided for extraordinary evaluations.

A member of the Agency staff is responsible to prepare answers to questions by the press and National Assembly deputies, which are regularly and promptly answered. In 2013, two press conferences were organised at the Agency.

II. APPEAL COMMITTEE

Processing of appeals

In 2013, the Agency Council referred 13 cases in appeal procedures to the Appeal Committee (11 less than in 2012). In accordance with the Appeal Committee's recommendations, before making final decisions in matters in which establishing the actual situation was more demanding, it strived to determine the exact and complete actual situation also by convening oral hearings, additionally calling the applicants to supplement their applications and similar. In order to give the applicants the possibility of equal treatment in procedures, the following practice was introduced in initial accreditation procedures, in accordance with possibilities provided by the General Administrative Procedure Act: submitting reports of the groups of experts in initial accreditation procedures of higher education institutions to applicants to provide response, and submitting applicants' responses to the reports of the groups of experts in procedures of programme accreditation for a potential additional opinion to be prepared, which is comparable to the preparation of the final evaluation report in re-accreditation procedures.

In readjudication of matters returned to the Committee by the Appeal Committee or the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia, all appeals were upheld. 8 accreditations were granted, of which only one was extended for a shorter period.

Although the Council in its old and new structure was presented the report on the decisions of the Appeal Committee, followed the instructions it wrote in its decisions on appeals in individual accreditation matters, and tried to follow the established practice in accreditation and evaluation procedures, it was often unable to adopt negative decisions in matters where, based on the evidence, the sufficient level of quality was not ascertained, which was mainly due to the accreditation criteria and vague legislative provisions in the HEA (regarding human resources, scientific-research work in masters' study programmes, integration in the environment). On the other hand, vague criteria were precisely

the reason for appellants to accuse the Council several times of arbitrariness in adopting decisions. The most important finding of the Appeal Committee regarding the challenged decisions was the insufficient explanation of the Agency Council decision in its individual parts. The Appeal Committee emphasised that, in the challenged decisions, the Agency Council often merely summarised the actual situation established by the group of experts and the legal basis of the alleged requirements. However, the challenged decisions do not show the reasons of the Agency Council for a particular decision. With such lack of reasons for the challenged decisions, the decisions cannot be tried, which is a significant violation of procedural provisions. The Agency Council must thus explain its decision in the repeated procedure.

To summarise - the Appeal Committee most frequently reacted due to procedural reasons, finding a significant violation of the rules of the administrative procedure. Most often, the decision lacked appropriate explanation or the main parts of the explanation which are required by law. Incorrect or incomplete actual situation was established, leading to violation of substantive law (i.e. substantive reasons) or misapplication of substantive law.

The Agency's operation and decision-making is bound by general administrative procedure. Because legal provisions (HEA) regarding accreditations and re-accreditations are very vague, many higher education institutions prefer to use the complaints channel or judicial procedures and hire eminent law firms instead of observing well-intentioned recommendations provided in final reports of independent experts. It should be noted that OAQ (Swiss Accreditation Committee) has not received any appeals so far, while QAA (The UK and Northern Ireland Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) has not received a single appeal throughout its history. These agencies do not publish negative decisions.

Appeals by stakeholders

Appeals by higher education stakeholders, particularly students and higher education teachers, were associated with individual violations in higher education institutions. They mainly concern irregularities (including anonymous) in providing study programmes as follows: inappropriate execution of practical exercises, provision of contact hours contrary to the accredited state and inadequate qualification of higher education teachers, irregularities in habilitation procedures, mobbing at the workplace. The Council regularly dealt with these appeals.

Based on this, the Council initiated two procedures of extraordinary evaluation in 2013.

III. DIRECTOR OF THE AGENCY

The third public call for the selection of a director was successful. The Director was appointed by the Agency Council at its 62nd session on 13 March 2013. He took his position on 2 April 2013, when he replaced previous Acting Director, Tatjana Debevec.

Apart from tending to regular performance of the fundamental activity of the Agency, which includes a large number of accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions and study programmes, his efforts by the end of 2013 were particularly directed at further integration of the Agency in international education area and cooperation with stakeholders.

The Agency actively participated in CEENQA and ECA projects. The Director was elected to the CEENQA Executive Board. He also established contacts with quality assurance agencies in Poland, Romania, Lithuania, the Netherlands and the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

In 2013, in order to strengthen relationships and improve cooperation with stakeholders as well as to provide the applicants with more information regarding the Agency's operation, the Director visited 9 higher education institutions in Slovenia: 3 universities and 6 private higher education institutions. He held informal discussions with rectors, presidents, students and in some cases also the owners of institutions. At the institutions, the Director's intentions to carry out regular annual visits were generally commended. In 2014, he intends to visit 10 additional higher education institutions, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia and the Employment Service of Slovenia. He reported to the Agency Council on his visits.

Upon the commencement of his term, the Director introduced regular brief weekly working meetings with all staff members. They are intended for brief exchange of information and coordination of future work. In the end of 2013 and in the beginning of 2014, he carried out annual work interviews with all Agency's employees. Mutual cooperation of all staff members at the Agency and cooperation between the Director and the Agency Council is essential for the Agency's successful operation. During annual interviews, the managers have the opportunity to talk to their colleagues in private and form an opinion of the work of the colleague and of their own work. Work in the past period is reviewed, and objectives and assignments for the next year are specified. The Agency staff were informed of the annual work interviews in December 2013. Each staff member received information regarding the subject areas of the interview. These were: satisfaction with working at the Agency, examples of good and bad practice at the Agency, assignments in the past year and in the future, professional training of the staff, and concrete proposals for improvement. Each staff member received a written questionnaire. The interviews took between 30 and 60 minutes.

The following opinions were evident from the interviews:

In 2013, entering in EQAR, signing the accession to MULTRA and completing institutional accreditations of four universities despite being burdened with programme accreditations was a great success for the Agency. Special thanks go to all Agency staff and the Acting Director Tatjana Debevec. The purpose of the interviews was to improve the work of the Agency and its management in association with the Agency Council. Poor exchanges of opinions between some colleagues were mentioned, and problems in communication between the Director and the employees. Some staff members mentioned that a more assertive management of the Agency was expected considering that the Agency is a non-governmental institution linked directly to budgetary resources (integral resources and European funds). According to some employees, some work processes had not been fully defined. Some believe that work is not properly distributed and controlled. Lack of the sense of belonging to the Agency can be felt, and there is a wish that the Agency, despite being burdened with "routine" work, would focus on research, development and counselling. They expected that the joint Monday meetings would have been brief and informative, possibly more professionally and thematically focused. All comments provided by the employees will be considered as much as possible when preparing the action plan for 2014.

