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

IN 2016

“Quality begins on the inside... then works its way out.”

Bob Moawad



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Introduction

2016 marks the seventh year of the operation of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency). The Work and Operation Report of the Agency for 2016 has been drafted in accordance with the Quality Manual of the Agency which was adopted in February 2015. The report mainly discusses the fulfilment of the objectives from the work plan. It should be worth considering that the number of different documents at the end of the year be reduced or at least combined – some information is repeated in several documents (Business Report 2016, Annual Accounts 2016, Work and Operation Report 2016, Self-evaluation Report 2016, Action Plan 2017, Work Plan for 2017)

In 2016, the Agency was fully active in the field of accreditation and re-accreditation implementation and in the field of external evaluations of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. The Agency operates as a full member of ENQA (it is also entered into the register of trustworthy agencies, EQAR) in full compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines ESG 2015.

The Agency has been gaining international recognition as it is an active and equal participant in three other international organizations: in ECA (European Consortium of Accreditation in Higher Education), in CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) and in INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education). The Agency also cooperates with other agencies and in 2016 it concluded the Erasmus+ project EIQAS (Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems) as a partner together with the Polish agency PKA, the Portuguese agency A3ES, the Bulgarian agency NEAA, with two rectors' conferences and three universities.

In 2016, the Agency actively participated in the modification of the higher education legislation. In December, the amended HEA-K was adopted in the third attempt. The amendment of the act has brought a number of novelties to the world of evaluations and accreditation – a transition towards institutional evaluation and accreditation, the validity of accreditations has been reduced from seven to five years...

30 September was an important date in 2016. The accreditation of pre-Bologna study programmes expired. But there are still 914 accredited study programmes in the Slovenian higher education area which a quite large number for a generation of approximately 69,000 students.

The Agency Council as the highest decision-making body of the Agency operated in a stable manner and did a lot of work. A lot of the text in this report has been summarized from the extensive minutes of the Agency Council in 2016, the Self-evaluation Report of the Agency for 2016 and the Business Report for 2016.

I would like to sincerely thank all of my staff, the members of the Agency Council and the Appeal Committee for their past work in 2016 and beyond. I wish to also express my gratitude to all independent evaluators of the Agency, domestic and foreign who perform many external evaluations of our higher education institutions. I would also like to thank all other stakeholders in our higher education area.

Done in Ljubljana, April 2016.

Ivan Leban, Director



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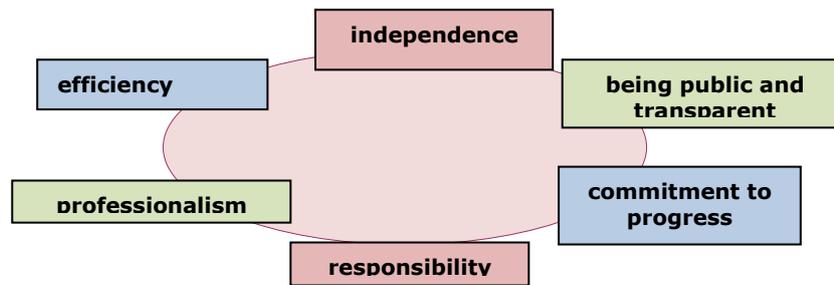
FROM THE AGENCY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE PERIOD 2011–2016

Mission

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

Vision

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



Values

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

- development and functioning of the quality assurance system;
- monitoring 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 2016

2016 was supposed to be devoted to the international affirmation of the Agency because of the extensive operation of the Agency in accordance with the law and other acts of the Agency (evaluations and accreditation of institutions and study programmes). However, we mostly expected that the higher education legislation will be changed as soon as possible – firstly the amendment of the HEA, and then a systemic act (public service) and a separate law regarding the Agency.

In addition to the accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions and many study programmes and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges, the tasks of the Agency for 2016 were defined by taking into consideration the strategic objectives of the Agency from the Development Strategy of the Agency for the period 2011-2016, adopted by the Agency Council in November 2011, which were centred towards:

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

The indicated guidelines refer to the concern for the quality of work of the Agency through the performed annual self-evaluation (and the related action plan) and occasional external evaluations of the Agency, participation with external stakeholders or the establishment of an efficient system of external quality assurance and the cooperation with the European Higher Education Area – EHEA by taking into consideration the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG, which were revised in 2015.

