

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

IN 2015

"Quality means doing it right
when no one is looking", Henry Ford



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Introduction

2015 marks the sixth year of the operation of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency). As the Director of the Agency I am starting my fourth year at this position. The Report on the Work and Operation of the Agency for 2015 has been drafted in accordance with the Quality Manual of the Agency, adopted in February 2015. It should be worth to consider if the number of various documents can be reduced or joined at the end of the year – some information is repeated several times (Business Report 2015, Report on the Work and Operation in 2015, Self-Evaluation Report 2015, Action Plan 2016, Work Plan for 2016).

The Agency was fully active in 2015 in the field of the implementation of accreditations and re-accreditations or external evaluations of higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges. Based on the Self-Evaluation Report for 2013 and with the supplement of the description of the Agency's operation up to October 2014, a group of international evaluators has prepared a favourable report and, on 6th March, the Agency became a full member of ENQA for a period of five years.

With the full membership in ENQA, the second strategic goal of the Agency for the period of 2011-2016 was achieved. The first objective has already been achieved, when the Agency was entered to the list (register) of trustworthy European agencies, EQAR, in 2013. This fulfilled both requirements from the Resolution of the National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020 (NHEP 2011-2020).

The Agency has also been gaining international recognition, as it is an active and equal participant in three international organizations: ECA (European Consortium of Accreditation in Higher Education), 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 2015, I was appointed as vice president of both ECA and CEENQA. In December 2014, the Agency, as a partner, signed the Erasmus+ EIQAS project (Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems), along with the Polish agency PKA, Portuguese agency A3ES and the Bulgarian Agency NEAA.

A lot of the text in this report has been summarized from the extensive minutes of the Agency Council in 2015, the Self-Evaluation Report of the Agency for 2015 and the Business Report for 2015.

I wish to express my gratitude to all my co-workers, all the members of the Agency Council and the Appeal Committee for their work in 2015. I would also like to thank all independent evaluators of the Agency, both domestic and foreign, who perform many external evaluations of our higher education institutions.

Done in Ljubljana, May 2016.

Ivan Leban, Director



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POVZETEK

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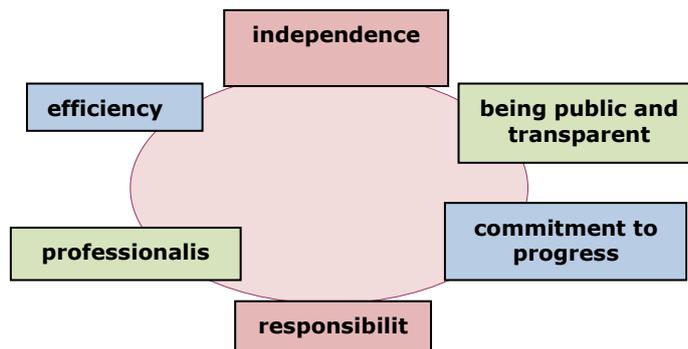
FROM THE AGENCY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE PERIOD 2011–2016

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 progress and strengthening of higher education quality;
- 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.



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ASSIGNMENTS IN THE WORK AND FINANCIAL PLAN FOR 2015

In 2015, the funds from the project of European Structural Funds have expired, therefore, a viable structure with regards to finances and staffing for 2016 and 2017 had to be provided.

In addition to the extensive activity executed in accordance with the law and other acts of the Agency (evaluations and accreditations), 2015 was also devoted to the international affirmation of the Agency. In addition to accreditations or external evaluations of higher education institutions and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges, the assignments were mainly:

- provision of an uninterrupted operation of the Agency, mainly finding the solution for the acute financial and staffing issues in 2015 – also adoptions of the budgets for 2016 and 2017;
- provision of adequate integral upon the fallout of ESF resources in 2015;
- final establishment of the comprehensive information system of the Agency;
- adoption of duties upon the joining the ENQA;
- provision of the implementation of the revised ESG Standards and Guidelines, adopted in May 2015;
- continuous training of candidates for entry into the register of experts;
- productive participation with stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education at workshops and professional consultations;
- permanent consultation office for current questions;
- participation in international projects, related to the work of the Agency;
- cooperation with foreign agencies;
- collection of data from higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, experts and other stakeholders regarding the work of the Agency, analysis of the survey questionnaires and the adoption of measures for improvements based on the findings of the survey;
- planned participation at various conferences, consultations and workshops at home and abroad;
- potential translation of all relevant material into English and the maintenance of the Agency's website – transparent publication of the experts' reports;
- active participation in the modifications of the higher education legislation.

Obtaining the trust of all stakeholders and the general public regarding the work of the Agency and the enhancement of its visibility is still of great importance.

The Agency shall continue to strive towards the assurance and improvement of its own quality, which is the basis for an efficient and generally recognized system of external quality assurance in higher education, agreed upon with all stakeholders.

The achievement of assignments from the Work Plan is firstly demonstrated in the Work Plan with a brief overview of the work of the Agency Council as the highest decision-making body of the Agency at the first instance, and the Appeal Committee at the second instance and the work of the Director.

This is followed by the (non)execution of the set assignments, demonstrated in such an order as the chapters were indicated in the Work Plan for 2015:



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- accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes and the evaluations of higher vocational colleges;
- establishment of the comprehensive information system of the Agency;
- update of the strategy of the Agency and the strategic objectives for 2016-2020;
- notification system for stakeholders about the Agency's activities;
- training of members of the Agency Council and experts;
- workshops and general assembly of CEENQA in 2015.

Because of the priority tasks of the Agency – integral financing of the operation of the Agency and the modifications of the higher education legislation – only three assignments were achieved fully, one was achieved partially, while the update of the Agency strategy and the strategic objectives for 2016-2020 and the notification system for stakeholders about the Agency's activities were postponed until 2016.



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SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE AGENCY IN 2015

In addition to legislative duties which the Agency performs in accordance with the Higher Education Act (HEA), other activities of the Agency were quite eventful.

On 6 March 2015, the Agency became a full member of the European association of agencies following a decision of the executive committee of ENQA based on the external evaluation of the Agency in November 2014. This fulfilled the second important strategic objective of the Agency. In 2013, the Agency was entered into the register of trustworthy agencies (EQAR). These were two requirements, included in the resolution of the National Higher Education Programme for 2011-2020 (NHEP 2011-2020 – actions No. 20 and 21).

Because of an anonymous feature in the media and elsewhere, the Agency was visited by inspectors in 2015: labour relations inspector, the Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia (Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs); inspector for the supervision of the implementation of the Public Sector Salary System Act, Inspectorate for the public sector (Ministry of Public Administration); inspector for the review of operation with the funds from the public budget, Budget Execution Supervision Office of the Republic of Slovenia (Ministry of Finance) and the controller of the use of the ESF funds from the Cohesion Policy Office, the Government Office of the Republic of Slovenia for the development and European cohesion policy. One offence was found, sanctioned with a warning and a payment of the court expenses in the amount of EUR 30.

In 2015, the second audit of the Court of Audit of the Republic Slovenia continued, "Quality and Diversity Assurance of Study Programmes", which began on 9 May 2014, and at the end of 2015 we received a proposal of the audit report. The Agency filed an appeal against the audit findings and the epilogue of the audit is expected in 2016 by forwarding the corrective actions and the findings of the post-audit report. The Agency also had to provide extensive reports regarding the audit of the Court of Audit from 2011. In 2015, the founder of Agency deleted paragraph one of Article 26 of the decision referencing the controversial meeting fees for the members of the Council and members of the Appeal Committee due to a conflict between the Higher Education Act and the Decision on the Establishment of Agency. It was determined that the Agency did not satisfactorily implement one of the three corrective actions contained in the Audit report (2011) by the Court of Audit.

Since the ESF project "Establishment of the national quality assurance in higher education 2010-2014", extended for one year, expired in 2015, the Agency was forced to solve the current difficult situation regarding human and financial resources. In July 2015, we were granted the extension of the conclusion of the ESF operation until 31 December 2015. By the end of the year, all activities were successfully concluded. Certain issues only occurred by forming the applications for compensations (CFC), which meant a certain backlog in the compensation of the funds to the budget of the Republic of Slovenia. The issues occurred due to the absence of the staff member who was primarily responsible for the preparation of these documents and the change of the persons responsible for our operation at the control unit of the certification authority (KE SVRK), which meant another explanation of the justification of certain costs. The Agency was very economical with the funds from the abovementioned ESF project. Upon the



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confirmation of the project, the funds decreased from the intended EUR 14,847,484 to EUR 10,090,257. Since the amount was still too high for the Agency in reality, the Agency further rescinded additional funds due to effectiveness. The entire amount of the funds, spent for the ESF project in the period from 2010 up until the end of 2015 were thus only EUR 4,606,499. ESF

In January 2015, the Agency already held active discussions with a group of representatives in the National Assembly, with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports. The results of the discussions enabled us to change the employment relationship status for nine employees from a definite period to an employment relationship for an indefinite period in 2015, and that in December 2015 the Agency was provided with the integral funds in the budget for 2016 upon the fallout of the ESF funds in the amount of EUR 1,221,864; and for 2017 the amount of EUR 1,178,072. Because of financial complications in 2015 (financing from the reserve fund of the Ministry of Finance) we had to let go four staff members of the Agency.

The Agency is actively involved in the international activity. In 2015, it was a member of ENQA, it was entered into EQAR and was a member of CEENQA, ECA and INQAAHE. The Director of the Agency is the vice president of two European associations, CEENQA and ECA. In May, the Agency hosted the CEENQA workshop and general assembly. The Polish Erasmus+ EIQAS project 2014-2016 (Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems) deserves a special mention; here, the Agency is participating as a partner with the Polish agency PKA (project coordinator), the Portuguese A3ES and the Bulgarian agency NEAA. In November, we organized the workshop for 20 students-evaluators from these countries. They were acquainted with the revised European Standards and Guidelines – ESG, which were adopted in May 2015 in Erevan, Armenia, by the ministers, competent for higher education.