The biggest problem of the Agency is artificial distinction between employees employed for an indefinite period and those employed for a definite period (limited duration of the European ESF project, which expires on 31 October 2015). It is believed that changing employment from definite to indefinite period would increase motivation for efficient work. We will try to make this happen in 2014. According to the National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020, the Agency will receive EUR 6 million after the ESF project expires in 2015. In 2012 and 2013, the entire Agency used only EUR 1.3 million per year. In the short-term, the issue of employment will be partly solved by renewing contracts until 31 October 2015, while in the long-term, the Director is trying to find a solution with the Ministry of Finance (hereinafter MF) and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. He talked to the Adviser to the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Prof Žekš, in January 2014. If funding for the period after 2015 is not settled, the Agency's operation in the present extent will be more or less disabled.

The Director also represented the Agency in the group for the revision of HEA; in particular, he explained Agency's positions with regard to changes in accreditation procedures, particularly the transition to institutional accreditation, and to the provisions governing Agency's competences (particularly in relation to TNHE).

At the end of 2013, the Agency invited Rok Primožič, the president of ESU, which joins 47 national student organisations. He informed the Agency of the proposal for revised ESG to be entered into force this year or 2015, and congratulated the Agency for the entry in EQAR. He was satisfied that the Agency actively included

students in the quality assurance processes. ESU advocates that education is a public good and public responsibility.

The Director regularly acts as evaluator in EUA IEP (European University Association - Institutional Evaluation Programme). In early 2014, he will participate in two evaluations (in Romania and Kazakhstan), together with the President of the European University Association, Prof Dr M. H. Nazare.

On 29 November 2013, training entitled 'Communication and Solving Conflict Situations' was carried out for all Agency employees.

The Agency expects to receive the audit report of the Court of Audit at the beginning of 2014.

PRESENTATION OF PERFORMANCE OF THE TASKS DEFINED IN CHAPTERS OF THE AGENCY'S WORK PLAN FOR 2013

A) ACCREDITATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND STUDY PROGRAMMES, AND EVALUATION OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES (*in 2013*)

| EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 1: ACCREDITATIONS AND EVALUATIONS | | | | |
|--|--|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Activity 1: accreditations in higher education | | | | |
| Task | Implementation and accountability | Anticipated no of applications submitted in 2013 | Work performed in 2013 | Notes |
| Initial accreditation of study programmes | Quality Department/ Agency Council | 31 | 37 | |
| Re-accreditation of study programmes | | 90 | 71 | |
| Initial accreditation of higher education institutions | | 5 | 2 | |
| Re-accreditation of higher education institutions | | 10 | 18 | |
| Changes of study programmes | | | 22 | |
| Transformation of higher education institutions | | 3 | 2 | |
| Activity 2: external evaluation of higher vocational colleges | | | | |
| Task | Implementation and accountability | Planned no of applications | Work performed | No of opinions/notes |
| External evaluation of higher vocational colleges | Quality Department/ Agency Council | 20 | 17 | 11, 6 with reservation |

Note: The applications to change study programmes are not considered in the table. According to the Fiscal Balance Act (ZUJF, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 40/2012), a private higher education institution may change the compulsory components of study programmes according to the same procedure under which they have been adopted. A university changes the compulsory components of study programmes on its own. It then informs the Agency on the modified compulsory components of study programmes within 30 days of their adoption. The Agency considers the modifications when re-accrediting study programmes.

Explanations: The list of publicly available records of the accredited higher education institutions and study programmes is published on the Agency's website www.nakvis.si under three links

- [Public records on the accreditations of study programmes from 2004 to 2010](#)
- [Public records on the accreditations of study programmes accredited after 1 March 2010](#)
- [Plan for re-accreditations and public records on the accreditations of higher education institutions](#)

Additionally, MESS publishes the Register of Higher Education Institutions and their study programmes http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/direktorat_za_visoko_solstvo/sektor_za_visoko_solstvo/razvid_visokosolskih_z_avodov/

Accreditations in higher education

Procedures completed from 1 January 2012 until 31 December 2012 and until 31 December 2013

Between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2013, the Agency completed $212 + 150 = \mathbf{362}$ accreditation or evaluation procedures, as follows:

- granted initial accreditation to $93 + 37 = \mathbf{130}$ study programmes (of the first, second and third Bologna cycle);
- re-accredited $68 + 71 = \mathbf{139}$ study programmes;
- granted initial accreditation to $6 + 2 = \mathbf{8}$ higher education institutions;
- re-accredited $1 + 18 = \mathbf{19}$ higher education institutions;
- accredited changes to $44 + 22 = \mathbf{66}$ study programmes.

In 2013, there were two extraordinary external evaluations.

In addition, the accreditation procedures of 73 study programmes and 4 higher education institutions are being conducted within the prescribed time-limits.

In 2013, the Agency received 197 applications **to be considered**:

- 123 applications for accreditation of study programmes of higher education institutions;
- 15 applications for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges;
- 59 applications for changes of study programmes.

In 2013, the Council adopted **150 accreditation decisions**:

Accreditation was granted to:

- 108 first-, second- and third-cycle study programmes and supplementary study programmes, 71 of which were re-accredited. Three procedures involved transferring of a study programme to another higher education institution.
- 20 private higher education institutions, of which 18 were re-accredited;
- 22 changes of study programmes.

Initial accreditation was granted to 37 (90%) assessed study programmes. Most of the study programmes were re-accredited in September 2013 when the initial accreditation expired after seven years. In case of 13 decisions, the Council granted re-accreditation for the period shorter than seven years (hereinafter: shorter period) and imposed deadlines for the applicants to eliminate the stated deficiencies. Four of these matters are undergoing the appeal procedure. After reconsideration based on appeals, 7 decisions of the Agency Council were annulled and 7 programmes were re-accredited for 7 years.

Main reasons for re-accreditation for the shorter period were as follows:

- provision of the study programme was not in line with the accredited state of affairs;
- insufficiently developed scientific-research activity in the field of the study programme at the level of the institution or at the level of higher education teachers;

- unstable personnel structure either in terms of staffing or in terms of inadequacy of higher education teachers or organisations providing the study programme;
- learning objectives and competences are not adapted to the level of the study programme;
- outdated contents of the study programme.

One study programme was not granted accreditation because it has not been carried out since the initial accreditation, which made it impossible to verify the quality of organisation and provision of studies and to assess the progress.

