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Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije  
za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

s·q·a·a

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education



*Naložba v vašo prihodnost*

OPERACIJO DELNO FINANCIRA EVROPSKA UNIJA  
Evropski socialni sklad

## **REPORT ON WORK AND OPERATION OF THE AGENCY IN 2011 – SUMMARY**



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## 1 About the Agency

### 1.1 Operation of the Agency's bodies

#### 1.1.1 Agency Council

In 2011, the Council held 27 sessions of which 14 were correspondence sessions. It adopted over 500 decisions, the majority of which was related to applications for accreditation (or external evaluation). In addition to decisions on accreditations in higher education and external evaluations in higher vocational education, it has been mainly deciding on criteria and other regulations and has been discussing about various content areas important for the work of the Agency. It has appointed several working groups, among them for renewal of the acts of the Agency, consideration of initiatives and claims for extraordinary evaluations, preparation of self-evaluation report, and project group for preparation on external evaluation of the Agency.

1. On 17 November 2012, it adopted the following two fundamental regulations for the work of the Agency:

- SQAA Strategy 2011–2016, and
- Quality Manual.

2. Criteria and plans pertaining to accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes, and evaluations of higher vocational colleges. The Agency Council adopted the following:

- Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges (in force since February 2011);
- Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes for Teacher Education (in force since November 2011);
- Guidelines for Quality Assessment, Planning and Implementing Research Work as One of the Key Elements in Higher Education;
- plan for external evaluations in higher education until 2015;
- plan for external evaluations of higher vocational colleges until 2015, and also approved plans for 2011 and 2012;
- in addition, it was preparing
- Criteria for Transnational Higher Education (in force since March 2012).

3. It approved entry of 122 experts in register of the Agency.

4. On several sessions, it discussed the following content areas:

a) higher education and higher vocational education legislation

On its sessions, it paid special attention to proposals for amendment of current Higher Education Act (see Appendices), in particular with regard to amendment of criteria for transnational education definition (Article 33). The proposals were

submitted to the ministry responsible for higher education and Coordination of Higher Education Institutions.

In addition, it requested the ministry as the Act proposer for interpretations of Article 2 (definition of higher education institution) and Article 37 (adjustment of study programme organisation) of *Higher Education Act (ZViS)*, and asked about the function of competence; it received responses to all questions asked. The Agency Council also asked the legislator, National Assembly, for the interpretations of Articles 2 and 37 of ZViS, but has not yet received the reply.

The Council adopted official position on amendments to the Higher Education Act, and submitted it to the ministry responsible for education and sport.

#### b) information system

The problem of the *Agency's information system* and the *Accreditation Proposal web form* connected thereto was considered on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> session of the Council; it adopted the following decisions:

- higher education institutions may submit their applications in the PDF or Word form until the overall electronic support of the Agency (establishment of new e-system);
- the Agency shall provide for technical and information support for the applicants, and shall establish information desk for them as soon as possible;
- on the Agency Council session in September, the development of adequate software and overall e-system of the Agency shall be presented – the Council got acquainted with it on its 37<sup>th</sup> session;
- the defects in use of electronic form shall be remedied as soon as possible;
- the Agency Specialists Service shall assist higher education institutions in remedying difficulties with the electronic Accreditation Proposal form;
- upon amendment of the *Criteria for Accreditations and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes*, the transparency and traceability of the form shall be improved in the new format of the Accreditation Proposal form.

#### c) training of experts

Problems related to experts were addressed several times (on 18<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> session) from different points of view, namely, with regard to their training, entry in the register of experts, and insufficient number of experts for individual subject areas.

One-half of 122 experts, entered in register of the Agency, have already been participating in assessment and external evaluation. There are two reasons why the other half have not yet participated, namely qualifications for the area in which there is a larger number of experts available (business studies), and the level of education obtained (master's or bachelor's degree).

In its comments on method of selecting experts and their training, the Council emphasised the following: the Agency should invite experienced evaluators (mainly

with international experiences) to participate through special invitations. For them, it should carry out different kind of training, since it is inappropriate that all candidates are treated the same, regardless their experience in quality assessment. The training for these candidates should be carried out in a form of acquaintance with the Agency Council acts and exchange of opinions; they should decide whether they wish to participate in training with other candidates for themselves. Although, some members of the Council thought that such training would change attitude of experienced evaluators towards other participants. In relation to these problems, the Council adopted several decisions, namely that a proposal for training of established experts by distance shall be formed or that the education schedule shall be adequately adjusted to support their needs, and the committee responsible for opening applications shall separately indicate their applications. The Council also pointed out that the compliance of candidates for entry in the register of experts with the conditions applying for experts shall be examined more thoroughly. Despite the detected problems, it estimated that the training in February was successfully completed.