Along with the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, and the Slovenian Student Union, in the spring the Agency prepared a consultation "*State and vision of higher education in Slovenia*" featuring significant contributions, such as: "Slovenia and higher education: Let's hurry slowly – social relations and the competitiveness of Slovenia reflect the quality of universities", "What kind of human resources does the Slovenian economy need?", "SQAA and the Higher Education Act", "Strategy without vision" and "Are we neglecting quality and justice?" In fall 2015, the Agency organized a consultation for the 5th anniversary of the operation of the Agency upon a massive turnout of all stakeholders.

In August 2015, the European commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Dr Tibor Navracsics, got to know the Agency and it is our wish that education would remain a competence of DG EAC (Education and Youth) and it would not become part of DG GROW (Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SME), as it is now proposed.

At the end of 2015, the Agency organized two intensive two-day training courses for the future experts-evaluators, who are after the particular evaluation then entered into its Register of Experts by the Agency Council.



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Two more pieces of information to conclude this segment. Even though we try not to look at any rankings here at the Agency, we still wish to mention that the University of Melbourne, Australia, ranked 50 national (<http://www.universitas21.com/article/projects/details/153/executive-summary-and-full-2015-report>) higher education systems based on 25 available indicators. Slovenia was ranked at the solid 26th place alongside the Czech Republic, Spain and Portugal. The other piece of information is connected with the global competitiveness of economies and is reported by the World Economic Forum (WEF) for the period 2015-2016 (<http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/economies/#economy=SVN>). Slovenia ranked very high in two pillars: Healthcare and primary education were ranked the 15th place and Higher education was ranked the 22nd place. The total ranking of Slovenia is 59th place among 140 ranked counties.

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

A detailed overview of the operation of the bodies with suitable actions and suggestions for improvement are given in the Self-Evaluation Report of the Agency for 2015.

I. AGENCY COUNCIL

The Agency Council is the highest decision-making body of the Agency. The members of the Agency Council act in a professional, independent and autonomous manner and are not bound in their work to the decisions, views and instructions of institutions which appointed them and of other institutions. The members of the Agency Council take into consideration in their performance of assignments and in making decisions the principles of preventing a conflict of interest and the principles of impartiality. For this purpose, they shall sign a special statement which obligates them to respect these principles. The Agency Council shall consist of 11 members. (summarised from the Higher Education Act (HEA); hereinafter referred to as: HEA).

The Agency Council meets in accordance with the Rules of Procedure every third Thursday in a calendar month, except for July and August. The meetings may be extraordinary and correspondence meetings. A typical agenda of a meeting is as follows: an overview and confirmation of the minutes for the previous meeting and an overview of the realization of decisions, significant events between two meetings, appeals, quality assurance (processing and deciding on the applications for accreditation and re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes and the external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, processing and deciding on the applications for the accreditation of transformations of study programmes, appointing groups of experts, entry of experts into the register), documents for quality assurance and miscellaneous.

Because of a large number of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, and a (too) high number of study programmes (please find transparent information according to the ISCED classification below), the Agency Council is still very



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burdened with the deciding on individual applications. Due to a too high number of accreditation and evaluation decisions, the Council also devoted itself to the increasingly common appeals against the decisions. Every procedure is conducted in accordance with the General Administrative Procedure Act. In addition to this primary activity, the Agency Council also dealt with the current issues of the operation of the Agency.

In 2015, 349 applications were submitted to the Agency:
- 273 for the accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions,
- 70 for the transformation of study programmes,
- 6 for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges.

In 2015, the Agency Council met **at ten regular meetings** (from 87th to 96th meeting). During that time, the following decisions were adopted.

It decided on **127 applications for accreditation or re-accreditation** of a study programme or higher education institution.

Initial accreditation was granted to **20 study programmes** (which equals the previous period), of which:

- 3 first-cycle study programmes,
- 10 second-cycle study programmes,
- 4 third-cycle study programmes,
- 2 study programmes for further education,
- 1 unified Master's study programme

The Council **denied the application for accreditation for 2 study programmes**, namely, in one case the study programme did not comply with the material conditions, because the applicant changed the location of the implementation of the study programme to a location which was not accredited at an institutional level in the final stage of the external assessment. If the applicant would wish to implement the study programme at the new location, the Agency Council would first have to grant accreditation to the new location. In the second case, because of the resignation of one of the partners of the consortium and a discrepancy between the partners, it was not to be expected that the application would be supplemented in a reasonable period, and the deadline for the supplementation of the application was already extended six times. Consequently, the application was not complete and the accreditation conditions were not complied with.

The Council **re-accredited 100 study programmes**, of that:

- 51 first-cycle study programmes,
- 38 second-cycle study programmes,
- 7 third-cycle study programmes,
- 4 unified Master's study programmes,

The Council **re-accredited 4 private higher education institutions** (one less than in the previous period),



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The Council **did not re-accredit 1 study programme**, because the study programme in its final actual state did not comply with the conditions of all the areas of assessment, and the discrepancies indicated in the first decision of the Agency Council have not been resolved;

During this period, the Council **did not make any decision regarding a re-accreditation for a shorter period.**

During this period, it also **did not grant or extend the accreditation of 3 more study programmes**, meaning that there were 2.4% of negative decisions.

In 16 procedures, the Council required **a supplementation of the report of the group of experts**, mainly because of the response to the report of a group of experts by the applicant, in which the latter significantly modified the application, and in one procedure also because of a decision of the appeal committee, with which the group of experts was also acquainted. The supplementations were required mostly because of:

- curricula of study programmes or the (non)-compliance of the anticipated professional title with the content of the programme,
- prevention of excessive burdening of the teaching staff and regarding habilitation,
- inclusion of students into the scientific-research work through applicable projects of the institution and informing the students,
- internal quality system of the institution,
- monitoring the needs for graduates of a study programme.

In **23 procedures, the Council required from the applicant** to supplement the application or respond to the report of the group of experts. The reasons were mostly:

in the initial accreditation procedures:

- contextual imbalance of the study programme regarding the employment possibilities and professional titles of graduates; the institution promises the obtainment of competences which will not be provided with the content of the study,
- supplementation of curricula with applicable literature,
- staffing structure, proof of the references of the main instructors of subjects; publications, scientific-research work, inclusion of students,
- harmonization of enrolment conditions in the event of a limitation of enrolment with HEA,
- non(compliance) with the criteria regarding the higher education library and library materials – submission of actual proof of access to specialized databases and information resources, suitability of library staff;



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in the re-accreditation procedures:

- preparation of action plans for the resolution of the found discrepancies and the opportunities for improvement regarding:
 - a. the update of study programmes in accordance with the recommendations of the group of experts,
 - b. assurances regarding the students' mobility, and the latter will enable them a full recognition of the obligations completed at foreign higher education institutions,
 - c. systemic solutions in the monitoring of the employability of graduates according to the national qualifications framework, connecting with the job market,
 - d. internal quality system of the institution: inclusion of the representatives of external stakeholders to the quality assurance commission; raising awareness among all stakeholders regarding the meaning of the quality culture and filling out the survey questionnaires, expansion of the list of questions regarding the acquired course-specific competences; monitoring the quality of study programmes based on the strategy of the institution, action plan, indicators, actions for improvement which conclude the circle of quality, obtainment of information about the satisfaction with the study (of foreign students during their exchange),
 - e. resolution of the overlapping of lectures and exams,
 - f. implementation of action for the encouragement of students to conclude their study,
 - g. more intensive inclusion of students to research or professional work,
 - h. balancing the load of higher education teachers and staff,
- unsuitability of scientific-research work,
- insufficiently regulated mentorship in the practical training,
- change of names of study programmes and professional titles of graduates without the corresponding change of certain competences and their curricula,
- preparation of the curricula which shall include all the changes which occurred after the initial accreditation of study programmes.

Appointment of groups of experts

The Council appointed a group of experts 95 times, of which 15 times in the initial accreditation procedures, 2 times in the procedure of issuing consent for the transformations of study programmes, 33 times in the re-accreditation procedures, 7 times for the procedure of external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, 1 time in the procedure of re-accreditation of a higher education institution, 1 time in the procedure of accreditation of a dislocated unit;

4 times, the Council appointed a substitute member of the group of experts because the student status of the previous member-student expired and was deleted from the



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register of experts, 2 times because the initially appointed cancelled the participation in the assessment, 1 time because of the cancellation of participation due to a conflict of interests.

The Council extended the deadline for the submission of the report of the group of experts 3 times, because some of the members of the group of experts participated in several assessment procedures, which were unexpectedly grouped in the same period because of the holidays, non-availability of foreign experts and the issues in determining the two-day visit.

Decision-making of the Agency Council after appeals or in repeated procedures: during this period, the Council decided in **five** repeated procedures, in which the Appeal Committee rectified the decision of the Council and returned the matter to the Council for a new decision.

In one of these cases, the Council in the repeated procedure decided to urge the applicant to provide an opinion regarding the findings in the supplemented report of the group of experts and to submit an accurate overview of pedagogical and other burdens of the main instructors of the subjects of a study programme. After the applicant's supplementation, the Council found that the application complies with the conditions of all the areas of assessment and it granted the study programme, which it initially did not, the accreditation for 7 years.