The Council re-accredited 16 higher education institutions for the full period whereby two instances involved the transformation of a higher education institution. Two higher education institutions were re-accredited for a shorter period primarily due to the following deficiencies:

- unstable personnel structure either in terms of staffing or in terms of inadequacy of higher education teachers or organisations providing a study programme as regards the study or scientific fields in which the institution carries out its activities;
- insufficient demonstration of scientific-research achievements in the area of the study activity in cases where the applicant failed to present important and current scientific-research projects, research and publications at the level of the institution, higher education teachers or organisations providing the study activity.

Accreditation was not granted to:

- 5 study programmes;
- 2 private higher education institutions.

Initial accreditation was not granted to 10% of the assessed study programmes. Reasons for rejection were primarily:

- inappropriate higher education teachers with respect to the field of the study programme;
- insufficient demonstration of scientific-research achievements in the area of the study programme in cases where the applicant failed to present important and current scientific-research projects, research and publications at the level of the institution, higher education teachers or providing organisations.
- insufficiently substantiated employability of graduates or need for the study programme;
- inconsistency of the contents of the study programme with the field of study.

Reasons for rejected accreditation of higher education institutions were primarily:

- inadequately organised practical education of students (insufficient number of places for practical education, the companies with signed agreements have inappropriate learning posts or working environment);
- insufficient stability of the staff due to the high percentage of part-time higher education teachers who are not actively integrated in scientific-research, professional or artistic work at the institution;
- failure to demonstrate integration in the environment and employability of graduates;
- non-fulfilment of material conditions.

The Agency also carries out external evaluations of higher vocational colleges. The Council adopted 17 opinions on the compliance of higher vocational colleges with standards prescribed by law; of these, 6 received opinions with reservation. In the latter, the following most common irregularities were established by the Council:

- inadequate implementation of practical education;
- inefficient or formally inadequate internal quality system;
- inconsistency of institution's organisation (composition of bodies) with regulations;
- inadequate integration in the environment and cooperation with the business sector.

Review of Council's decisions on granting accreditation for a shorter period, its issued opinions with reservation or rejected accreditations reveals that deficiencies are mostly related to higher education teachers, scientific-research, professional and artistic work and integration in the environment.

The above-mentioned fields are particularly problematic because they are relatively vaguely defined by laws and regulations which is why the appellants are very successful in appeal procedures.

In 2013, the number of procedures for re-accreditation of study programmes increased considerably in comparison to 2012. The main reason is that accreditation expired after 7 years for an increasing number of study programmes that were among the first programmes revised according to the Bologna process.

The Council also adopted its first decisions related to the recording of transnational higher education (two contracts for transnational higher education –TNHE– were recorded) and decided on a relatively large number of appeals and repeated procedures in comparison to 2012.

It must be emphasised that in 2013, the Agency prematurely re-accredited all four Slovenian universities, which provide education to 88% of all students in Slovenia.

B) ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY (activity listed in the action plan for 2013)

The Agency is already using standardised electronic form for applications for accreditations and external evaluation to be submitted and dealt with, and has slightly updated it in 2012. Both applicants and the staff point out the weaknesses of the electronic form or electronic submission and processing of applications in the procedures. The current design of the electronic operation does not enable a considerable system upgrade. For higher quality, more transparent and safer operation, a thoroughly modified electronic form is required to eliminate weaknesses and enable continuous development and updating in accordance with the requirements and nature of the work performed by the Agency. It is planned as a part of the Agency's comprehensive information system. In 2012 and notably in 2013, the following activities were performed:

- based on the experience obtained, detailed procedures were designed in connection with dealing with the applications for accreditations and external evaluations and for submitting data to other stakeholders (applicant - Agency- MESS);
- two meetings with higher education institutions in order to give the applicants an insight into the structure of the future information system, to explain the user benefits of the system and to collect proposals for optimisation and improvement of user experience.
- several working sessions with MESS because the information system will be based on the eVŠ platform which already functions and enables keeping records of students that applied for subsidised accommodation as well as keeping eVŠ records of higher education institutions, eVŠ records of study programmes, eVŠ records of students and graduates, eVŠ records of applicants for enrolment, eVŠ records of higher education providers and eVŠ records of private higher education teachers. Because HEA stipulates in article 82 that certain data obtained by MESS from the Agency or higher education institutions shall be free of charge, it is very important that the Agency's information system and eVŠ are compatible so that they enable mutual exchange of data, while it also needs to be ensured that the work of the applicants is not duplicated or obstructed.

Further development of the Agency's information system is as follows. In the spring of 2014, a public tender will be conducted (preparation of tender documentation, production of the study and selection of the provider), while the electronic form is expected to be ready by early 2015.

Postponing the final establishment of comprehensive information system of the Agency to 2015 will not have a negative impact on the work process, since the electronic form for submitting the applications for accreditations and external evaluations, and the other web applications have been updated. Thus, there are no major difficulties occurring in the work process. However, we are aware of the

importance of the information system for the future operation of the Agency. It will be mainly used in preparing overview reports.

Assessment of success in the achievement of the objective (realisation of tasks)

| Activity: Establishment of a comprehensive information system | | |
|--|--|---|
| Task | Implementation and accountability | Task performed YES/ NO/PARTLY |
| Preparation of tender documentation | Staff / Director | Yes |
| Publication of the tender, and selection of the contractor | | No; planned for June 2014 |
| Participation in forming and applying the support information system | | The procedures are being finalised; tender notice is being prepared |
| Connection with the e-VŠ system | | Partly; subject to coordination |

The objective was not fully achieved. The aim of establishing a renewed comprehensive information system is more efficient and rational work of higher quality and simplification of accreditation and evaluation procedures and other work processes at the Agency. Data collection and drafting of reports will also be simplified.

C) ENTRY OF EXPERTS IN THE REGISTER OF THE AGENCY, AND REVISION OF THEIR TRAINING AND OF THE REGISTER (activity listed in the action plan for 2013)

The Committee for the opening of applications of candidates for entry in the register of experts, composed of Council members, convened twice in 2103. It considered 21 applications, of which 15 were submitted by students. In the beginning of the year, the Council addressed the issue of the lack of student experts in the register, more precisely, the lack of doctoral students and higher vocational college students.

By the end of 2013, the Council entered 138 Slovenian experts and 15 student experts in the register of experts. In 2013, upon a special invitation, it entered 8 experts in poorly represented areas and experts with management experience and experience in the field of quality in higher education. 2 student experts were entered after they successfully completed the second part of training which started in the autumn of 2013. The Council will decide on the rest of the candidates one by one, as they carry out their site visits to institutions or colleges.

In 2013, the Agency council appointed 110 groups of experts for assessments in accreditation and evaluation procedures. Some groups assessed several study programmes at a time due to joint procedures. Most appointments took place in the beginning and in the end of 2013.