At several sessions, the Council was informed about individual applicants trying to influence the decisions of members of the group of experts by forming various pressures. Therefore, it discussed conduct of experts and response of the Agency in such circumstances.

The pressures were frequent at the beginning of the applications for the initial accreditation assessment in February 2011. The applicants were exercising them directly (on experts) and through media, and also on the management of the Agency by telephone calls, letter of students to the Agency and Office of the Prime Minister and through a deputy of National Assembly. The Agency sent written response to accusations about delaying accreditation procedures to the students, Office and the applicant.

#### d) accreditation of dislocated units

The problem of accreditation of dislocated units was addressed on 24<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> session. The Council discussed both the initial accreditation and re-accreditation of a dislocated unit, i.e. accreditation of provision of study programme in the dislocated unit. Mainly the dilemmas about accreditation procedures, i.e. about how the planned provision of study programme in the dislocated unit shall be accredited as a change to study programme, how to accredit dislocated unit upon external evaluation and how many dislocated units of the institution must be visited by the group of experts, which criteria shall apply for accreditation of these units abroad, how to act in case the locations at which the study programmes are provided change, etc., were present. It was decided that these problems will be newly and more specifically arranged in amendments to the Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programme.

### 1.1.2 Appeal Committee

In accordance with the provisions of ZViS, the Appeal Committee as second-level decision-making body are appointed by the Agency Council; they were constituted at the Council session on 1 February 2011.

The Appeal Committee shall decide in appeals against the Agency Council's decisions on accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes. If the appeal is upheld, the matter shall be returned to the Agency Council for readjudication. Decision of the Appeal Committee shall be complete. Judicial dispute may be initiated against it.

In 2011, the Committee met for five sessions, and decided on seventeen matters. Their decisions were as follows:

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

From an overview of dealt with matters, it can be established that in majority of cases the appellants asserted all three grounds for appeal from the first paragraph of Article 237 of *General Administrative Procedure Act* (ZUP) (appeal complaints of procedural and substantive violations of regulations). Namely, the decisions were challenged for the following reasons:

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

Substantial violation of administrative procedure which occurs when the decision can not be examined, referred to in point 7 of the second paragraph of Article 237 of ZUP, was most often asserted as grounds of procedural violations. Grounds were mainly that challenged decision does not have the reasoning or essential parts of reasoning that it should have according to the law, since otherwise it can not be established whether a disposition of the decision was well founded.

The Appeal Committee have in seven dealt with matters upheld appeal, annulled challenged decision and returned the matter to the Agency Council for readjudication precisely due to the grounds stated in above paragraph (point 7 of the second paragraph of Article 237 of ZUP).

Appeal complaint of procedural violations referred to in point 3 of second paragraph of Article 237 of ZUP according to which the parties were not given the possibility to declare themselves on the facts and circumstances important for issuing the

decision also appeared. The complaint was mainly that the oral hearing was not called, and also that the applicant was not served the opinions and observations of expert witnesses.

Regarding the violation of incompletely or incorrectly established state of facts, and consequently, of incorrect application of substantive law, the complaint pertaining to establishment of existence of academic research work and establishment whether the Slovenian Current Research Information System (SICRIS) is proof of academic research activity required by regulations, was most often given. In this regard, the Appeal Committee emphasised that in its decision, the decision-making body has to reason, in particular, what is relevant in its assessment of compliance with the conditions of academic research work, and on which grounds the SICRIS base was used as its (only) proof thereto.

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

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

Maybe, the decision of the Appeal Committee in matter in which the application for revocation of the decision under the right of scrutiny was evaluated, should be especially noted. In this case, the Appeal Committee declared void the part of decision in which it was resolved that "study programme shall be provided at the Head Office of the Faculty [...] at the following address [...] after examining it ex officio. The Committee established that by taking such decision, the Agency Council resolved on part of the claim not submitted by the applicant, and such violations are observed by virtue of its office.

### *1.1.3 Director*

Government of the Republic of Slovenia appointed Acting Director on 19 February 2010. The Director shall be appointed and dismissed by the Agency Council on the basis of open competition in accordance with the conditions and criteria, laid down in this Act. The Director shall be appointed for the term of five years, and can be reappointed. The current Director was appointed on 25 August 2010 for the term of five years.

## 2 Operation of the Agency in 2011 – plan and implementation

Planning of annual work of the Agency is directly related with its strategic objectives and areas of activity, and thus presents their annual operationalisation. Therefore, long-term objectives on one hand and their implementation form at the annual level on the other, are tightly connected. Moreover, the majority of tasks for implementation of long-term and short-term objectives within this framework is permanent, and thus shall repeat over several years or even all years of planning.