In three repeated procedures, the Agency Council urged the group of experts to supplement the joint or evaluation report, once because of the warning of the Appeal Committee that a flaw was once defined as a discrepancy by the experts, and another time as an opportunity for improvement, and that it would more appropriate to acquaint the group of experts with the decision of the Appeal Committee and to urge them to explain the professional opinion. In the second and third case, the experts were urged to provide a fuller and more detailed opinion regarding the found actual situation and the collected documentation or to provide an opinion regarding the response of the higher education institution to the evaluation report and to prepare the final evaluation report which was not done in the initial procedure according to the opinion of the Appeal Committee. In one case, the Council accepted a different decision after the receipt of the supplemented report of the group of experts, it granted accreditation to the study programme for 7 years (in the initial procedures, the accreditation application was denied). In the second case, after the receipt of the final evaluation report, the Council made the same decision as in the initial procedure (it again did not re-accredit the study programme), because the study programme in the final actual situation did not meet all the conditions of the areas of assessment, and the discrepancies, indicated in the first decision of the Agency Council, were not resolved.

In the repeated procedure of the decision-making about an accreditation of a higher education institution, the Council decided to supplement the procedure by a staff member convening an oral hearing to which the group of experts and the applicant are invited with the purpose of obtaining an additional explanation regarding the potential discrepancies with the Criteria for accreditation and external evaluation of higher education institution and study programmes and other legal regulation.

Decision-making of the Council regarding appeals:

The Agency Council received 7 appeals against its decisions. In two cases, it decided to supplement the procedure, namely, to send a response of the group of experts regarding the appeal of the applicant for remarks. After the receipt of the applicant's response, it was the opinion of the Council that the applicant did not suitably respond to the found flaws and discrepancies, because of which the Council limited the extension of the accreditation of the assessed study programmes, and these were not resolved. The Council did not change its decision and it issued an alternative decision in which it supplemented and additionally explained which flaws and discrepancies refer to individual assessed study programmes. The appeal was then sent to the Appeal Committee for a competent decision-making. In the second case, the Council urged the group of experts to clearly make a connection between the flaws and discrepancies with individual assessed study programmes.

Two appeals were sent by the Council without the supplementation of the procedure to the Appeal Committee for competent decision-making.

The Council received an appeal against the initiation of the extraordinary evaluation procedure. This was dismissed at the 93th meeting as unwarranted. The applicant shall have the right to appeal the final decision of the Council when the first phase of the procedure of extraordinary evaluation shall be concluded. The applicant appealed against this decision of the Council, and the Council sent this appeal to the Appeal Committee for competent decision-making.

The Council was also sent one appeal because of the silence of the body, in the procedure of issuing consent to the transformations of the study programme. After the receipt of this appeal, the Council decided on the applications of the applicant which were ready for decision-making, and issued consent for these transformations. Regarding the part of the application or the transformation of the programme which did not meet the conditions for decision-making, the Council urged the applicant to supplement the application again.

Other decisions and tasks of the Council

The Council adopted 39 decisions regarding the corrections of decisions

In one case, the Council rejected the application for another extension of the deadline for the supplementation of the application, because the deadline was already extended six times, one of the partners in the consortium withdrew and there were discrepancies among the partners, and the supplementation of the application was not to be expected in a reasonable period.

Thirteen times it issued consent for the transformations of study programmes.

4 times the Council granted consent for the changes of the KLASIUS-P, ISCED field, 3 times it granted consent for the changes of KLASIUS-SRV, and 2 times it granted consent for the implementation of a new field, 2 times it gave consent for the change of the location of the implementation of study programmes, 1 time it was acquainted with the change of the registered address of the higher education institution, 1 time it gave consent for the change of the address of the higher education institution, it gave consent



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for 4 dislocated unit and 4 times it gave consent for an additional location of the implementation of study programmes.

The members of the Agency Council removed themselves from the accreditation procedures 10 times.

The committee of the Council for the overview of applications by candidates for the entry into the register of experts met once, in September. The Council invited 39 candidates to the training, 21 experts were entered in the register of experts, of which 3 were entered upon an invitation by the Agency Council and others after the completed training.

The Council accepted 3 opinions that a higher vocational college complies with the standards required by law and found irregularities in the external evaluation of 1 higher vocational college, because of the regulation of the employment of the study and student affairs clerk as stipulated by Article 26 of ZVSI.

The Council was acquainted with 2 judgments of the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia, 1 time it sent the decision of the Appeal Committee to the group of experts for their reference.

The Council entered 2 agreements for transnational higher education into public records.

The Council accepted the text of the public call to candidates for deputies of members of the Agency's Appeal Committee.

The Council initiated the procedure of an extraordinary evaluation for 17 programmes upon the initiative of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports who alerted us about alleged violations in the transformations of study programme due to the decrease of contact hours. Only the faculty senate was to confirm the transformations, but not the university senate. The initiative of the ministry included a letter by two higher education teachers participating in the implementation of the study programme in question. In one study programme, the contact load of the teachers was to shrink for 25%.

The Council later stopped the procedure against 16 study programmes as there was no public interest for the initiation of the procedure. In its response to the initiation of the extraordinary evaluation, the University notified the Agency Council that its senate has decided to confirm the transformations of study programme at all the competent bodies of the faculty and the university, therefore, the senate does not doubt the legality of the operation or implementation of the study activity. The university also supports the position that the re-distribution of the hours (for example, fewer contact hours in favour of more individual work of the students) is a minor change which does not require the consent of the Agency Council. The changes of contact hours which initiated the initiation for the extraordinary evaluation were a consequence of austerity measures which the faculty was forced to adopt due to a decrease of the funds, intended to the implementation of the study activity. In addition, the alleged violations in the initiation for the extraordinary evaluation were only mentioned in one study programme, therefore, the Council stopped the procedure of extraordinary evaluation of 16 study programmes and continued with the process of the extraordinary evaluation of one study programme.



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The Council adopted a decision to stop the procedure 4 times; 1 time because of the change of the decision to initiate a procedure of extraordinary evaluation of study programmes, and 3 times because the applicant withdrew the application (in one case it was the application for the re-accreditation of a study programme, because the study programme was not implemented).

3 times the Council dismissed the application for accreditation in accordance with Article 129 of the General Administrative Procedure Act; in one case because it was not possible to decide on the matter because it was already part of an appeal procedure, and in two cases, it dismissed the two applications for the re-accreditation of the Euro-Mediterranean university and one notified study programme, because it is not the competent body to decide on the re-accreditation of a higher education institution or study programme which it did not accredit.

The Council authorized two staff members to conduct accreditation procedures.

The Council confirmed the plan of external evaluations of higher vocational colleges for up to 2020 and the plan for 2016.

The Council also gave consent for the new Quality Manual of the Agency.

At the 95th meeting it concluded that the Agency should in the future acquaint the groups of experts with the latest responses of applicants to the expert opinions and the final decisions of the Council.



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**INDICATIVE OVERVIEW OF STUDY PROGRAMMES ACCORDING TO ISCED -
MESS REGISTER, STATUS AS OF June 2015 2014/2015**

Isced	Description	UL	UM	UPR	Finš	UNG	PRIVATE	No. of programmes
14	Teacher training and education science	86	43	22				151
21	Arts	30	2	1		2	6	41
22	Humanities	92	29	23		6	3	153
31	Social and behavioural science	61	10	20	4		13	108
32	Journalism	7					2	9
34	Business and administration	25	18	4			64	111
38	Law	3	7	1			7	18
42	Life sciences	12	5	8		4		29
44	Physical sciences	12	7			3	2	24
46	Mathematics and statistics	9	4	6				19
48	Computing	5	11	2	1		2	21
52	Engineering and engineering trades	15	34	1			8	58
54	Manufacturing and processing	15	3			2	9	29
58	Architecture and building	17	6			1		24
62	Agriculture, forestry and fishery	14	12	2		1	1	30
64	Veterinary	6						6
72	Health care	21	5	4			14	44
76	Social services	7						7
81	Personal services	5	5	8			6	24
84	Transport services	7	5					12
85	Environmental protection	3	1				6	10
86	Security services	2	5				2	9
Interdisc.		7		1		1	1	10
	TOTAL	461	212	103	5	20	146	947
	%	48.7	22.4	10.9		2.1	15.4	



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No. of students	42922	16680	5802	200	500	6110	72214
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Explanation: 3 national, 1 private and 1 network university (EMUNI) and 49 higher education institutions. Another 48 (27/21) higher vocational colleges with approx. 35 study programmes and 11,485 students. The total number of students in tertiary education in the study year 2014/2015 is 83,669, and in the study year 2013/2014 there were 90,622 students.