Assessment of success in the achievement of the objective (realisation of tasks)

| Activity 1: entry of experienced experts in the register (in accordance with amendment of the Criteria for Entry in the Register of Experts); revision of the register | | |
|---|--|---|
| Task | Implementation and accountability | Task performed YES / NO / PARTLY |
| Sending out the invitations of the Agency Council to acknowledged or internationally recognised experts for quality in higher vocational and higher education | Staff/ Agency Council Director | Yes |
| Preparation of the list of experts with their references to be approved at the session of the Agency Council. | | Yes |
| Revision or transformation of the register of experts and constant updating | Quality Department/Director | Yes |
| Task | Implementation and accountability | Task performed YES / NO / PARTLY |
| Surveying experts, applicants, students and other stakeholders; the analysis of surveys. | Quality Department/ Agency Self-Evaluation Group/ Director | Yes |
| Surveying of the staff on the quality of the visit (external evaluation) and the analysis of surveys. | | Yes |
| Analysis of reports of groups of experts | Quality Department/ Director | Yes |
| Revision of the training programme for experts | Staff | Yes |
| Supplementation of the group of experts' site visit protocol | | Yes |
| Preparation of the code of ethics for experts | Staff/Director | Partly; rules of behaviour prepared |

The tasks have been implemented. The register of experts is being promptly improved, the data updated, the electronic form for experts has been prepared

but has not been introduced in the web application; the Agency obtained experienced experts in poorly represented fields of study, science and arts.

At the end of 2013, the first training of candidates for the entry in the Agency's register of experts took place according to the revised training programme for candidates for the entry in the register of experts. The goals of the revised programme are as follows: candidates acquire competences for working in groups of experts, reviewing documentation (applications with evidence), visiting institutions/colleges and writing reports, but much more emphasis is put on practical training with concrete examples (examples from "real" accreditation procedures).

New is the second part where candidates are obliged to participate either in a site visit within the procedure of initial accreditation of a higher education institution or a study programme or in a site visit within the evaluation procedure. On the basis of successful completion of training, the opinion of a staff member and the group of experts the candidate joins, the Council decides on his/her entry in the register.

D) TWO NEW POSITIONS FINANCED BY THE ESF FUNDS

In 2013, according to the action plan for 2013, employment of two new employees was planned, one in the General Affairs Department and one in the Quality Department: archivist and translator.

As per work plan, job vacancy for archivist in the General Affairs Department was published. Selection procedure was performed and the new employee took her position in June 2013.

Job vacancy for translator has not been published yet; it is planned for 2014.

Assessment of success in the achievement of the objective (realisation of tasks)

| Activity 1: Employment of new employees financed with the ESF funds | | |
|--|--|---|
| Task | Implementation and accountability | Task performed YES / NO / PARTLY |
| Publication of call for applicants to fill a new vacancy in the General Affairs Department - archivist | General Affairs Department | Yes |
| Employee selection | | Yes |
| Publication of call for applicants to fill a new vacancy in the Quality Department - translator | | No |

Irrespective of staff augmentation, the self-evaluation report shows that some employees are more burdened than others.

Organisation of work in the sector they are employed in and involvement in the management of the Agency was also rated low by the staff in the previous survey on the satisfaction of the Agency staff. The work at the Agency is also obstructed by the uncertainty in the group employed for a definite period through the ESF project which adversely affects the motivation of the entire Agency staff.

E) PARTICIPATING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The mission of the Agency also includes constant cooperation with the ministries and other organisations in forming and determining national legislation and regulations from the area of higher education and higher vocational education, namely by means of active participation in working groups and at different meetings, and by drafting proposals for laws and other acts. Deadlines for these tasks depend on external stakeholders – typically MESS.

The anticipated amendments of the Higher Education Act (HEA UPB7, 40/2012-ZUJF, 57/2012-ZPCP-2D, 109/2012) fully comply with the National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020. The amendments, which also regulate the Agency's operation, refer mainly to the following: definition of terms (branch, place of implementation, head office, eVŠ), transition to institutional evaluation and only initial accreditation of new study programmes, reduced duration of accreditation validity from 7 to 5 years, further consideration regarding the establishment of new universities, faculties and higher education institutions, consideration on using the general administrative procedure in evaluation and accreditation procedures, transnational education, structure of the Appeal Committee with the Agency, necessary harmonisation of inconsistent provisions of HEA: deadlines for submission and authorisation; non-compliance with transitional provisions of the Act etc.

Assessment of the tasks carried out (achievement of executive objectives)

| EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 1: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME 2011–2020 IN THE FIELD OF QUALITY AND INTERNATIONALISATION, AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT RENEWAL | | |
|--|--|---|
| Activity: participation in drafting the new Higher Education Act | | |
| Task | Implementation and accountability | Task performed YES / NO / PARTLY |
| Preparation of proposed amendments to HEA | Staff/Director, Agency Council | Yes |



n·a·k·v·i·s

Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije
za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

s·q·a·a

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 2: FORMING AND IMPLEMENTING UNIFORM CRITERIA AND STANDARDS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALISATION

Activity: preparation of the Criteria for Transnational Higher Education

| Task | Implementation and accountability | Task performed YES / NO / PARTLY |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| Drafting amendments to the Criteria for Transnational Higher Education and the consolidated version | Staff; Agency Council Working Group/ Agency Council | Yes |
| Conferences with stakeholders | | Partly (during site visits) |
| Analysis of conditions for the provision of transnational higher education in other countries, monitoring the development of this education, i.e. education according to joint study programmes | Staff/Director | Partly; permanent task |

EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 3: PARTICIPATION IN FORMING THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Activity: participation in forming the national qualifications framework

| Task | Implementation and accountability | Task performed YES/NO/PARTLY |
|--|--|------------------------------|
| Participation in working meetings, sessions, conferences | Quality Department/Agency Council/ Director | Yes |

EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 4: DEVELOPMENT AND CONCERN FOR INTRODUCING THE UNIFORM CRITERIA AND STANDARDS IN STUDY PROGRAMMES

Activity: constant cooperation with the stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education and experts of the Agency in exchanging experiences, examples of good practice and needs

| Task | Implementation and accountability | Task performed YES / NO / PARTLY |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Organisation of a conference with the stakeholders and experts on quality standards development | Agency Council/ Director | Yes |

In the second half of 2013, the Agency was invited to participate in the working group for drafting the amendments to HEA in the part regulating the Agency's operation. Apart from the representatives of MESS, the working group also included representatives of universities, private higher education institutions, students, the trade union and employers.