In this sense, the objectives of operation of the Agency in 2011 are planned and defined by four content areas, namely due to the following:

1. quality assurance in higher education;
2. criteria, standards and other acts of the Agency;
3. organisation of the Agency's operation; (not included in summary), and
4. quality assurance of the operation of the Agency.

### 2.1 Quality assurance in higher education

#### 2.1.1 *Forming and maintaining publicly accessible records on accredited higher education institutions and study programmes*

The Agency shall keep public record in accordance with Article 51 of the Higher Education Act. From data acquired by the Agency in electronic form of applications for accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, it shall form and maintain publicly accessible records with data prescribed by ZViS on the following:

- accreditations of higher education institutions;
- accreditations of study programmes;
- evaluations of higher vocational colleges, evaluations of implementation of study programmes and higher vocational colleges;
- concluded contracts and granted consents on transnational education, and
- granted consents to transformation of higher education institutions and to changes of study programmes.

#### Realisation

Realisation of the task is connected with establishment of uniform information system at the Agency that is being prepared. Records which were published on the Agency's website in the middle of March 2011 were manually prepared, namely:

- public records on accreditations of study programmes from 2004 to 2010;
- public records on accredited study programmes from 2010 to 2012;
- public records on higher education institutions;
- plan of re-accreditations of study programmes; and
- plan of re-accreditations of higher education institutions.

Preparation of public records on evaluations of higher education institutions and study programmes, and of higher vocational colleges will start after conclusion of procedures; preparation of records on concluded contracts and granted consents on transnational education will start with commencement of granting consent in accordance with the Criteria for Transnational Higher Education.

## **2.2 Criteria and other acts of the Agency**

### *2.2.1 Preparation and adoption of the Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges*

According to the *Higher Education Act*, the Agency shall assure quality in entire tertiary education sector, including quality assurance in higher vocational colleges by implementation of external evaluations.

#### Realisation

Working Group of the Agency Council prepared the *Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges* and accompanying form in close cooperation with higher vocational colleges and their community. The Criteria are in force since February 2011, i.e. after their publication in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia (on 14 February 2011).

### *2.2.2 Preparation and adoption of the Criteria for Transnational Higher Education*

According to the Higher Education Act, the Agency shall assure quality in entire tertiary education sector, including by regulation of transnational education.

#### Realisation

Working Group of the Agency Council began preparing the *Criteria for Transnational Higher Education* at the end of 2011 in close cooperation with all stakeholders in higher education. To this end, several working groups and consultation (on 31 March 2011) were organised. By the end of 2011, the last draft of the Criteria was prepared; the Criteria were approved by the Agency Council *on its 46<sup>th</sup> session on 15 February 2012 and entered into force on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2012 (on the fifteenth day after its publication in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 18, of 9 March 2012).*

#### Realisation of unplanned tasks

### *2.2.3 Preparation and adoption of the Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes for Teacher Education*

The *Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes for Teacher Education* were adopted at the initiative of higher education institutions that provide study programmes for teacher education; they were prepared in cooperation with working group at the Ministry of Education and Sports, in which employees of the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and representatives of higher education institutions providing study programmes for teacher education, were included. The Criteria were published in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia*, No 94/2011, and entered into force on 28 November 2011.

#### *2.2.4 Preparation and adoption of the Guidelines for Quality Assessment, Planning and Implementing Research Work as One of the Key Elements in Higher Education*

The Agency Council adopted, on its session in November (on 17 November 2011), the *Guidelines for Quality Assessment and for Planning and Implementing Research Work as One of the Key Elements in Higher Education* prepared by the Council Working Group.

### **2.3 Quality assurance in the operation of the Agency**

#### *2.3.1 Preparation and adoption of the Quality Manual*

The *Quality Manual* is a starting foundation of the internal quality assurance system of the Agency on which the activities for preparation on and implementation of external evaluation of the Agency are founded. First draft of the manual was submitted to the Agency Council to be assessed on its session in June (on 15 June 2011), and was adopted with amendments on its session in November (on 17 November 2011).

#### *2.3.2 Preparation and adoption of the SQAA Strategy 2011–2016*

The *Agency Strategy* has been prepared in two steps. In spring, the document entitled *Mission, Vision, Values and Strategic Objectives* was prepared, also being a subject of discussion on workshop at which President of the Council and Agency staff participated (on 2 March 2011), while in autumn, the whole document *SQAA Strategy 2011–2016* was drawn up and adopted on the Agency Council session in November (on 17 November 2011). Both documents are published on the Agency's website.