Accreditations in higher education					
Task	Implementation and accountability	Applications received in 2015	Applications processed in 2015	Anticipated No. of applications in 2016	Notes
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality Department / Agency Council	17	20	15	
Re-accreditation of study programmes		233	98	77*	*60 applications where the accreditation was granted by the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education + 2 after extraordinary evaluation + 15 which were accredited by the Agency
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions		3	1	3	
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		12	5	5	
Transformation of higher education institutions		10	7	8	
Transnational higher education		2	2	2	
Evaluations of higher vocational colleges					
Task	Implementation and accountability	Applications received in 2015	Applications processed in 2015	Anticipated No. of applications in 2016	Notes
External evaluations of higher vocational colleges	Quality Department / Agency Council	6	4	11	



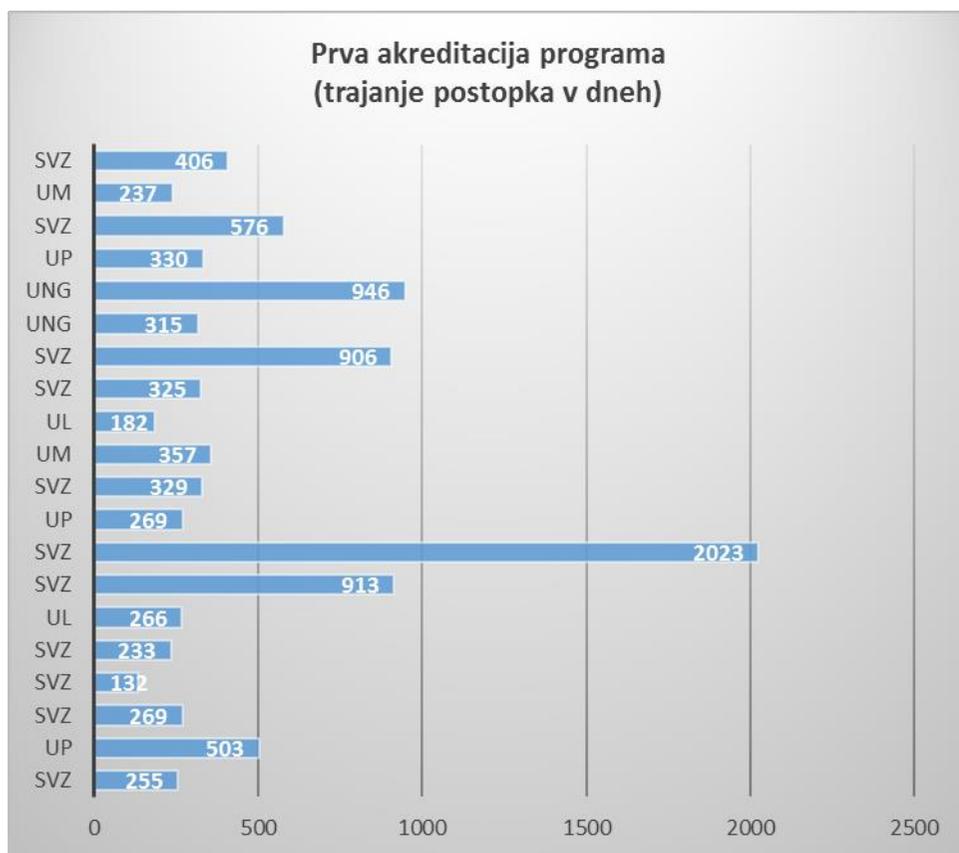
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Duration of individual procedures (decisions adopted in 2015)





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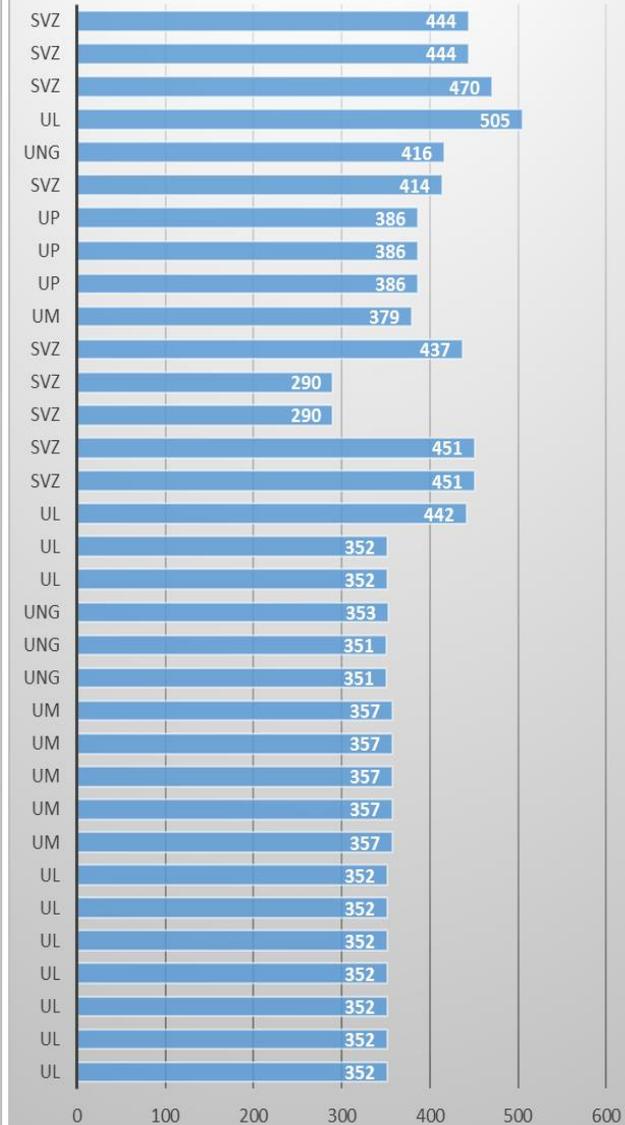
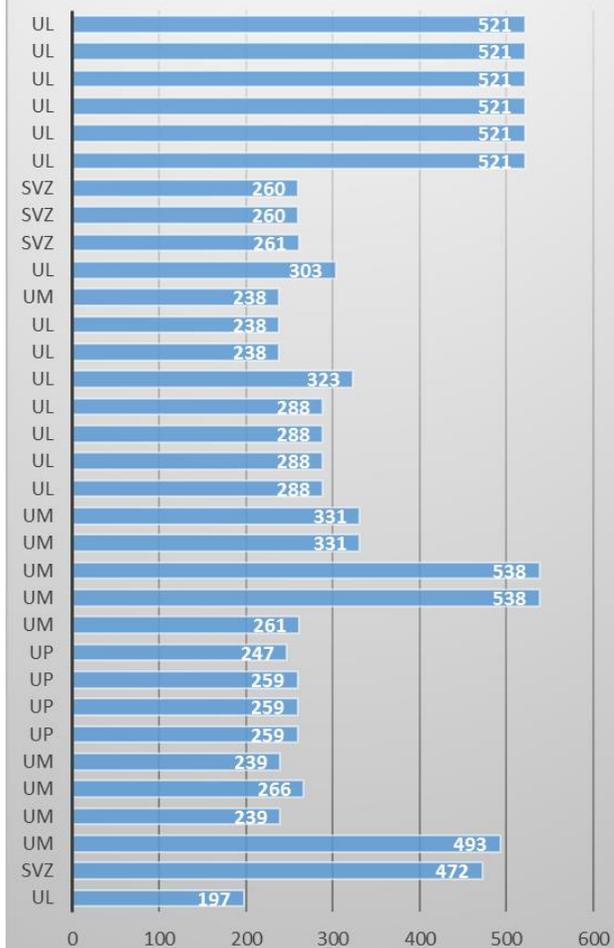
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Podaljšanje akreditacije programa (trajanje postopka v dneh)





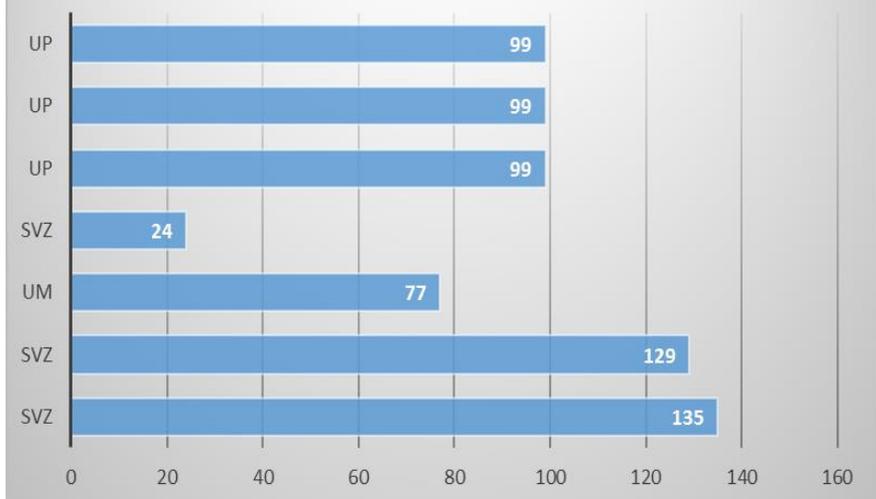
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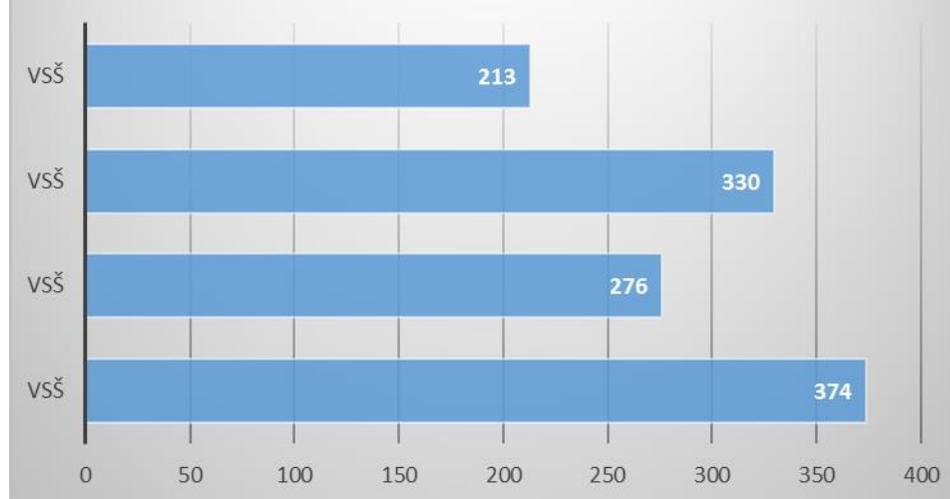
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Preoblikovanje zavoda (trajanje postopka v dneh)



Višje strokovne šole (trajanje postopka v dneh)



II. APPEAL COMMITTEE

In the year 2015, a trend of a reduction in the number of appeals by applicants was demonstrated; only 3 were submitted. Therefore, 6 appeals fewer were submitted than in 2014 (9) and 10 fewer than 2013 (13). The Appeal Committee met at two meetings where it decided on all three matters which were given to them to decide by the Agency Council.