The Agency suggested that the amended act should:

- include transition to institutional accreditation or external evaluation – programme accreditations are only preserved for initial accreditation of new

study programmes, while in the re-accreditation procedure, their provision is verified through external evaluation, which is a condition for re-accreditation to be granted to the institution and the programmes it provides. A group of independent experts should be authorised to determine (decide) during the mandatory site visit to the institution as to which programmes and their provision they would examine in more detail (according to predetermined conditions and criteria of course). The key programmes the provision of which will be verified in more detail may also be predetermined by the Agency Council;

- reduce the duration of accreditation from 7 to 5 years: the institution must be re-accredited every 5 years;
- regulate transnational education so that different forms of this education are considered, including branches of a higher education institution abroad;
- regulate (define) branches of a higher education institution and its transformation;
- specify more exactly accreditation and evaluation procedures and applicants' rights in the procedures, so that only meaningful application of the General Administrative Procedure Act is enacted;
- align inconsistent provisions: deadlines for submission of applications and authorisation; non-compliance with the transitional provisions of the Act.

Additionally, legal and organisational form of the Agency should be more clearly specified, structure of the Appeal Committee should be changed, competences and learning outcomes should be specified with due consideration of the fact that the term 'learning outcomes' is usually used in the European higher education area, and the Agency should have the possibility to charge for accreditation and evaluation procedures.

At the end of 2013, various debates were held in the media and round-table discussions regarding the draft amendments to HEA-1, and its text was modified twice. In the beginning of 2014, the debates continued, but for now, the future of the amendments to the Act is completely uncertain.

The Criteria for Transnational Higher Education were adopted in March 2012 and were published in the Official Gazette (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 18/2012). Coordination before the adoption was time-consuming because provisions of HEA failed to take into account different types of this education, of which the responsible ministry was constantly cautioned by the Agency. However, even after the enactment of the amended HEA in the beginning of 2013 (1 January 2013), this field is still not regulated despite the amended provisions governing transnational education. The last amendment to HEA, instead of regulating the field so that the Agency could assess the most diverse forms of this education including branches abroad, deprived the Agency of the authority which it had until the amendment (end of 2012), i.e. granting consents to transnational education contracts, and gave it duties the ENIC NARIC centre had within the ministry (recording higher education institutions that wish to provide education in Slovenia), the duties not associated with the Agency's

basic activity, i.e. external quality assessment. This is why the Agency had several difficulties in harmonising the Criteria for Transnational Education with the amended HEA. In 2013, amendments to the Criteria for Transnational Education were adopted by the Agency Council (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 38/2013). There was an additional complication in June 2013 regarding the assumed "incompatibility of Article 33.c of HEA, including secondary legislation within its framework, with Article 54 of TFEU and Articles 10, 13 and 16 of the European Directive 2006/123/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on services in the internal market." The problem is that sometime in the past, Slovenia probably defined higher education as services. The complication has continued into 2014.

In April 2013, the Director and a member of the Agency Council participated in an all-day conference on the Slovenian Qualifications Framework, attended by various stakeholders. The legislator must adopt the National Qualifications Framework Act as soon as possible. It is particularly important for the classification and assessment of learning outcomes acquired by students and graduates. It was in 2012 when the Agency took part in the preparation of materials relating to the higher education area for the final report "Integration of the national qualifications framework in the European Qualifications Framework for life-long learning and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area".

The Agency strived for prompt provision of answers to the questions of applicants, higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, students, journalists, ministries and others, and improved counselling and assistance to experts. On a monthly basis, it updated the data on its website regarding accreditations and external evaluations and promptly submitted it to the ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education, together with decisions and other documents required for updating and entering data in the register.

In November and December 2013, the Agency Director visited three public universities and six private higher education institutions (UL, UM, UP, UNG, EVRO-PF, DOBA, ECM-ACE, VŠZNJ, GEA-College). Two institutions did not respond to the initiative for a visit. During the interviews, the Director briefly advised the representatives of the institutions of the Agency's activity and the situation in higher education (October 2013), of the work performed at the Agency – mostly re-accreditations to all four universities – and of the future work, primarily of re-accreditation procedures of study programmes. He did not comment individual accreditation procedures; however, he presented findings of the external evaluation of the Agency and informed the representatives of the institutions of the Agency's entry into EQAR and its signing of the MULTRA agreement. At public universities, he pointed to Part 1 of ESG concerning the culture of quality and the necessity for publishing all appeal procedures, for both employees and students, on web sites. He mentioned the efforts to amend HEA allowing for immediate transition to institutional evaluation with two site visits

and shorter validity of accreditation (5 years). Except for initial accreditation, programme accreditation would be under the authority of higher education institutions, even though the National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020 stipulates otherwise. He suggested the institutions to stimulate both teachers and students to apply to become experts of the Agency. Generally, the institutions mentioned good communication with the Agency staff. They appreciate the work done by the Agency, but they wish that the possibility to resolve procedures more quickly be examined. They also report on being burdened with collecting different data due to procedures, which later show to be highly useful for planning and specifying future tasks and preparation of action plans. The private institutions emphasised their problem with libraries. Contracts with town libraries and good information system were supposed to suffice to formally meet the required criteria. In relation to the stability of staffing, the private institutions believe that the required level of staffing (e.g. in professional higher education programmes) is a formality, since these programmes require the inclusion of experts from the practice, while postgraduate programmes require the inclusion of experts from scientific-research institutions. New legislation should regulate the status of distance learning, define more exactly the criteria for the transformation of institutions and for regulated professions. The issue of branches abroad was mentioned in relation to transnational education. The institutions commended the Agency's intention to visit them.

Such visits are an excellent opportunity for the Agency Council to present itself to the institutions. It would be highly appropriate if the Council members visited those institutions for which the Council found deficiencies more frequently, so that the Council's decision can be commented upon. The Agency must provide for correct application of substantive law and proper justifications of final decisions in accreditation and evaluation procedures. The Director will continue with his visits in 2014.

F) INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, JOINING ENQA

The biggest achievement of the Agency in 2013 was **its entry in EQAR** (described in more detail on page 12 of the report).

In December 2013, in The Hague, the Netherlands, the Agency signed the international agreement on mutual recognition of accreditation results in joint study programmes within ECA. The agreement is valid for three years. This is to show how the Agency is committed to the internationalisation of higher education in Slovenia and European higher education area. Besides, its role and importance in the international area thus grow, which contributes to increased visibility of Slovenian higher education area and the recognition of Slovenian diplomas.