#### *2.3.3 Forming and implementing the system for internal evaluation of the Agency*

In accordance with the national and European criteria, standards and instructions, the Agency must establish internal quality system as the basis for external evaluation of the Agency. Among planned objectives, the following have been realised:

- drawn up and adopted *Quality Manual*;
- cooperation with stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education taking place through provision of written answers to written questions and dilemmas, and in the form of workshops – which were carried out at the university level (University of Ljubljana and University of Maribor) and, to a more detailed extent, at the University of Ljubljana (4) on the subject of completing the *Accreditation Proposal* form; on these occasions, comments and opinions of higher education institutions on implementation of acts for quality assurance and proposals for amendments were collected.
- comparative analysis of self-evaluations of agencies (ASHE – Croatia and EVA – Denmark) as an input data for preparation of schedule for implementation of Agency's self-evaluation;

- exchange of experience and examples of good practice (ASHE), in particular with regard to preparation of self-evaluation and to external evaluation of the Agency (visit of ASHE on 19 December 2011);
- preparation of instruments for self-evaluation of the Agency – schedule and framework structure of self-evaluation report, both presented to the Agency Council (on 15 December 2011), the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education (on 13 December 2011) and the Coordination of Higher Education Institutions (21 December 2011 and 24 January 2012);
- preparation of instruments (surveys) for monitoring the work of Agency staff, members of the Council, stakeholders and experts of the Agency; at the end of 2011, the surveys on applicants of re-accreditation applications began being conducted (they are carried out when experts visit for external evaluation and when report on visit is provided in order to enable comments on the report); the survey on experts is conducted following the submission of final report for external evaluation;
- opinions on implementation of the acts of the Agency and their effect were selected on workshop in the context of first consultation of experts; opinions of candidates for entry in the register of experts are being collected and discussed on trainings for the candidates;
- information on operation of the Agency (acts, Council decisions, bodies and other) are being published on the Agency's website and regularly updated; members of the Council have passwords to access materials for the Council sessions; Agency staff has information on internal network available; a section of responses to questions of stakeholders is available for documents for accreditation; also, workshops at the first consultation of experts of the Agency on 24 November 2011 were oriented towards resolving outstanding issues;
- besides higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, the Agency also cooperates with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Education and Sports, and partially with the Metrology Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (due to applications of candidates for entry in the register of experts).

#### The two unrealised tasks:

- to draw up a code of ethics;
- to establish cooperation with other stakeholders, e.g. the Ministry of Health and the Slovenian Research Agency.

#### *2.3.4 Preparation of materials for the membership in ENQA*

Preparation for membership in ENQA and entry in EQAR began with the following:

- establishment of internal quality assurance system (Subsection 2.4.3.) subject to *Quality Manual*;
- appointment of the project group for preparation on external evaluation (on 41<sup>st</sup> session of the Council on 15 December 2011) and the group for preparation of self-evaluation report (on 19 January 2012);
- visit at ASHE from Croatia in order to get acquainted with their experiences in preparation of self-evaluation report and to get prepared for external evaluation of the Agency (on 19 December 2011) and exchange of experiences and

examples of good practices (ASHE), in particular regarding preparation on self-evaluation and external evaluation of the Agency;

- discussion on preparation for external evaluation of the Agency held at the Coordination of Higher Education Institutions (21 December 2011);
- comparative analysis of self-evaluations of agencies (ASHE and EVA);
- preparation of instruments for self-evaluation of the Agency – schedule and framework structure of self-evaluation report;
- preparation of instruments (surveys) for monitoring the work of Agency staff, members of the Council, stakeholders and experts of the Agency;
- opinions on implementation of the acts of the agency for quality assurance and their effect were selected on workshop in the framework of first consultation of experts; opinions of candidates for entry in the register of experts are being collected and discussed on trainings for the candidates.

### *2.3.5 Participation in international quality assurance associations for higher education*

The Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education passed to the Agency membership in international associations ECA and CEE Network, in activities of which it fully participates, namely by participation at the following:

- Annual General Assembly of the CEE Network in Split in May 2011 where the association was renamed to CEENQA;
- ECA seminar in Barcelona in June 2011,
- working session of the JOQAR project group in April 2011 and January 2012 in Vienna.

### *2.3.6 Concern for public and transparent work of the Agency*

Public operation of the Agency is provided through publication of the acts, the Agency Council's decisions and other information on its work on its website; the website is in Slovenian, although acts for quality assurance are also available in English. On the website, the *Short Report on Work* is also published and regularly updated. *Strategy of Media Relations with Implementation Plan for the period October–December 2011* was also drawn up, and is annexed to the *Quality Manual*.