In 2015, appellants mainly exercised all three causes for an appeal stipulated in paragraph one of Article 237 of the General Administrative Procedure Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 24/06 – official consolidated text, 105/06 – ZUS-1, 126/07, 65/08, 8/10 and 82/13; hereinafter: ZUP). The decisions of the Agency Council were therefore contested because of the claimed violations of material law, a wrong or incomplete finding of the facts and the violation of the rules of the procedure.

In two procedures in which it decided the Appeal Committee upheld the committee, and the contested decision was abolished and referred back to the Council for another decision.

In both cases it found that it was a procedural violation because the Agency Council based its decision on the report of the group of experts which did not contain an opinion regarding the applicant's remarks to it.

In the third processed matter, it confirmed the decision of the Agency Council to extend the accreditation of a study programme for a shorter period. Until now, there was no information whether the appellant used judicial and legal protection with regards to the decision of the Council which was confirmed by the Appeal Committee, and initiated the administrative dispute procedure.

III. DIRECTOR

In 2015, the Director as the leadership body of the Agency, devoted a lot of his time to work regarding the audits of the Court of Audit. In addition to the obligations in relation with the second audit of the Court of Audit, a discussion of the draft or the proposal of the audit report "Evaluation, accreditation and granting concession procedures in the period 2010-2013", unexpectedly an affair erupted concerning the findings of the audit report for 2011, specifically with the corrective action – which was implemented neither by the Director nor the Agency Council – for the Agency to collect the amounts for meeting fees paid in excess because of the so-called "double meeting fees", as it was dubbed in the media.

The Director answered to many journalists' questions and criticisms regarding the non-collection of "amounts paid in excess" almost on a daily basis, and in the end published a lengthy response at the website, in which he explained that the Agency did not execute this action as it was paying the members of the Council for the work performed in accordance with the provisions of HEA and the decision on the establishment of the Agency, about which it notified the Court of Audit within the deadline (twice in 2015). It was only after nine months that the President of the Court of Audit notified the public that the collection is still a current matter and the Agency failed to acknowledge the requirements of the Court.



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According to the Director, the Agency found itself in such a situation because of the poorly prepared legislation – a collision between HEA and the decision on the establishment of the Agency. The Agency is not one of the public agencies, but is an institution, such as the Court of Audit, Corruption Prevention Commission, Constitutional Court, Public Agent etc. Its operation is regulated by HEA, among other also the payment for the work of the Council is regulated. In Article 51.n of HEA it is clearly stipulated that the members of the Agency Council are entitled to payment and compensation of costs for work. It is determined that the Agency Council may itself determine “the method and amount of payment and compensation of costs”. The public was additionally informed through the media that the Agency is in criminal proceedings and in procedure at the Corruption Prevention Commission, but the Agency did not receive any such official document.

In 2015, the main concern of the Director was to ensure stable financing of the Agency. On 31 October 2015, the ESF project expired, through which the basic activity of the Agency was financed (accreditations and evaluations or the work of experts of the Agency, information system, salaries for 14 of the 23 members of the staff, the majority). In its first five years, the Agency was mainly financed from the ESF funds, therefore, more money from the budget needed to be ensured for its work or employments in the future. The negotiations with the ministry competent for finance were protracted; only in August 2015 were the funds for the operation of the Agency ensured in the integral part of the budget for 2016 and 2017, and finally with the adoption of the budgets for 2016 and 2017. The ESF project was extended until 31 December 2015.

International cooperation has been strengthening from year to year. The Director has an important role in international quality assurance institutions; on 4 December 2015, he was appointed as the vice president of the European Consortium for Accreditations (ECA). The Agency has prepared the annual general meeting and the workshop of the CEENQA association which was held in Ljubljana on 22 and 23 May 2015. The Director was again elected as the vice president of CEENQA for a two-year term.

The Director made many trips abroad, he participated at

- the conference of quality assurance agencies, ministries competent for education and higher education institutions on the topic of quality assurance for joint study programmes in Salamanca, Spain,
- the 6th general meeting of ENQA in Dublin;
- he visited the Estonian quality assurance agency EKKA, and the Bulgarian quality assurance agency NEAA, as well as the Portuguese quality assurance agency A3ES within the framework of the EIQAS project.

He promptly reported about his work to the staff at the Agency at weekly meetings and at the meetings of the Agency Council.

The Director strived for cooperation with the stakeholders and to bring the operation of the Agency closer to applicants. He continued to visit institutions. He held informal discussions with rectors, deans, presidents, students and in some cases also with the owners of institutions.



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The Director continues weekly work meetings with the staff, the minutes are also done about them. It is a prompt exchange of information and an agreement about forthcoming work. In comparison with the previous meetings, a slight trend of improvement is felt. The meetings have become more efficient, the staff actively participates and adopts joint decisions.

At the beginning of 2016, the Director performed the individual annual work interviews with all employees, the same as every year. The annual interview is a discussion or an overview and evaluation of the work to date of an individual employee, the total evaluation of the realization of objectives and tasks, and the comprehensive evaluation of the performance of the employee and the leader. The annual interview is an opportunity for both participants to talk about the plans for the future and their wishes and expectations. Annual interviews are the basis for the **determination of the work performance of the employee**. By determining the work performance, work is being controlled, a basis for a promotion is established, determined are the advantages and disadvantages, and this also allows the employees to plan their career with the help of the leaders.

Annual interviews were performed with all employees. The employees answered the following questions in advance: Your thoughts regarding the work at the Agency? Indicate one example of a good and bad practice at the Agency! What were your professional training and what burdens you the most in the work at the Agency? The summary of the answers is as follows:

Thoughts regarding the work in 2015. 2015 was problematic and stressful for the staff at the Agency, because the ESF resources expired in September 2015; nonetheless, later we ensured integral resources in the budgets for 2016 and 2017. However, we could not extend the employment agreement for 4 employees. The Director signed employment agreements for an indefinite period for ten employees. In 2015, the ESF project concluded. Finally, we began to establish the eNAKVIS information system. 2015 was also marked by a disproportionate amount of work with the many applications. The Agency actively participated in the Erasmus+ EIQAS project (Poland, Portugal, Bulgaria and Slovenia) and in the ECA working groups. We were burdened by the work required by the Court of Audit (audit for the period 2010-2013).

Examples of good practices. The staff praised the current employment for an indefinite period which enables the stability of the employment. At the same time, the training of experts-evaluators and an informal exchange of opinions during the morning coffee and regular meetings documented by minutes have received positive assessments. A good practice is also the introduction of steering meetings and the update and harmonization of new forms for applicants.

Examples of not to good practices. Mainly, there were remarks regarding the undetermination in the submission of supplements to the many applications. There is occasional inconsistency between the staff and the members of the Council and inconsistent reporting by the Council members. The number of the procedures is definitely too high, which naturally impacts the quality of the work. The processing of the extraordinary evaluations is also questionable. Not respecting the presence at the work place and the lease agreement for the premises of the Agency were also mentioned.

Proposed changes. A summary of the proposed changes is as follows:



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- more cooperation and consistency and more coordination between the staff and the Council;
- containment of the too extensive supplementation of the applications;
- wish to proportionately burden the staff;
- honestly discuss the contentious questions at the regular work meetings;
- more consistent use of the Lotus Notes programme by everyone;
- respecting the rules on the working hours.

Praised executed trainings: refreshment seminar for the General Administrative Procedure Act, visit by two representatives of the Corruption Prevention Commission (conflict of interests, ethics, integrity, influence, protection of applicants), course for CMEPIUS evaluators, for Excel, use of ISO standards in education

Burdensome factors in the work:

- inconsistencies in the decisions of the Council;
- missing the deadlines and too many procedures;
- occasionally disrespectful attitude of the applicants;
- too much bureaucratization;
- media publications (affairs);
- constant requests for preferential treatment.

The Director regularly participates as the evaluator in EUA IEP (European University Association-Institutional Evaluation Programme). In 2015, he participated in the institutional evaluation of the Bulgarian university in Sofia, Bulgaria.

In December 2014, the Director, along with the Polish (coordinator), Portuguese and Bulgarian agency and other partners (among others also UL and UNG), signed a two-year Erasmus+ project EIQAS (Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems). In 2015, we organized a five-day seminar in Ljubljana for 20 students-evaluators from Poland, Portugal, Bulgaria and Slovenia. The students prepared a guide through the revised European Standards and Guidelines, Part 1. They mainly dealt with the standards concerning the students.

IV. INTEGRITY PLAN

In 2015, the working group for the integrity plan met three times. At the meetings, the members of the working group analysed how many actions from the existing register were already implemented, how many of them are implemented periodically and how many remain unimplemented and why. In some cases, if necessary, the working group also prepared a new evaluation of the risks and actions to prevent the realization of these risks.

On 1 June 2015, the Agency submitted to the Corruption Prevention Commission the annual report regarding the implemented actions from the integrity plan for the period 2014-2015.

One of the joint findings of the working group for the integrity plan in 2015 was that the Agency, for the purposes of raising awareness and an even better education of the



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professional staff about conflict of interests and what are the unauthorized influences and how to best respond in actual cases when such risks are realized, to organize a seminar on this topic for the entire staff. For this purpose, **we sent in July 2015 an inquiry to the Corruption Prevention Commission for a seminar on ethics and integrity.**

Because of the non-availability of the lecturers, unfortunately, it was not possible to organize the seminar at the Agency in 2015, but at the end of 2015 (in November) we again asked for the seminar and have come to an agreement to do it in February 2016.

In November 2015, the trustee of the integrity plan attended a training for trustees, which was organized by the Corruption Prevention Commission.