Moreover, in 2013 the Agency continued to intensely participate in the following ECA projects:



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- **JOQAR** (Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded): the Agency was the coordinator of one of the largest pilot accreditation procedures with a general aim of facilitation of accreditations and recognition of Erasmus - Mundus programmes (and joint study programmes in general). The Agency participated in the steering group and in the working group. In March 2013, it prepared the first accreditation report according to JOQAR methodology; based on this, it adopted the decision on accreditation of a joint masters' study programme which was later jointly approved and recognised by other quality assurance agencies participating in the programme. Besides, it also participated in a working group which convened in Madrid in February 2013 and in Ljubljana in October 2013.
- **ECApedia, EEEP and Crossroads**: the main aim 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, part of which is the information on national quality assurance and accreditation bodies and bodies for recognition of acquired qualifications. In 2013, we actively participated in a thorough revision of web sites and contents of the ECA Consortium (<http://ecahe.eu/>) and took part in the construction and implementation of the ECA's Expert Exchange Platform (<http://ecahe.eu/home/eeep/>), which constitutes a platform for expert exchange within the ECA Consortium.
- **CeQuInt** (Certificate for Quality of Internationalisation): the purpose of the project, selected in the framework of Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus); Erasmus Multilateral Projects in September 2012, is to improve and promote the internationalisation process in higher education, and to develop methodology to measure internationalisation at both, programme and institutional levels. Successful evaluation will lead to the European internationalisation certificate. The Agency participates in the steering group; in 2013, it participated in the development of pilot methodology for training of experts in Vienna and carried out all organisational procedures for the evaluation of a study programme which will be carried out in March 2014 at the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana. The evaluation with the international group of experts in the field of higher education internationalisation will not be intended for assessing quality standards aimed at accreditation or re-accreditation, but for assessing the standards of internationalisation quality and for awarding the certificate. In March 2013, it also hosted a steering committee meeting which was convened in Ljubljana.

Reinforced international participation of the Agency in 2013 is also seen through continued cooperation with ECA (<http://ecahe.eu/>), of which it is a full member, because it was the first time that the Agency actively participated in various projects, in addition to attending annual meetings and different seminars. In the context of CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance

Agencies in Higher Education– <http://www.ceenqa.eu>), the Agency Director was elected to CEENQA Executive Board.

Moreover, the staff participated in different conferences, workshops and trainings both in Slovenia and abroad. They also responded to various invitations for foreign international accreditations and attended meetings such as: AACSB, EUA IEP. In the future, the Agency will strive for even closer cooperation and exchange of staff with other quality assurance agencies in the European higher education area. The Agency is also in the process of becoming a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

One of the important strategic objectives of the Agency is full membership in ENQA (www.enqa.eu). The Agency expects to submit the application for full membership in ENQA in the spring of 2014. ENQA provides information, experience and good practices in the field of quality assurance in higher education to European quality assurance agencies, public bodies and higher education institutions.

The Agency, candidate to become member of ENQA, will be assessed mostly according to Parts 2 and 3 of ESG. The Agency must prepare a comprehensive self-evaluation report and gather a series of documents on its operation. This challenge was undertaken in the second half of 2013. It prepared an extensive self-evaluation report, including the assessment according to ESG and the assessment of implementing recommendations provided by the international group of evaluators and the EQAR Committee.

The annual work plan for 2013 already included the activities aimed at becoming member of ENQA.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

OUTTURN OF TOTAL STATE BUDGET OF THE AGENCY FOR 2013

| BH | Policy/Main programme/Sub-programme/Budget heading | 2013 adopted budget (in EUR) | 2013 established budget (in EUR) | 2013 budget outturn (in EUR) | Share of budget outturn in the established budget |
|----|---|------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 = 5 / 4 |
| | 02 – Higher education, science, technology and information society | | | | |



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| BH | Policy/Main programme/Sub-programme/Budget heading | 2013 adopted budget (in EUR) | 2013 established budget (in EUR) | 2013 budget outturn (in EUR) | Share of budget outturn in the established budget |
|------|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 = 5 / 4 |
| | 0201 – Higher education | | | | |
| | 020101 – Higher education | | | | |
| 9885 | Salaries | 298,000 | 295,849.43 | 295,849.43 | 100 % |
| 9886 | Material costs | 133,041.32 | 130,769.98 | 130,769.98 | 100 % |
| 9887 | Investments | 1,827.68 | 1,827.68 | 1,827.68 | 100 % |
| 9888 | High. edu. quality | 50,000 | 38,001.61 | 38,001.61 | 100 % |
| | | | | | |
| 9889 | Quality, competitiveness and responsiveness of higher education – ESF – 07-13 – EU | *808,350 | *808,350 | 709,457.24 | 87.77 % |
| 9890 | Quality, competitiveness and responsiveness of higher education – ESF – 07-13 – Slovenian part | *142,650 | *142,650 | 125,211.11 | 87.77 % |

In the beginning of 2013, the adopted and established budget with the ESF funds amounted to EUR 2,520,550 (9889= EUR 2,142,467.50 and 9890= EUR 378,082.50). After the 2013 state budget had been revised, the adopted and established budget was reduced to EUR 1,643,524 (9889= EUR 1,399,888 and 9890= EUR 243,636). Subsequently, the Decision No OP RČV/3/3/001-3-NAKVIS amending Decision No OP RČV/3/3/001-0-NAKVIS on the allocation of resources for the operation "Establishment of a National Quality Assurance System in Higher Education 2010-2014" reduced the funds to EUR 951,000 (9889= EUR 808,350 and 9890= EUR 142,650).

Compared to 2012, the funds from the integral part of the budget were significantly reduced, while the use of the ESF funds was increased accordingly.

The fact that the basic activity of the Agency is partly covered by the ESF funds is rather unfavourable.

The **available budgetary resources** outturn (salaries, material costs, investments and quality of higher education) of the adopted budget of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education amounted to **100 %** in 2013.

100 % outturn of the available budgetary resources is a result of the following:

- the Act Amending the Public Sector Salary System Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 46/2013),
- the revised state budget in June 2013,
- the efficient use of the lump sum – certain costs were considered indirect costs within the implementation of the ESF project, so some budgetary resources remained unused towards the end of 2013, and the Agency reallocated them to general budgetary reserve (EUR 14,500 in November, EUR 1,920.30 in December).

The outturn of the resources available from the ESF funds amounted to **87.7%** in 2013.

87.7 % outturn of the ESF resources is a result of the following:

- unfinished informatisation of the Agency (all payments were postponed to 2014 or 2015).

If, in addition to the available budgetary resources, the ESF funds are taken into account, the established budget outturn in 2013 amounted to 91.8 %.