On the updated website of the Agency (14 March 2012), the public records on accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes and plan for their re-accreditation, and public records on changes of study programmes, are also published.

## 2.4 Analysis of achievement of objectives by priority areas of activities

### 2.4.1 Analysis of quality of higher education institutions and study programmes

In Slovenia, four universities (including the total of 57 university members) and 39 independent higher education institutions are accredited; in the period from 2004 until January 2012, 798 study programmes were accredited in total, namely 694 in the period from 2004 until 2010 and 104 in the period from 2010 until January 2012.

In the period 2010–2012 (January), the Agency conducted the following accreditation procedures:

- for the applications submitted to the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education until 31 December 2011, according to the criteria for the accreditation of this Council;
- for the applications submitted to the Agency between 1 May and 2 December 2010, according to the new criteria (Article 56 – transitional provision), although they were submitted on the old forms;
- for the applications submitted to the Agency after 2 December 2010, according to the new criteria.

In the period 2010–2012 (January), 104 procedures for initial accreditation were concluded, from which 30 in 2010, 62 in 2011 and 15 in January 2012.

For 46 applications, submitted before 31 December 2009, dealt with in accordance with accreditation criteria of the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education, 30 procedures were completed in 2010, 14 in 2011 and 2 in January 2012.

For 39 applications submitted between 1 May and 2 December 2010 (prepared on old forms and dealt with in accordance with the new criteria), 33 procedures were concluded in 2011 and 6 in January 2012. For 20 applications, submitted after 2 December 2010, 15 procedures were concluded in 2011 and 5 in January 2012.

In the period between 2010 and January 2012, the majority of concluded procedures for accreditation were for applications submitted by the University of Maribor, while in case of the University of Nova Gorica, none of the procedures was concluded.

Table: *Number of accreditations in the period 2010–2012 (January) by applicants and years*

<b>Accreditations of study programmes after 1 March 2010 (until January 2012)</b>				
<b>Total</b>	104	2010	2011	2012
University of Ljubljana	29	6	18	5
University of Maribor	39	16	20	3
University of Nova Gorica	0	0	0	0
University of Primorska	16	1	11	4
Independent higher education institutions	20	7	10	3

Among 104 accredited study programmes, in the period 2010–2012 (January), most of them were of second-cycle, significantly less of first-cycle and supplementary, and the least of them of third-cycle.

Table: Accredited study programmes in the period 2010–2012 (January) by cycles of provision

Year of accreditation	SP – supplementary	First-cycle	Second-cycle	Third-cycle	Total
<b>2010</b>	3	4	21	2	<b>30</b>
<b>2011</b>	7	7	39	6	<b>59</b>
<b>2012 (Jan.)</b>	5	7	3	/	<b>15</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>104</b>

In terms of fields of study, the majority of study programmes were accredited for teacher training and education science – 34 (ISCED 14), humanities – 17 (ISCED 21) and social sciences – 11 (ISCED 31).

Table: Accredited study programmes in the period 2010–2012 (January) by subject areas (ISCED)

Field of study according to ISCED	2010	2011	2012 (January)	Total
Teacher training and education science (14)	12	21	1	<b>34</b>
Arts (21)	/	1	/	<b>1</b>
Humanities (22)	3	10	4	<b>17</b>
Social and behavioural science (31)	2	5	4	<b>11</b>
Business and administration (34)	2	3	/	<b>5</b>
Law (38)	/	1	/	<b>1</b>
Physical science (44)	1	1	/	<b>2</b>
Computing (48)	/	1	/	<b>1</b>
Engineering and engineering trades (52)	3	5	/	<b>8</b>
Manufacturing and processing (54)	1	/	1	<b>2</b>
Architecture and building (58)	/	1	/	<b>1</b>
Veterinary (64)	/	/	5	<b>5</b>
Health (72)	2	1	/	<b>3</b>
Personal services (81)	1	4	3	<b>8</b>
Transport services (84)	/	1	/	<b>1</b>
Environmental protection (85)	1	1	/	<b>2</b>
Security services (86)	2	/	/	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>104</b>

## Duration of procedures

After commencement of the operation of the Agency, individual applicants submitted various numbers of applications depending on number of accredited study programmes before 2010. Therefore, the majority of accredited programmes were of the University of Maribor, namely one quarter, one fifth of them were of the University of Primorska and independent higher education institutions, and less than one tenth of the University of Ljubljana, while the University of Nova Gorica had no study programme newly accredited.