At the initiative of the working group for the integrity plan and with the support of the Director of the Agency, we included a questionnaire about risk factors (for employees, members of the Council and experts) to the self-evaluation questionnaire for the first time in 2015.



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PRESENTATION OF PERFORMANCE OF TASKS DEFINED IN CHAPTERS OF THE AGENCY'S WORK PLAN FOR 2015

A) ACCREDITATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND STUDY PROGRAMMES, AND EVALUATIONS OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES (2015)

EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 1: ACCREDITATIONS AND EVALUATIONS					
Activity 1: accreditations in higher education					
Task	Implementation and accountability	Applications received in 2015	Applications processed in 2015	Anticipated No. of applications in 2016	Notes
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality Department / Agency Council	17	20	15	*60 applications which were granted accreditation by the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education + 2 after an extraordinary evaluation + 15 which were accredited by the Agency
Re-accreditation of study programmes		233	98	77*	
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions		3	1	3	
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		12	5	5	
Transformation of higher education institutions		10	7	8	
Transnational higher education		2	2	2	
Activity 2: evaluations of higher vocational colleges					
Task	Implementation and accountability	Applications received in 2015	Applications processed in 2015	Anticipated No. of applications in 2016	Notes
External evaluations of higher vocational colleges	Quality Department / Agency Council	6	4	11	

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 modification when re-accrediting study programmes.

The data on the anticipated number of applications in 2015 for initial accreditations of study programmes and higher education institutions and the transformation of institutions are only estimates. Regarding the differences in the number of received and considered applications it should be taken into consideration that the applications come throughout the entire calendar year, especially the applications for re-accreditation of study programmes (deadline: 30 September). Their consideration may therefore be completed in the next calendar year.



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Explanations:

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

- [Public records on the accreditation of study programmes from 2004 to 2010](#)
- [Public records of study programmes accredited after 1 March 2010](#)
- [Plan for re-accreditation and public records on the accreditation 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_zavodov /](http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/direktorat_za_visoko_solstvo/sektor_za_visoko_solstvo/razvid_visokosolskih_zavodov/)

Accreditations in higher education

Quality assurance system in higher education

1. Accreditation procedures in higher education

External evaluation and granting accreditation or re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes is the fundamental activity of the Agency. It is an external quality assurance system because of the constant improvement of higher education and the enabling of a quality education.

Additionally, the procedures for the accreditation of **304** study programmes and **19** accreditation procedures related with higher education institutions are being conducted within the legal deadlines.

Therefore, in the period from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2015 (these are the years 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015), the Agency completed $212 + 150 + 157 + 172 = \mathbf{691}$ accreditation or evaluation procedures, in which it:

- granted initial accreditation to $93 + 37 + 22 + 17 = \mathbf{169}$ study programmes (first, second, and third Bologna cycle and the programmes for further education),
- re-accredited $68 + 71 + 85 + 98 = \mathbf{322}$ study programmes,
- granted initial accreditation to $6 + 2 + 4 + 0 = \mathbf{12}$ higher education institutions,
- re-accredited $1 + 18 + 4 + 4 = \mathbf{27}$ higher education institutions,
- accredited $44 + 22 + 40 + 43 = \mathbf{149}$ transformations of study programmes.

In 2013 and again in 2015, the Agency already expected a change of the higher education legislation and a transition to a predominantly institutional accreditation, but these changes did not occur. In 2015, two ministers for education, science and sports resigned (Setnikar Cankar, royalties; Mlekuž, plagiarism) and the changes of the higher education legislation (attempts by Pikalo, Setnikar Cankar) have therefore not occurred. An amendment of HEA has been announced and later a more significant change of HEA in 2016 (Makovec Brenčič). In 2016, all non-Bologna study programmes shall be concluded.

2. External evaluations of higher vocational colleges

In 2015, the Agency received **6** applications for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges and performed **5** evaluation visits. It also concluded **3** procedures which it started in 2014. The Agency gave its final opinion for **4** higher vocational colleges, in three cases it confirmed that the higher vocational colleges complies with the statutory standards, and that it does not comply with them in one case.

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

The road of the development of an information system of the Agency was as follows. In spring 2014, a public tender was to be conducted (preparation of the tender documentation, production of the study, and selection of the provider), while the electronic form was expected to be ready in 2015.

Postponing the final implementation of a comprehensive information system of the Agency to 2015 was not supposed to have a negative impact on the work process, since the electronic form for submitting the applications for accreditations and external



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evaluations as well as other web applications would already be updated so that there would not be any 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 mainly be used in preparing overview reports. We are also aware of the criticism of the applicants.

In 2014, we prepared the appropriate documentation. In 2014, we successfully carried out the tender for the provider to build the information system in accordance with the provisions of the Public Procurement Act (ZJN-2). In September 2014, the Agency held a public opening of offers to build and maintain the information system of the Agency. 4 offers arrived in time for the deadline. The lowest offer was EUR 100,000.00, the highest was EUR 150,000.00. The estimated value of the project was EUR 160,000.

Activity: Establishment of a comprehensive information system			
Task	Implementation and accountability	Implementation deadline	Expected result
Acquainting the higher education institutions with eNakvis	Staff	July, August 2015	More efficient, rationalized and quality work, simplification and improvement of accreditation and evaluation procedures and other work processes at the Agency. Also, connectedness with the e-VŠ system.
Testing the forms and the usability of eNakvis with internal and external stakeholders	Staff	November 2015	
Resolution of found flaws and irregularities	Staff	December 2015	
Final version and implementation of eNakvis	Staff	March 2016	

The tender was followed by the signing of the agreement with the selected contractor, Optilab d.o.o., and the works on the development of the information system began at the end of 2014. An agreement for the establishment of the information system of the Agency in the value of EUR 100,000 was signed. There were no appeals against the selection of the provider.

The objective set for 2014 was achieved in full. The aim of establishing a renewed comprehensive information system is more efficient, rationalized and quality work, and a simplification of accreditation and evaluation procedures and other work processes at the Agency. Data collection and drafting of reports shall also be simplified.



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Since the beginning of 2015, the information system was being built (eNakvis). There were regular weekly meetings between the contracting authority and the provider where the duties were promptly set and all issues were resolved promptly. In 2015, we did the following:

- an analysis of the previous state of the electronic form,
- an analysis of the processes,
- building the processes,
- compliance of strict security measures with the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA),
- redesign of the forms,
- initial training of the users,
- first migration of the data,
- preparation of everything necessary to connect eNakvis with other external systems,
- placed the system in the MPA test environment,
- tested the operation of the processes,
- takeover the system,
- formally update of the forms.

Therefore, eNakvis, despite the extremely short deadlines, was built and works on a local server environment, but has not yet been uploaded to the so-called production environment at the Ministry of Public Administration and is not yet available for the public.

A thorough update of the application forms needed to be done; the Council confirmed them at the November 2015 meeting (initial accreditation) and January 2016 meeting (re-accreditation). Because we expect remarks regarding the new form, the system must first be installed in the so-called school environment in the servers of the Ministry of Public Administrations (MPA) and only when we have the final version of the forms, it shall be installed in the production environment. eNakvis will then be available for all users.

Because the Agency is being hosted by the MPA servers, the security requirements and protocols for the installation of the system extremely demanding and move slowly, the same goes for all upgrades and updates. It should be noted that the Agency shall use the same database as eVŠ, meaning that it will never be able to turn off or stop the entire system at any time for potential maintenance works. Therefore, we will thoroughly review and test the system before installation. All changed forms or the operation of eNakvis regarding the stakeholders shall be tested with their cooperation. We will try and take into consideration as many of their remarks or suggestions for improvement as possible.

C) UPDATE OF THE AGENCY STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR

THE PERIOD 2016-2020

The assignments in the work plan for 2015 were defined by taking into consideration the strategic objectives of the Agency from the Development Strategy of the Agency for the



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Period 2011–2016, which were adopted by the Agency Council in November 2011. The operation of the Agency was mostly directed towards:

1. the establishment and further development of the quality assurance system of the Agency (mainly the establishment of the information system),
2. transformation of the quality assurance system in higher education, and
3. participation in the development of higher education in Slovenia,
4. recognition of the Agency in the international area.

The present activity "Update of the Agency strategy and strategic objectives in the period 2016–2020" was planned in the Annual Work Plan for 2015 and in the Action Plan, but it was not achieved.

Upon a review of the five-year operation of the Agency, we discovered that we have given ourselves too many activities and objectives in the action and work plan. In the operation of the Agency itself, there were additional very time-consuming and demanding obligations (fulfilling the letters of request of the Court of Audit, participation in the changing of the Higher Education Act - twice). Because the Agency does not yet have the information system, we prepared – exclusively for the purposes of the Court of Audit – for example, 16 chapters, in total 38 pages of text and 330 document attachments, and there were another 6 smaller letters of request.

Therefore, we are postponing the possible update of the Mission and Vision of the Agency and the determination of the strategic objectives of the Agency for the period 2016–2020 by taking into consideration NHEP 2011–2020 to 2016. It is also worth mentioning (although it is no excuse) that of 46 planned actions from NHEP 2011–2020 only 6 actions were achieved in full, among them also the requirement that NAKVIS becomes a member of ENQA and EQAR (action 21).

D) SYSTEM OF NOTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE AGENCY

Something similar is also true for this chapter. The establishment of an efficient system of notifying the stakeholders about important events, best practices and changes of the acts of the Agency shall be postponed to 2016.

However, it must be noted that the Agency regularly and promptly answers all current questions it receives to its e-mail address info@nakvis.si. These are not only the questions by stakeholders, but also of the general public. One of the staff of the Agency is responsible for the replies.

The Agency schedules press conferences about important events.

Last but not least, the Agency also maintains its Twitter profile @nakvis (<http://twitter.com/nakvis>), where it associates with other institutions, such as @ceenqa @ENQAtwt @ESUtw @ECA_association.