Similar as in the past, the Agency's guidelines were considered in the preparation of the Work and Financial Plan for 2016. The Agency does most of the work in the field of external evaluations and accreditations. In 2016, in addition to our regular work, we mostly dedicated our time to the establishment of a user-friendly eNakvis information system. We had high expectations regarding the adoption of the amendments to HEA-K, which legalized institutional evaluation and accreditation; the predominant concern for study programmes was left to the autonomy of higher education institutions. At the same time, we prepared the basis for the rough draft of the act regarding the Agency and prepared a draft (objectives) of the strategy of the Agency's work for the period 2017-2020.

We may specify the following chapters from the Work Plan for 2016:

- a) accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes, and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges – this is the main activity
- b) establishment of a comprehensive information system of the Agency
- c) preparation of the update of the Agency strategy and strategic objectives of the Agency for the period 2017-2020
- d) system for notifying stakeholders about the activities of the Agency
- e) training of the members of the Agency Council and of experts



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f) training of external international evaluators ENQA (ENQA Agency Reviews - training of reviewers) in Ljubljana; and
The gaining of trust of all stakeholders and the general public to the work of the Agency and the strengthening of its recognition was of great importance.

The Agency has continued to assure and improve its own quality which is the basis for an efficient and generally recognized system of external quality assurance in higher education, which was agreed upon with all stakeholders.

SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE AGENCY IN 2016

In addition to regulatory obligations the Agency performs in accordance with the Higher Education Act, HEA, all other operations of the Agency were eventful. Below we provide a chronologically documented overview including the dates of the Agency Council meetings. The texts have been summarized from the extensive minutes of the Agency Council and are public information.

97th meeting of the Agency Council, 21 January 2016.

The representatives of the Agency have joined the efforts to organize a meeting at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports to obtain an agreement regarding the regulation of the external evaluation procedure of higher vocational colleges if an opinion with reservation must be issued. The date of the meeting is still subject to coordination.

The Agency has prepared a list of deficit areas in the register of experts and a proposal of a call for candidates for the entry to the register of experts of the Agency.

On 24 December 2015, the Agency urged the managements of universities and private higher education institutions to adopt the changes of study programmes in accordance with Article 32 of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in order for the changes to ensure or improve the quality of the study. The managements were also urged to ensure that their students have the possibility to gain education and complete their study under the same conditions which were valid upon their enrolment (Article 66 of HEA).

The Agency sent an objection to the Court of Audit of the Republic of Slovenia regarding the findings of the audit from the proposed audit report: "Evaluation, accreditation and concession granting procedures in higher education, 2010-2013".

The Agency is actively involved in the preparation of the amendments to HEA. While quality assurance is mostly coordinated among the stakeholders, there are still major differences regarding the financing of higher education. Regarding quality, the Agency mitigated its views concerning the extent of the employment of higher education teachers, so that now higher vocational colleges must ensure for two higher vocational study programmes, or a faculty for one university study programme, at least an equivalent of one fully employed higher education teacher. The requirement for a staffing norm for universities remains unchanged.



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In 2016, the term of four members of the Agency Council expired. A member of the Council must also be appointed by the government, and the term of the students' representative also expired.

Two representatives of the Agency, along with five evaluators from the register of experts, have participated in Lisbon at a meeting within the EIQAS project regarding the internal quality assurance systems.

The Council also discussed the proposed forms for re-accreditation of a higher education institution and study programme. It was acquainted with all the changes proposed by the internal stakeholders and it confirmed the proposed application forms with the changes.

98th meeting of the Agency Council, 17 February 2016.

The representatives of the Agency shall meet with the representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports (MESS) and agree on the regulation of the procedure of external evaluation of a higher vocational college if an opinion with reservation is to be issued.

For the more important contextual transformations of study programmes and higher education institutions for which the Council gives its consent it should be necessary to determine reporters for such procedures to ensure a quality of monitoring of the development of higher education.

The Agency shall organize consultations for external stakeholders and experts of the Agency, during which it will also discuss the issue of distance study.