Table: *Number of accredited study programmes by applicants and periods*

<b>Applicant/accreditations by periods</b>	2004–2010	2010–2012 (Jan.)
University of Ljubljana	352	29
University of Maribor	158	39
University of Primorska	65	16
University of Nova Gorica	20	0
Independent higher education institutions	99	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>104</b>

In comparison of the structure and dynamics of accreditations during the observed periods, the comparison of duration of procedures is especially interesting. In this regard, it has to be taken into consideration that in accordance with the previously applicable criteria, the universities could have submitted applications for accreditation with three independent reviews enclosed, causing correspondingly shorter procedures for accreditation for their applications, although they differed among individual applicants.

The accreditation procedure at the Senate for Accreditation at the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education took 124 days in average. The shortest average duration of the procedures applied for the University of Maribor – 100 days, followed by the University of Ljubljana – 117 days, the University of Primorska – 135 days, independent higher education institutions – 157 days, and the University of Nova Gorica – 244 days.

Table: *Average duration of dealing with the application at the Agency*

<b>Year of submission</b>	<b>Average duration (in days) of dealing with the application from its submission on</b>	<b>Average duration (in days) of dealing with the application from its completion on</b>
2009	334	
2010	313	120
2011	165	104
<b>Average duration</b>	<b>298</b>	

Accreditation procedure at the Agency Council lasted 298 days in average. In this connection, the following characteristics have to be stressed: applications submitted between 1 May 2010 and 1 December 2010 had been suspended until the *Criteria*

for *Accreditations and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes* came into force on 2 December 2010, thus the average duration of procedure has been correspondingly long. Although, in comparison of the average duration of dealing with an application from its completion on, the duration is getting shorter, i.e. 120 days for applications submitted before 2 December 2010 (in 2010), and 104 days for applications submitted after 2 December 2010. It should also be noted that the completion of applications submitted before 2 December 2012 took 59 days in average. Also, the average duration per completed application – i.e. 104 days, including the appointment of the group of experts, preparation of report, submission of comments by higher education institutions to the report and finality of Council's decision, is actually half of the time anticipated in the Criteria (7 months or 210 days).

#### Appointed groups of experts

In the period 2010–2012 (February), the Agency Council appointed altogether 478 experts to assess the accreditation applications and to carry out external evaluations as follows:

- 20 experts in 2010 (for the assessment of applications according to the old criteria);
- 356 experts in 2011 (of whom 65 for the assessment of applications according to the old criteria);
- 102 experts in 2012 (January, February) (of whom five for the assessment of applications according to the old criteria).

Among the 478 appointed experts:

- 70 were appointed for the assessment according to the old criteria (the majority of them are not listed in the register of experts);
- 22 were foreign experts;
- 112 were experts appointed several times.

Among the experts listed in the register of experts, all students were at least once appointed to assess the accreditation application or to carry out external evaluation, and among the others, 53 were appointed at least once, while 54 have never been appointed – most often because they do not hold the doctoral academic title.

#### *2.4.2 Professional support in accreditation proceedings*

Higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges are promptly advised on the completion of the *Accreditation Proposal* form and *Evaluation Proposal* form, as well as on the annexes, procedures, preparation for the visit of the group of experts and the visit schedule.

The Agency dedicates special attention to solving difficulties in completing the Accreditation Proposal e-form. The difficulties were observed, for example, in attaching annexes, completing the human resources table as well as in incorrect use of punctuation marks and letters, and due to the disregard to follow technical instructions for completing the form.

### 2.4.3 Cooperation with stakeholders in higher education

#### Counselling

Cooperation with stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education took place through the provision of written answers to written questions and dilemmas, and in the form of workshops. Workshops in higher education were carried out at the university level (University of Ljubljana and University of Maribor) and, to a more detailed extent, at the University of Ljubljana (4) on the subject of completing the *Accreditation Proposal* form; on these occasions, comments and opinions of higher education institutions on implementation of acts for quality assurance and proposals for amendments were collected. Evaluations in higher vocational education and procedures and dilemmas related therewith were explained at the annual consultation of the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges, attended by directors and headteachers of higher vocational colleges, representatives of the ministry responsible for higher vocational education, of chambers, of the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and others.

Counselling to students is carried out through written questions or issues raised. While the majority of questions relating to enrolment conditions, accreditation of particular study programmes or the implementation form of a study programme can be answered without any reservations, the Agency must refrain from concrete actions and only be acquainted with the situation in case of students who believe that their rights have been encroached and expect direct intervention by the Agency.

#### Contacts with stakeholders

The Agency maintains continuous contacts with different stakeholders.