The Agency performed the majority of the most important tasks specified in the work plan for 2013 in accordance with the strategic objectives and considering the descriptive indicators set out in the explanation of the amending budget for 2013, as follows:

- implementation of accreditation procedures for higher education;
- implementation of external evaluations of higher vocational colleges,
- maintenance of membership in the representative European organisations;
- preparation for the external evaluation by EQAR and ENQA; and
- establishment and maintenance of uniform information system of the Agency - partly.

In 2013, the Agency continued to intensively examine the efficiency and applicability of the established external quality assurance system for higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, and was assessing suitability and applicability of accreditation and evaluation procedures and criteria in relation to stakeholders. Based on the findings, proposals for revised criteria for accreditation and evaluation were drafted, the Agency brochure and

the Manual for Experts were published in 2013, and the expert training programme was revised.

The Agency checked its internal quality system, stimulated higher education institutions to establish their own quality culture, verified responses of higher education institutions with surveys and personal visits, performed training of experts-evaluators and organised the third conference for all Agency experts. At this conference, the representatives of the Association of Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia and of the Organisation of the Disabled Students of Slovenia presented problems that students with special needs face during study. During the second part of the conference, a discussion regarding the modification of criteria and site visit protocol was held.

The Agency staff regularly participate in training of student quality assessment experts at the SSU seat.

The table below shows the data on the resources that the Agency received as the direct non-governmental budget user in 2012 and 2013.

Integral resources: cover salaries for the Director and to 9 employees employed for an indefinite period

ESF funds (until 31 October 2015): cover salaries for 13 employees employed for a definite period and costs of all evaluations (accreditations) and appeals.

COMPARISON OF THE RESOURCES SPENT BY THE AGENCY IN 2012 AND 2013 (IN EUR)

| | | 2012 | 2013 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| INTEGRAL RESOURCES | | | |
| 1 | Salaries | 343,976 | 295,849 |
| 2 | Material costs | 174,151 | 130,770 |
| 3 | Investments | 12,525 | 1,828 |
| 4 | Council meeting fees | 75,300 | 38,000 |
| | 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 | 605,952 | 466,447 |
| ESF RESOURCES | | | |
| 5 | Salaries | 253,379 | 287,700 |
| 6 | Accreditation costs | 432,369 | 539,618 |



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| | | 2012 | 2013 |
|----------|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 7 | Investments | 3,747 | 7,349 |
| | 5 + 6 + 7 | 689,495 | 834,667 |
| | TOTAL EXPENDITURE | 1,295,447 | 1,301,114 |
| | 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 | | |

The National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020 imposes on the Agency a high number of duties, while stating in the action no. 20: "the Agency shall develop and constantly update the external quality assurance system, including all higher education stakeholders

- Explanation: the Agency will create and update the external quality assurance system in full compliance with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.
- Financing of the action: From 2015, when the (co)funding of the Agency from the European Structural Fund expires, approximately EUR 6 million of budgetary funds annually shall be earmarked for the Agency, increasing in line with the extent of work and complexity of operation."
- end of quote.

The Agency currently finances all of its activities (salaries, accreditations, material costs, external experts, Agency Council, Appeal Committee) with approximately EUR 1.3 million annually. If the Agency received only a third (EUR 2 million) of EUR 6 million planned in the NHEP 2011-2020 in 2015 (when the ESF funds expire), this would enable it to continue with good work. If there are no funds, the Agency will not be able to pursue such work.

The audit by the Court of Audit of the Republic of Slovenia

In June 2012, on the basis of the decision on performing the audit of 15 June 2012, the Court of Audit of the Republic of Slovenia informed the Agency that regularity audit for 2011 would be performed. The first meeting between the Agency and the auditors of the Court of Audit took place in July 2012, during which both the course of the audit procedure and the documents and data that had to be prepared by the Agency prior to the auditors' visit were presented. The Agency's business overview for 2012 began in September 2012 at the Agency. It took two full months.

In 2013, the Agency received a draft audit report and was invited to attend a clearance meeting. After the meeting, the Agency filed a complaint against particular audit findings. The draft and proposed audit report are confidential. In 2014, the Agency expects to receive the final business audit report for 2011. The opinion of the Court of Audit will probably be negative.

Preparation of the financial plan for 2014 and 2015

On 25 July 2013, the Government issued a decision including indicative limits to prepare the proposed revised budget of the Republic of Slovenia for 2014 and the proposed budget of the Republic of Slovenia for 2015. After reviewing the financial situation and the indicative limits, it was established that the indicated distribution of budgetary expenditure for 2014 and 2015, the Agency's operation would be significantly affected, of which MF was then informed. The anticipated integral budgetary resources of the Agency for 2014 were additionally reduced by 8% compared to the revised 2013 budget. These funds sufficed in 2013 because certain costs were considered indirect costs within the project implementation (ESF resources). The ESF project was supposed to expire on 31 October 2014; fortunately, it was extended until 31 October 2015.

In accordance with the general financial situation in the Republic of Slovenia, the Agency adopted a series measures to reduce the use of the integral resources in 2012, when the budget was revised, and in 2013 (payment of the essential monthly overheads only, no additional contracts were concluded, e.g. for security, insurance of furniture, computer and other equipment).

After the coordination meeting with the state secretary of MF and her team on 13 September 2013, and thanks to the fact that the ESF project funding had been extended until 31 October 2015, the Agency's budgets for 2014 and 2015 are now supposed to be financially sustainable, provided that the budget of the Republic of Slovenia is not further restricted. Nevertheless, stable financing of the Agency's operation after 2015 will be put at risk if additional measures are not taken.

One of the conditions to become member of ENQA is to meet ESG 3.4, stating that Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

Statement of accounts for 2013

On 7 February 2014, the Agency submitted the Financial Report for 2013 to the Ministry of Finance, and prepared the Statement of Accounts for 2013 in the first half of March 2013; the Statement must be prepared by all direct budgetary users in SAPPRA web application. The Statement includes the report on the financial plan realisation, the explanation of balance sheet data, the statement of the estimate of public finance internal control and a special business report comprising the report or information on the achieved objectives with respect to predetermined target values.

In the Statement of the Estimate of Public Finance Internal Control, the Agency emphasised the risk it could not manage to a sufficient extent:

"The Agency is afraid of further reductions in funds for its operation, and will strive to preserve the funds for 2013, 2014 and to provide budgetary resources for 2015 and beyond, when the ESF project expires. Each revised and amended budget additionally increases the risk, even though the obligation of continuous financing of the Agency is stipulated in HEA and the NHEP 2011-2020. The NHEP 2011-2020 even stipulates that the Agency will receive EUR 6 million from the budget; currently, the Agency operates with EUR 1.3 million per year (with integral resources decreasing every year). In 2013, the Agency was entered in EQAR; one of the condition of admission is stable long-term funding - if this condition is no longer met, it might be removed from the register.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Employments financed from the budget funds are planned in the human resources plan of the Agency, while the ESF project documentation includes the plan for employments financed from the ESF funds.