This Twitter profile featured 692 tweets one year ago, we follow 292 users and the tweets by @nakvis are read by 89 followers. The current numbers are: 760 tweets, we are following 329 users and we have 137 followers.

E) TRAINING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL AND EXPERTS

"You cannot teach a man anything, you can only help him find it within himself." - G. Galilei
"I never teach my pupils, I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn."-
A. Einstein

The opinions are divided regarding the training of Council members, while the training of experts is a standard practice of the Agency.

The Court of Audit also posed questions regarding the training of Council members. Since it was not formally executed, the Director violated paragraph ten of Article 51.h of HEA. The new Council members are trained through their work. While it is true that they did not attend any formal training, I do believe that stakeholders themselves ensure that they choose with their procedures the candidates for Council members who are suitable for the position, who know what the Agency does. Among the members of the Council were former rectors, ministers and other distinguished citizens. In June 2013, only 4 Council members were replaced, and 2016 five members of the Council shall be replaced and we will organize the appropriate training in September.

Upon the commencement of their term, every Council member received instructions for the work at the Agency – June 2013 and they occasionally receive current documentation regarding evaluations and accreditations. This information was also forwarded to the Court of Audit. Every year, the work of the Agency Council and of individual members is evaluated.

F) WORKSHOP AND GENERAL MEETING OF CEENQA 2015

The workshop and the general meeting of 27 countries of Central and Eastern-European network of quality assurance agencies for higher education was held from 22 to 23 May 2015 in Ljubljana.

The meeting was led by the President of CEENQA, Iring Wasser, the main director of the German agency ASIIN. The welcome speech was held by the newly appointed Minister for Education, Science and Sports, Maja Makovec Brenčič, Full Professor in the field of international business at the EF UL and former president of the Agency Council.

The theme of the workshop was "Impact of quality assurance and control". Professor T. Leiber from the German agency presented the background and the results of the analysis of the impact of quality assurance in higher education in the project (IMPALA). Heli Mattisen, head of the Estonian higher education quality agency (EKKA), described the recent national project of the impact of quality assurance at higher education



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institutions. Blazhe Todorovski, representing European students (ESU), presented an overview of the organization and projects dealing with quality assurance. Prof. I. Leban, as the host of the event, presented Slovenian higher education and gave an overview of quality assurance and the connectedness of economy and higher education. Josep Grifoll, member of the ENQA executive committee, concluded the workshop.

The second day was the day of the CEENQA general meeting which also carried out an election. Iring Wasser from ASIIN, Germany, was again elected as the President of CEENQA, as vice president I. Leban was elected for a period of 2 years. M. Vidlakova, Czech Republic, also became a member of the CEENQA executive committee.

CEENQA also participates as a partner in international projects - BIHTEK, ALIGN, BHQFHE with several partners in Central and Eastern Europe, and in QUALITAS, which includes the Romanian agency for quality assurance in higher education (ARACIS).

In 2016, the general meeting and the workshop for the 15th anniversary of CEENQA will be held in Krakow, Poland, where CEENQA was founded. The meeting will be hosted by the Polish agency PKA, along with the Polish accreditation commission UAC.



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FINANCIAL RESOURCES

OUTTURN OF TOTAL STATE BUDGET OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION FOR 2015

Budget heading (PP)	Policy / Main programme / Sub-programme / Budget heading	2015 adopted budget (in EUR)	2015 established budget (in EUR)	2015 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				
	0201 – Higher education				
	020101 – Higher education				
9885	Salaries	352,089.67	385,649.55	385,307.10	99.9%
9886	Material costs	134,584.25	145,745.16	145,745.16	100%
9887	Investments	5,000.00	111.00	111.00	100%
130163	Fixed assets – funds for compensation	3960.65	3960.65	0	0%
9888	Higher education quality	42,932.00	26,606.68	26,606.68	100%
9889	Quality, competitiveness and responsiveness of higher education – ESF – 07-13 – EU	785,169.09	785,169.09	636,007.41	81%
9890	Quality, competitiveness and responsiveness of higher education – ESF – 07-13 – Slovenian parts	138,531.66	138,531.66	112,259.44	81%
150022	Implementation of the EIQAS project	0	4795.00	4715.14	98%



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Budgeted expenditure, type 1 (budget headings PP 9885, PP 9886, PP 9887, PP 9888)

99.9% outturn of the available budgetary resources is the result of the following:

- revised state budget in January 2015,
- the efficient use of the lump sum – certain costs were considered as indirect costs within the implementation of the ESF project,
- other funds which were not used fully by the end of 2015, were in accordance with a decision of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia reallocated to the Current budgetary reserve.

EU funds 07-13 – Structural funds, types 70 and 71 (budget headings PP 9889 and PP 9890)

The outturn of the available budgetary resources from the European structural funds ESF was **81%** in 2015.

Such outturn of the ESG resources is a result of the following:

- fewer payments for the work of external experts
- fewer indirect costs
- fewer costs for the organization of conferences, symposiums or workshops

EU funds 14-20 – Centralized and other EU programmes, type 801 (budget heading PP 150022)

The outturn of the available funds related to the EIQAS project was **98%** in 2015.

Funds for compensation from property insurance, type 7 (budget heading PP 130163)

The outturn of the available funds for compensation was **0%** in 2015.

- in 2015, the owner of the premises changed, and they will (have) repaired the damaged or destroyed equipment at their own expense, as the equipment was destroyed due to the ingress of water into the leased premises

The outturn of the total adopted budget was 87.9% in 2015.

The Agency performed the majority of the most important tasks specified in the Work Plan for 2015 in accordance with the strategic objectives and guidelines and considering descriptive indicators set out in the explanation of the amending budget:

- implementation of accreditation and evaluation procedures for higher education;
- implementation of external evaluations of higher vocational colleges;
- maintenance of membership in representative European organizations;
- member of EQAR and ENQA
- active work aimed at establishing a uniform information system of the Agency - partially
- active participation in the development of the Slovenian higher education system.

In 2015, the Agency continued to intensively examine the efficiency and applicability of the established external quality system for higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, and was assessing the suitability and applicability of accreditation and evaluation procedures and criteria in relation to stakeholders even in the process of self-evaluation. Based on the findings, proposals for revised and consolidated criteria for accreditation and evaluation were drafted, and the system for the training of experts was revised.

In November 2015, the Agency carried out the third training of candidates for the entry into the register of experts under the revised training programme. 33 candidates participated at the training. The participants of the training received a survey questionnaire about their satisfaction



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and the general opinion on the execution of the training was very good. The training providers took the advice and the remarks of the Agency Council into consideration: Agency staff and the members of the Council actively participated. Agency staff regularly participate in the training of students-evaluators of quality at SSU headquarters and respond to invitations from higher education institutions.



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In the implementation of the Agency's work there were no inadmissible or unexpected consequences.

In 2014, the Agency received a negative assessment from the Court of Audit about its operation in 2011 and had to implement 3 corrective actions. In the post-audit report the Court of Audit deemed 2 out of 3 actions as satisfactory, and one was assessed as not satisfactory according to the Court. A violation of good business was determined and the Agency Council was ordered to implement an additional corrective action. It occurred because of a collision in the legislation – it is an inconsistency of the Higher Education Act and the Decision on the Establishment of the Agency. The Court of Audit also instructed the Government of the Republic of Slovenia to harmonize the legislation to avoid false interpretations.

In 2014, the Court of Audit initiated a new audit at the Agency aimed to assess the efficiency of the procedures of evaluation, accreditation and granting concessions in the quality assurance and the diversification of study programme from 1 January 2010 to June 2014. The audit also includes MESS and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. We expect the Audit Report in January 2016.

The establishment of the new comprehensive information system of the Agency took place throughout the whole 2015. We are aware of the importance of the information system for the future operation of the Agency, especially since it will be harmonized with eVŠ at MESS and MPA and there will no longer be any duplication of entering data. However, there are certain issues because the information system will be hosted in "foreign" infrastructure and a very harmonized operation shall be required. This demonstrates the most delays.

The table below shows the data on the resources that the Agency received as a direct non-governmental user in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015.

Integral resources: cover salaries for the Director and 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.



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COMPARISON OF THE RESOURCES SPENT (in EUR) IN 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015

		2012	2013	2014	2015
INTEGRAL RESOURCES					
1	Salaries	343,976	295,849	304,464	385,307
2	Material costs	174,151	130,770	133,878	145,745
3	Investments	12,525	1,828	1,157	111
4	Council meeting fees	75,300	38,000	32,079	26,607
	1+2+3+4	605,952	466,447	471,578	557,770
ESF RESOURCES					
5	Salaries	253,379	287,700	307,211	259,408
6	Accreditation costs	432,369	539,618	425,246	401,631
7	Investments	3,747	7,349	4,987	87,228
	5+6+7	689,495	834,667	737,444	748,267
	EIQAS	-	-	-	4,715
	TOTAL EXPENDITURE 1+2+3+4+5+6+7	1,295,447	1,301,114	1,209,022	1,310,752

The National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020 imposes on the Agency a very high number of duties, while stating in 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 the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Financing of the action: From 2015, when the (co)funding of the Agency from the European Structural Funds expires, approximately 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.

In 2015, the Agency financed all its activities (salaries, accreditations, material costs, external experts, minimal investments, the Agency Council, Appeal Committee) with approximately EUR 1.3 million annually. If the Agency received only a third (EUR 2 million) of the EUR 6 million planned in the NHEP 2011-2020 in 2015 (when the ESF



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funds likely expire), this would enable it to continue with quality work. If there are no funds, the Agency will not be able to pursue such work and the granting of accreditation will become questionable.