The Director presented the circumstances of the audit of the Court of Audit of the Republic of Slovenia 2011. The chronology of events, including the audit, post-audit, corrective measures and a discussion in the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, comprises of 11 pages. For the media questions, we have published on the Agency's website the materials containing the relevant information and every report of the inspectors who have been reviewing the operation of the Agency so far. The media has presented the Agency in a negative light. We have been informed from the media that the Agency is part of a criminal investigation or part of the Corruption Prevention Committee investigation. The Agency has not yet been officially informed about the investigation of the double payments to the members of the Council for the work performed. The media attention is mostly connected only with the Minister, Dr Maja Makovec Brenčič, a former president of the Agency Council. The Director supports the Minister as the Agency paid the members of the Council for the work performed in accordance with the provisions of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and the Decision on the establishment of the Agency. The Agency has meanwhile implemented two out of three corrective measures. According to the assessment of the Court of Audit, the Agency violated the principle of good operation, but it did not determine any major violations of its operation. Nine months after the last development between the Agency and the Court of Audit, the President of the Court of Audit informed the public that the



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collection is still relevant and that the Agency did not comply with the requirements of the Court of Audit. According to the Director, the reason why the Agency is in this unfavourable position is because of the poorly drafted legislation. The Agency is among institutions such as the Court of Audit, Corruption Prevention Commission, Constitutional Court, Public Representative, Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Fiscal Council... It is not a public agency and it does not have its own special act; its operation is regulated by HEA. Article 51.l of HEA applies for the employees of the Agency, namely: "Provisions regulating the position of public servants shall apply for the employees of the Agency." The status of the members of the Council and everyone else is not determined, but Article 51.n of HEA states: "Members of the Agency Council, the Appeal Committee and the members of the groups of experts are entitled to the payment and the compensation of work-related costs." In addition, this article also states: "The method and amount of payment and compensation of costs shall be determined by the Agency Council." The Council operated in accordance with these provisions. Until its amendment (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 57/2015), the Decision on the establishment of the Agency stated in paragraph one of Article 26 that the members of the Council and the Appeal Committee are entitled to meeting fees in accordance with the regulation which regulates meeting fees and the compensation of costs in public funds, public agencies, public institutions and public economic institutes. In its second paragraph it determined that the members of the Agency Council, Appeal Committee and members of the groups of experts are entitled to the payment and compensation of costs for the work, and in the third paragraph it was that the method and amount of the payment and the compensation of the costs shall be determined by the Agency Council. The decree regulating meeting fees and compensation of costs in public funds, public agencies, public institutions and public economic institutions, which does not regulate the operation of the Agency, defines meeting fees as the payment for the work performed by the member in the body of the entity in the public sector and for the accountability arising from such work. The collision of the Decision on the establishment of the Agency was rectified at the end of 2015 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 57/2015). The decree regarding the meeting fees determines, among others, that the meetings fees shall be paid to the members on the basis of actual work performed in the body which is demonstrated with a signature on the list of persons present which is an obligatory attachment to the minutes of a regular or an extraordinary meeting. The Agency was also visited by the budget inspector who does not only issue opinions, but also imposes sanctions. His report, dated 9 June 2015, states that there were no irregularities found in the payments of the meeting fees.

In the time between two meetings, the representatives of the Agency actively participated in the preparation of the proposal of the amendments to HEA, which, among others, anticipates a transition to institutional accreditation and an introduction of two visits by the group of experts within the external evaluation. In addition to extraordinary evaluations of study programmes, the proposal of the amendments also determines the annual sample accreditations of study programmes intended to improve the systems of quality. The amendment would decrease the amount of work of the Agency regarding procedures, and it would also relieve higher education institutions. The questions which remain the subject of the negotiation and coordination refer to the elimination of the initial accreditations of study programmes, duration of the accreditation and a



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comprehensive liberalization of the accreditation of joint study programmes. The latter would only be reported to the Agency by higher education institutions; therefore, the Agency would no longer be able to vouch for the quality of the awarded degrees. The question also arises who shall take care of the quality of the development of study programmes and how will a line be ensured between those who prepare study programmes and the management of the higher education institutions.

The Agency has organized a refresher course in ethics, integrity and conflict of interests which was performed by the representatives of the Corruption Prevention Commission. They also praised the risk register of the Agency.

The representatives of the Agency and five experts of the Agency participated from 18 to 22 January 2016 at the event within the EIQAS project, taking place at the Portuguese quality assurance agency A3ES in Lisbon.

We have received a notification regarding a recent regular change in the management of the Slovenian Student Union (SSU). The management of SSU is now in the hand of Klemen Balanč, the secretary is Rok Primožič. SSU supports, with some comments, the amendments to HEA and a new higher education act. It also warns about the financing of quality assurance in higher education.

The Agency received two letters from students from the University of Primorska regarding the implementation of the study programmes "Applied Kinesiology" and "Biopsychology". They shall be forwarded to the extraordinary evaluation commission. The letters are signed, but the applicants ask for discretion in the discussion of the application for personal protection.

The Council also discussed the method of entering student candidates to the register of experts. Student candidates, after successfully completing the training organized by SSU, participate at the two-part training at the Agency. In the future, the student candidates shall be invited to the second part of the training, organized by the Agency, and shall attend evaluation visits as observers.