At the end of 2012, there were 19 employees at the Agency: the Acting Director and 5 employees at the General Affairs Department, and 13 employees at the Quality Department. In 2012, the number of employees significantly reduced, both of those financed from the budget funds and those financed from the ESF funds. Despite that, the Agency carried out the majority of tasks specified in the work plan for 2012, and in order to achieve these objectives, its employees were often overburdened. Since the number of tasks will not reduce in the future, additional employments are necessary.

In 2013, three members of staff were employed, and an additional one to temporarily replace the employee on maternity leave. The Acting Director

returned to her previous position. The Agency Director took his position in April 2013.

As of 31 December 2013, there were 24 employees at the Agency: the Director, 18 members of staff in the Quality Department and 5 in the General Affairs Department. In 2013, the planned increase in number of employees financed from the ESF funds was implemented, namely for three members of the staff. For this purpose, the project was changed; the Agency obtained approval of this change in the second half of 2012.

In 2012 and 2013, the Agency staff accomplished almost all tasks specified in the work plan, and even exceeded them in some areas.

In the future, continued efforts should be made to increase the number of employees and improve work organisation, and to amend HEA (particularly regarding transition to institutional evaluation), so that the Agency will not have to conduct accreditation and evaluation procedures for a large annual number of study programmes. The current staffing, in addition to other tasks - international participation, cooperation with stakeholders, development work, significant number of appeals - prevents such workload to be carried out without overburdening the staff. Efforts should be made to obtain integral budgetary funds for salaries of the employees who are employed under the ESF project until October 2015, which was announced and explained in the Staffing and Financial Plan for 2013 and 2014 which had to be submitted by the Agency to MF by 27 September 2012.

Integrity Plan

According to the Integrity and Prevention of Corruption Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 69/2011- official consolidated version 2; hereinafter ZIntPK), the Agency is obliged to draw up the integrity plan. This is a documented process of planning, implementing, monitoring, reviewing and taking action in managing the risks of corruption and other non-ethical conduct within an individual institution.

At the end of May 2012, the Integrity Plan of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education was adopted. In order to draw up the plan, a working group was appointed at the Agency that examined the risk factors and checked them at three levels: work 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, together with the proposals for action, persons responsible and implementation deadlines (risk registry), was approved on 25 May 2012. The integrity plan is to be redrawn every two years. The next integrity plan is foreseen for 2014.

CONCLUSION

In 2013, the Agency was relatively successful in fulfilling its 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 contextually, and counsels all stakeholders and participants in tertiary education in line with European and global development trends."

In addition to the tasks the Agency has to perform by the law and other acts, it strived to establish better and more encouraging working environment in order to complete numerous and demanding tasks listed in the work plan. At the end of 2013, there were 98 higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges in Slovenia, and 918 study programmes entered in the Ministry's register that are implemented by higher education institutions.

The Agency was rather successful in fulfilling its mission. Although the re-accreditation of universities is among the most demanding and lengthy procedures, the Agency re-accredited (thereby completing the procedure) all four Slovenia universities: University of Ljubljana, University of Maribor, University of Primorska and University of Nova Gorica. In total, they enrol 88% of all students in Slovenia.

In 2013, the Agency achieved one of its important strategic objectives. In April 2013, an independent international group of evaluators performed external evaluation of the Agency's operation under Parts 2 and 3 of ESG. To this end, the Agency prepared a comprehensive self-evaluation report for the period between 2012 and 2012. The evaluators' report was complimentary, and in the summer of 2013, the Agency submitted the application for the entry into EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – <http://www.eqar.eu>). On 19 October 2013, the international committee of EQAR decided to accept the Agency into the register. The Agency was entered in the register together with the Estonian agency and the agency of the UK and Northern Ireland. Accreditations issued to Slovenian higher education institutions and their study programmes and to higher vocational colleges thus obtained added value at the European level.

The Agency tried to gain more trust from higher education and higher vocational education stakeholders and general public, and strengthened its visibility in Slovenia. It continuously strived for the improvement of its own quality, which is the foundation for an efficient, with all stakeholders agreed upon and generally acknowledged external quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education. This is the area where the Agency demonstrated a certain progress. 2013 was the Agency's fourth year of operation.

SUMMARY

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency) successfully achieved the objectives of its mission in 2013: "The Agency provides for development and operation of the quality assurance system in the Slovenian higher education area. It operates responsibly, both formally and contextually, and counsels all stakeholders and participants in tertiary education in line with European and global development trends."

In addition to the common tasks which the Agency is required to perform in accordance with the law and other legal acts, the Agency aimed to establish a better and more supportive work environment to be able to accomplish numerous and demanding tasks in the work plan of quality assurance in higher education. At the end of 2013, there are 98 higher education institutions and higher vocational institutions (entered into the register) together with 918 study programmes in Slovenia.

The Agency was successful with its mission. Despite the fact that the re-accreditation of universities is one of the most complex and lengthy procedures, the Agency in 2013 extended the accreditation (and thus ending the process) for all four Slovenian universities: University of Ljubljana, University of Maribor, University of Primorska and University of Nova Gorica, which at the same time covers 88% of all Slovenian student population.

The Agency in 2013 reached one of the most important strategic objectives. In April 2013, an independent international panel of experts conduct an external evaluation of the agency's work in comparison with European standards and guidelines - European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG - ENQA Part 2 and 3). The agency has prepared a comprehensive self-evaluation report for the period 2010-2012. The evaluation report was favourable and the Agency in the summer of 2013 applied for entry into the European register of trusted quality assurance agencies in higher education EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - <http://www.eqar.eu>). The board of the register EQAR on 19 October 2013 adopted a decision to enter the Agency in the register. The Agency was entered in the register together with the Estonian agency and the Agency of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. Slovenian higher education diplomas and curricula are thereby approved also by European standards.

The Agency has improved its reputation in Slovenian higher education area by all stakeholders and the general public. We constantly sought to improve our internal quality, which is the foundation for an effective external quality assurance and enhancement in higher education. This was the improvement for 2013. In 2013, the Agency has entered the fourth year of its ordinary activities.

Additional sources:

Work and Financial Plan for 2013

Business Report for 2013

Self-evaluation Report for 2013

Minutes of the Agency Council sessions in 2013

Minutes of internal meetings of the Agency staff in 2013

I would like to thank everybody who participated in preparing this report on work and operation of the Agency in 2013.

Dr Ivan Leban
May 2014