Preparation of financial plans for 2015 and 2016

On 25 July 2013, the Government issued a decision including indicative limits to prepare the proposed revised budgets 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 budget resources of the Agency for 2014 for additionally reduced by 8% compared to the revised 2013 budget. These resources sufficed in 2013 because certain costs were considered indirect costs within the project implementation (ESF resources). The ESF was supposed to expire on 31 October 2014; fortunately, in June it was extended to 31 October 2015, and later to 31 December 2015. At the same time, all contracts with the staff employed for a definite period were signed until August 2015.

In accordance with the general financial situation in the Republic of Slovenia, the Agency adopted a series of measures to reduce the use of integral resources in 2012, when the budget was revised, and again in the beginning of 2013 (payment of the essential monthly overheads only, no additional contracts were concluded, e.g. for security, insurance of furniture, computer and other equipment, the Agency has no alarm system). The Agency does not have any resources in the integral part to execute an external revision of financial operation.

After the coordination meeting with the state secretary of MF and her team in 2015, and thanks to the fact that the ESF project funding had been extended until 31 December 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 which is hard to believe. Nevertheless, stable financing of the Agency's operation after 2015 was put at risk if additional measures would not have been taken.

One of the conditions to become a member of ENQA is to meet ESG standard 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, which should be guaranteed long-term.

In the Statement of the Estimate of Public Finance Internal Control, the Agency emphasized 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 the HEA and the NHEP 2011-2020. The NHEP 2011-2020



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even stipulates that the Agency will receive EUR 6 million from the budget; currently, the Agency operates with EUR 1.2 million per year.



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HUMAN RESOURCES

Employments financed from the budget funds were planned in the staffing plan of the Agency, while the ESF project documentation included the plan for employment financed from the ESF funds.

At the end of 2015, there were 20 employees at the Agency: the Director and 6 employees in the General Affairs Department, and 14 employees in the Quality Department. In 2015, the number of staff was decreased for 4 technical members of the staff because of the financial deficit at the Agency.

The Agency achieved almost all tasks specified in the Work Plan for 2015 – apart from establishing the eNakvis information system, regular notifying of the stakeholders and specifying the new 2016-2020 strategy.

In the future, continued efforts should be made to increase the number of employees, and to improve work organization, new systemization, and an amendment of HEA for promotions (particularly regarding a transition to institutional evaluation), so that the Agency will not have to conduct accreditation and evaluation procedures for a too large annual number of study programmes. It will also enable it to devote itself to development-analytical work and regularly monitor the developments abroad.

The current staffing, in addition to other urgent tasks – international cooperation, cooperation with stakeholders, work regarding development, appeals, anonymous letters etc. – almost impossible to perform as much work, and not to overburden the staff in the process. Efforts should be made to obtain integral budgetary resources for the salaries of two additional employees – a translator and probably an ICT expert.

At the beginning of 2016, the Director carried out the annual work interviews. It arises from the interviews and the filled-out questionnaires that the work environment at the Agency is beginning to normalize and there is no longer a clear divide between two groups of employees – employees employed for an indefinite period and the employees employed for a definite period. The regular Monday meetings have now achieved their purpose, asking questions and informal discussions, exchanges of opinions and forwarding initiatives.

The overview of financial operation and the staffing situation is featured on the following page. After a long-term negotiation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, and the Ministry of Finance in 2015, we received at the end of the year the financial assurance and minimal resources in the integral part of the budgets for 2016 and 2017.



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Proračuni NAKVIS 2010 - 2017

	NAKVIS														
	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017
	Veljav. proračun	Realizacija	Veljav. proračun	Realizacija	Veljav. proračun	Realizacija	Veljav. proračun	Realizacija	Veljav. proračun	Realizacija	Veljav. proračun	Realizacija	Veljav. proračun	Veljav. proračun	
Integralni del	854,725	601,366.12	682,339	672,829.89	607,214.50	605,953.62	470,409.35	466,448.70	497,939.65	473,471.09	538,566.57	557,769.94	1,221,864.00	1,178,072.00	
ESS sredstva 85%	1,720,777	0	1,720,779	410,341.16	777,632.66	586,050.21	1,399,888.00	709,457.24	794,106.55	627,127.27	785,169.09	636,007.41	0	0	
ESS sredstva SVN 15%	303,667	0	303,667	72,406.87	119,555.53	103,454.14	243,636.00	125,211.11	140,136.45	110,574.55	138,531.66	112,259.44	0	0	
Skupaj	2,879,169	601,366.12	2,706,785	1,155,577.92	1,504,402.69	1,295,457.97	2,113,933.35	1,301,117.05	1,432,182.65	1,211,172.91	1,462,267.32	1,306,036.79	1,221,864.00	1,178,072.00	

Plače

	NAKVIS					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Integralni del	346,227.41	403,228.90	343,976.46	295,849.43	304,464.57	385,307.10
ESS sredstva	0.00	191,071.76	256,052.70	289,514.33	307,821.13	259,407.50
Skupaj	346,227.41	594,300.66	600,029.16	585,363.76	612,285.70	644,714.60

Število zaposlenih

	NAKVIS							2017 plan
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
Integralni del	12	12	12	10	10	10	20	22
ESS sredstva	0	10	11	14	14	10	0	-
Skupaj	12	22	23	24	24	20	20	22

CONCLUSION

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, SQAA (hereinafter: the Agency) has performed its mission in 2015: "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."

The agency carried out its assignments in accordance with the law and other acts. The Agency has an important role in the establishment of the Slovenian higher education area. There were 98 higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges in the records of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, and there were 947 accredited study programmes in June 2015.

In 2015, the Agency achieved another important strategic goal. It became a full member of ENQA. The agency operates in accordance with 17 ENQA ESG standards (Part 2 and Part 3) as follows: fully compliant (10), substantially (6), partly (1) and non-compliant (0). The problematic is the standard 3.4 – i.e. long-term stable and sustainable funding of the agency. The Agency should obtain an effective information system as soon as possible.

Thus, the Agency entered in the register of trusted agencies EQAR (2013) www.eqar.eu and is also a full member of ENQA (2015) www.enqa.eu.

The Agency has gained the trust of all higher education stakeholders and the general public, and also achieves greater visibility in Slovenian and in the international environment. The agency continuously tries to improve its quality, which is the basis for efficient system of external quality assurance in higher education area. Unfortunately, the general public got to know the activity of the Agency through negative events in our higher education area (non-accredited programs, plagiarism, fraud).

We believe that the Agency and its work are proving that it has successfully established a national system for quality assurance and enhancement in higher education in the Republic of Slovenia.

POVZETEK

Leto 2015 je agencija udejanjala svoje poslanstvo: »Agencija skrbi za razvoj in delovanje sistema zagotavljanja kakovosti v slovenskem visokem šolstvu. Deluje vsebinsko in formalno odgovorno ter svetovalno do vseh deležnikov in udeležencev v terciarnem izobraževanju v skladu z evropskimi in svetovnimi smerni razvoja.«

Opravila, ki jih agencija opravlja v skladu z zakonom in drugimi akti, je del njenega delovanja. Agencija ima pomembno vlogo pri vzpostavitvi slovenskega visokošolskega okolja. Junija 2015 je bilo v Sloveniji 98 visokošolskih zavodov in višjih strokovnih šol, v razvid ministrstva pa je bilo vpisanih 947 akreditiranih študijskih programov.

Agencija je v letu 2015 dosegla drugi pomembni strateški cilj. Pridobila je polnopravno članstvo v ENQA. Agencija deluje v skladu z 17 ENQA ESG standardi (2. in 3.del) takole: popolnoma izpolnjuje (10), pretežno (6) in delno (1). Problematičen je standard 3.4 - dolgoročno stabilno in vzdržno financiranje agencije. Naslednja usmeritev agencije je vzpostavitev učinkovitega informacijskega sistema.

Tako je agencija vpisana v register zaupanja vrednih agencij EQAR (2013) www.eqar.eu in je tudi polnopravna članica ENQA (2015) www.enqa.eu.

Agencija si je pridobila zaupanje visokošolskih in višješolskih deležnikov in širše javnosti ter tudi dosega večjo prepoznavnost tako v slovenskem kot v mednarodnem prostoru. Nenehno si je prizadevala za izboljševanje lastne kakovosti, kar je temelj za učinkovit, z vsemi deležniki dogovorjen in splošno priznan sistem zunanjega zagotavljanja kakovosti v visokem in višjem šolstvu. Na žalost širša javnost spoznava dejavnost agencije ob slabih dogodkih v našem visokem šolstvu (neakreditirani programi, plagiatorstvo, goljufije).

Menimo, da je s svojim delom agencija dokazala, da je uspešno vzpostavila nacionalni sistem za zagotavljanje in izboljševanje kakovosti v visokem šolstvu v republiki Sloveniji.

Additional resources:

Work and Financial Plan for 2015
Business Report for 2015
Self-evaluation report for 2015
Minutes of internal meetings of the Agency staff in 2015
Minutes of the Agency Council in 2015

I would like to thank everybody who participated in preparing this report on work and operation of the Agency in 2015.

Dr Ivan Leban,
May 2015.

Translation of the text in the pictures:
(section: duration of individual procedures)

Initial accreditation of a programme
(duration of the procedure in days)

Re-accreditation of an institution
(duration of the procedure in days)

Re-accreditation of a programme
(duration of the procedure in days)

Transformation of an institution
(duration of the procedure in days)

Higher vocational colleges
(duration of the procedure in days)

SQAA budgets 2010-2017

NAKVIS = SQAA

Integralni del = Integral part

ESS sredstva = ESF resources

ESS sredstva SVN = ESF resources SVN

Skupaj = Total

Plača = Salaries

Število zaposlenih = Number of employees

Veljavn. proračun = Established budget

Realizacija = Outturn