The Council discussed the request of the University of Maribor regarding the interpretation of indent three, paragraph two of Article 25 and indent four, paragraph two of Article 28 of the Minimal Standards for Appointment to the Title of Higher Education Teachers, Scientific Workers and Higher Education Staff at Higher Education Institutions.

The Council has already expressed its opinion regarding the duration of the period of a scientific or pedagogical work abroad of a candidate as one of the conditions for appointment to a title. In accordance with the minimal standards, this period must uninterruptedly last at least three months, and it cannot take place during the study vacation. The assessment or the contextual assessment of "important international artistic competitions or events or tenders", or "international competitions or events which are in relation to the place and location of extreme importance", may only be performed by the competent body (for appointments to titles) of the higher education institution. The work abroad is not possible to be conditioned with employment abroad. To be avoided are also the provisions encouraging institutional hypocrisy.



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99th meeting of the Agency Council, 18 March 2016

The representatives of Agency have met on 3 March 2016 at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MESS) with the representatives of the Ministry to find an agreement regarding the regulation of the procedure of external evaluation of a higher vocational college if an opinion with reservation is to be issued, but the open issues were not resolved at the meeting. According to MESS, the Agency even has the option to limit the implementation of a study programme at the higher vocational college. MESS' inspectors do not review the elimination of the irregularities and discrepancies with the regulations which are found by the Agency after the completed external evaluations, as they are working under different regulations. But the Agency does not have a legal basis for that. The Agency could only change the evaluation criteria so that it could enable a prompt repeated evaluation of a higher vocational college in the event of issuing an opinion with reservation for a higher vocational college.

Two technical members of the staff have issued a decision regarding the eligibility of interested higher education teachers from the Department for Political Sciences at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana to participation in the procedure of extraordinary evaluation of study programmes of the Faculty for Social Sciences and expressing their opinion on the matter. The applicants have thus far not appealed to the decision.

The ENQA organization sent a letter to the Agency finding that the Agency has demonstrated stable financing for 2016/17, but that it still needs to fulfil some obligations, such as the coordination of the criteria for accreditation with the updated ESG standards (2015).

The Agency was visited by a 16-member delegation from the Republic of Serbia who acquainted themselves with the Slovenian system of higher education and the regulation of the higher education studies.

On 4 March 2016, a representative of the Agency attended the session of the Association of European Healthcare Schools in Berlin, which recommended that the agencies also take into consideration for their evaluations of higher education institutions and their study programmes the relevant field standards of WFME (World Federation of Medical Education).

The representatives of the Agency have attended the round-table discussion on the topic of joint study programmes at the Faculty of Administration of the University of Ljubljana.

The agency submitted the business report for 2015, annual accounts for 2015 and the report on the risks. In 2015, it spent EUR 1.3 million, which is comparable with the previous years.

The Agency was visited by the representative of the European Accreditation Consortium, Mark Fredericks, to test the evaluation of the joint study programmes in the humanities.

The Agency took the position that the joint study programmes should remain within the external quality assurance system.

The Council acquainted itself with the process of the update of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The key areas of the update are the use of a foreign language and the concern for the Slovenian language; internationalization of higher education; transition to institutional accreditation and financing. According to the opinion of the Council, higher education teachers have the obligation to write textbooks in the Slovenian language and thus care for the development of the Slovenian technical language. In the field of quality, universities take upon themselves a lot of responsibility. They will need to invest hefty financial and staffing resources. The Council consents that the agency should forward to MESS a proposal to eliminate the first paragraph of the amended Article 51.r. of HEA.

The Council acquainted itself with the proposal for the change of the Rules of Operation of the Council by the National Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for quality in higher education. In Appendix 2, the amounts for the payment of the work performed by the experts for the visits in the accreditation procedures of dislocated units, re-accreditation when a day of the visit of the dislocated unit lasts fewer than 6 or fewer than 4 hours, and the transformation of the higher education institution.

The Council acquainted itself with the proposal of the instructions for the preparation of an agreement on the implementation of the transnational higher education. The purpose of the instructions is to improve the agreements regarding transnational higher education. The issue how to define the rights of students in more detail remains open. Higher education institutions namely ensure different rights and obligations which is why it is not possible to determine unified or sufficiently specified instructions. The instructions should therefore include that the agreements regarding transnational higher education should define the rights and obligations of the students in more detail.