#### Transparent and public work of the Agency

Operation of the Agency is public and transparent through publication of the Agency Council's accreditation decisions on its website. All quality assurance acts of the Agency, composition of the Council bodies and Agency Staff, information on the activity and announcements of important events are also published on the website.

The Agency cooperates with all stakeholders in higher education and also dedicates attention to public engagement. In addition to regular publication of the Agency Council's decisions, publications of regular annual and financial reports, press conferences and press releases, it also organises annual consultations for Slovenian and foreign experts as well as for the interested public.

In 2011, the Agency appeared in the Slovenian media area mainly in relation to the European Qualifications Framework, records of study programmes and higher education institutions, nursing studies, establishments of new universities and complicated accreditation procedures (for programmes and institutions). In a

special press release, the Rectors' Conference expressed its opinion relating to the functioning of the Agency. The main message was that the Agency should focus on the quality and not on administrative procedures.

#### *2.4.4 Training of experts for quality assessment and external evaluation*

Training sessions for experts were organised in February, March, April, June and October. Each session consisted of four meetings; two on Friday afternoon and two on Saturday throughout the day, 25 hours altogether. They took place in the premises of Mons Hotel Congress Centre in Ljubljana.

Upon completion of each training session, the participants completed a survey. Their analysis shows that for two thirds of the participants, this was their first training; half of the participants had already cooperated with the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education either as reviewers or as evaluators. The total average grade of the measured characteristics of all training sessions is 3.84 (very good).

Transparency and structure of the presentation of problems, applicability of the obtained knowledge, meeting the expectations and the purpose of the training, group dynamics, as well as the work of the organisers and speakers were graded as 'very good' or 'excellent' by the participants.

The surveys indicate that the participants would like to have more time to discuss the acts and perform a simulation of a visit to an institution in external evaluation procedure (grades between 'good' and 'very good') and that they were less satisfied with the discussion, group work and reinforcement of skills (grades between 'satisfactory' and 'good').

The first consultation of the Agency's experts took place in November (24 November 2011) in the Mons Hotel Congress Centre, Ljubljana; it was attended by 111 participants: 87 experts, 19 Agency employees, 2 Agency Council members and 3 plenary speakers. It was intended for the exchange of experiences from the initial accreditation assessment, for deepening the knowledge obtained and familiarisation with the experiences of foreign experts and agencies.

On the Agency's website, all three plenary presentations and reports on the implementation of workshops are published. The Agency staff prepared a report on each workshop, including the topics discussed and the open and/or answered questions to be of assistance in further activity of the Agency.

At the end of the consultation, the participants rated it. The survey was completed by 39 out of 105 participants (experts and Agency employees) and the consultation was graded as good or very good. Plenary presentations were overall assessed as 'very good' (performance of speakers 4.4; interestingness of the presented topics 4.2; applicability of the presented topics 2.8 and overall grade 3.8).

The workshop *Difficulties in using the Criteria* was assessed by 13 participants with the overall grade of 3.4 (performance of the moderator 4.0; interestingness of the topics 3.8; applicability of the presented topics 2.2).

The workshop *Microdynamics of visits to the institutions* was assessed by 3 participants with the overall grade of 4.0 (performance of the moderator 4.7; interestingness of the topics 5.0; applicability of the presented topics 2.3).

The workshop *Preparation of reports and professional support to the experts* was assessed by 10 participants with the overall grade of 2.9 (performance of the moderator 2.9; interestingness of the topics 3.3; applicability of the presented topics 2.0).

The workshop *External evaluation of higher vocational colleges* was assessed by 10 participants with the overall grade of 3.9 (performance of the host 3.9; interestingness of the topics 4.3; applicability of the presented topics 3.6).

#### 2.4.5 Effectiveness of the Agency staff activity

##### Education and training for Agency employees

In Slovenia, the Agency employees attended:

- two consultations in March and November organised by the ministry responsible for higher education and OECD in Ljubljana; Director attended the March consultation to present the Agency and its activity;
- the CMEPIUS consultation in Ljubljana in November – three Agency employees;
- the conference of the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges in Bled in December – active participation of one Agency employee.

If consultations take place in Ljubljana, they are attended by several Agency employees, otherwise only one participates.

Abroad, the Agency employees attended:

- the Bologna experts seminar in Berlin in March – one Agency employee;
- the ENQA consultation on quality assurance in life-long learning in Bonn in May – three Agency employees;
- CEENQA seminar and assembly in Split in May – Head of the Quality Sector;
- the ECA seminar in Barcelona in June – one Agency employee and Director;
- ENQA workshop on joint study programmes in Vienna in September – one Agency employee;
- a symposium on teacher training quality and presentation of the TEMPUS project on this topic in Sarajevo in October – Director with the invited lecture;
- JOINMAN consultation (for Bologna experts) in Budapest in November – active participation of one Agency employee;
- the Quality Forum in November organised by ENQA, EUA, ESU, EQAR and EURASHE in Antwerpen – one technical assistant and Director (two Agency employees and Director were planned but one Agency employee fell ill);

- a regional consultation on quality in higher education in Sarajevo in December – Director with the invited lecture.

### Internal relations

In December (14 December 2011), the SLOKA Union submitted the *Problem Report* to the Agency Council. On its 41<sup>st</sup> session (on 15 December 2011), the Agency Council instructed Director to prepare the answer to the Union's *Problem Report* within 15 days; the task was realized on 10 January 2012.

On its 43<sup>rd</sup> session on 19 January 2012, the Agency Council instructed President and one Council member to meet the Agency employees – the Union members and non-members and the management. The meeting took place on 24 January 2012; topics of the discussion (5) were to be submitted by the Union and the Agency management to the meeting moderator, an Agency Council member.

At the meeting, the Agency's management thus presented their expectations towards the employees:

1. consistent respect and observance of the relevant laws and acts of the Agency to assure quality;
2. acting in the interests of the Agency as a whole and consistent delimitation between professionalism and politics;
3. consistent observance of agreements and performance of the agreed tasks within the agreed deadlines;
4. consistent observance of the employment contract and distinguishing between the rights and bonuses;
5. respect of formal relations.

The SLOKA Union emphasised that the expectations or requirements were provided in the *Problem Report*. By a show of hands, 14 out of 16 members present voted for the compulsory retirement of the Agency Director.

The Agency Council met at the extraordinary session on 1 February 2012 to discuss the strategic orientations of the Agency; Director was also acquainted with the draft minutes. On 2 February 2012, a meeting took place between the Council delegation (President and two Council members) and the Agency Director. The Council delegation offered Director several options to leave her position but she refused them all.

#### *2.4.6 Analysis of quality standards achievement in higher education institutions and international comparison of the results achieved*

By taking into account the extent and characteristics of the data on the accredited study programmes and institutions implementing them, and their comparison with similar files published by other quality assurance agencies (e.g. AZVO, NOKUT and ACQUIN), it can be determined that the following is published on the websites of the agencies:

- their self-evaluation reports;

- analyses of the evaluations performed;
- self-evaluation reports of the evaluated institutions;
- comparisons between different quality assurance systems;
- various studies (sector-specific, general) (e.g. NOKUT);
- files of the accredited study programmes and higher education institutions;
- reports on the cooperation with different stakeholders (e.g. ACQUIN).

Compared to the other agencies mentioned above, the Agency has:

- published reports of the Senate for Evaluation at the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education on monitoring, assessing and assuring quality in Slovene higher education area in 2007, 2008 and 2009 (meta-report for 2007 and 2008 and report for 2009);
- records (manually prepared) of the accredited study programmes and higher education institutions before 2010 and after 2010;
- authorised access to the website for higher education institutions;
- authorised access to the website for the Council members.

In the future, the Agency must:

- perform self-evaluation and publish the self-evaluation report;
- publish reports by the groups of experts on the external evaluations performed;
- publish self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges;
- perform and publish sector-specific and general analyses of the reports by the groups of experts for initial accreditations and external evaluations;
- perform and publish comparative analyses of different quality assurance systems;
- open an authorised access to the website for the groups of experts.

#### *2.4.7 Participation of the Agency in international associations and cooperation with agencies for quality assurance in higher education*

The Agency inherited the membership of the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education in international associations ECA (European Consortium of Accreditation) and CEE Network (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education); it actively participates in both associations.

With the adoption of the Quality Manual, the Agency started to prepare for the external evaluation in order to become a member of ENQA and to be entered in EQAR.

The Agency cooperates closely with ASHE from Croatia (exchange of experts and experience) and with OAR from Vienna, where an employee of the Agency was referred for an expert visit in November 2011. OAR ceased to exist on 1 March 2012.



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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education



*Naložba v vašo prihodnost*

OPERACIJO DELNO FINANCIRA EVROPSKA UNIJA  
Evropski socialni sklad

#### *2.4.8 Participation of the Agency in the international projects in the field of quality*

The Agency participates in the implementation of an international project in the field of quality JOQAR (Joint Programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of Degrees Awarded) conducted by ECA and coordinated by the quality assurance agency for the Netherlands and Flanders NVAO. The project was initiated at the end of 2010, after having obtained the European Commission funds, and will end with an international conference in 2013.