The Council acquainted itself with the report of the commission dealing with the initiatives for the implementation of procedures of extraordinary evaluation. After the Commission studied the applications, it suggested the initiation of the procedure of an extraordinary evaluation of the study of applied kinesiology and the study of biopsychology at the Faculty of Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Information Technologies of the University of Primorska.

101st meeting of the Agency Council, 21 April 2016

The term of four members of the Council expired. Dr Andreja Kocijančič was elected as the President of the Council.

The commission for the preparation of the act amending the Agency's accreditation and evaluation criteria, the requirements of the Court of Audits of the Republic of Slovenia and the upcoming change of the relevant legislation, especially the amendments to the Higher Education Act (HEA) should be taken into consideration. At the same time, the Agency will have to harmonize the criteria with the updated ESG standards. The Agency



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shall take into consideration in the update of the criteria the relevant field WFME standards (World Federation of Medical Education).

The Director attended the regular meeting of the executive committee of the European Accreditation Consortium ECA in Paris. In Salamanca, he attended a seminar on the topic of standard 1.3 of the updated ESG standards on the topic of the student-centred learning. The Agency shall participate at the workshop and the annual assembly of the CEENQA organization.

The Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education and the Council of the Government for student issues have confirmed the proposal of the amendments to HEA.

The Agency applied for the projects in the Erasmus+ KA2 programme. As a coordinator it successfully submitted the application for the project "Accessibility and Quality Assurance in European Open Education AQA ENEO". The support for the application was expressed by UNESCO and European Blind Union. The Agency also applied as a partner to the Erasmus+ K3 project "Enhancing Entrepreneurial Orientation of Higher Education Institutions ENEO". The Council warned that the employees at the Agency are overwhelmed with their current work. In the future, the Council shall decide in which projects and additional activities the Agency shall participate in.

The ENQA organization invited the Agency to organize a training for Agency's evaluators. The Council welcomed the invitation and expressed its support for the organization of the event.

A representative of the Agency attended the annual conference of the University of Maribor regarding internal quality assurance. The university has been implementing internal evaluations in accordance with the regulations of the Agency with its evaluators for several years now.

The Council has acquainted itself with the letter by MESS asking for the explanation of Article 5 of the Criteria for the transition between study programmes. Because the statutorily determined deadline for the completion of the pre-Bologna study programmes is fast approaching (30 September 2016), the question has been raised whether the students on these study programmes will be able to enrol to the accredited study programmes according to the criteria for the transition.

After the discussion at the Agency Council, the Council has adopted the opinion that the applicants of new study programmes have the obligation to also take care of the not-already regulated vocational standards for the vocations for which these study programmes might educate.

The Agency should regulate the criteria for the field of the placement into the environment more precisely in the update of the criteria for accreditation.

The Council discussed the response of the Court of Audit to the objection of the Agency against the findings of the audit in the proposal of the audit report "Evaluation, accreditation, and concession granting procedures in higher education 2010-2013". The



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Agency must submit in ninety days a response report to the proposal of the audit report and state its opinion regarding corrective measures. The Court of Audit will then prepare a post-audit report. The Agency finds it most problematic that it is being forced by the Court of Audit to objectivize and quantify quality assurance and is limiting its evaluation procedures to measuring. For this change, the Agency continues to strive to retain the qualitative aspects of evaluations, and to assess and determine, in addition to objective quantities, the unmeasurable quality, and to fulfil the requirement of the Court of Audit in accordance with the criteria where it is reasonable and possible. Other improvements shall be assured by the Agency when the relevant legislation will be changed or when it will eliminate the shortcomings. The Agency shall prepare a precise action plan with implementation deadlines and persons responsible for the elimination of the found shortcomings. Individual activities shall be implemented by the employees at the Agency and the commissions and working groups which were already appointed by the Council. The shortcomings which were already eliminated by the Agency should be presented clearly in the response report.

The Council has acquainted itself with the proposal of the Self-evaluation Report of the Agency for 2015. The constitution of the report is similar to those of the previous reports. This report documents in more detail the accreditation and evaluation procedures. More of the content is devoted to the obtainment of the membership of the Agency to the ENQA organization and the audit by the Court of Audit. In the chapter regarding the fulfilment of the ESG standards, the report discusses the compliance with the standards for which in the external assessment of the Agency because of the membership in the ENQA did not find full compliance. The actions have been realized in accordance with the action plan for 2015 and the current strategy of the Agency. The report also includes the findings from the survey questionnaires filled out by key stakeholders. The results of the survey questionnaires have shown that the satisfaction of the stakeholders has not significantly changed. While the opinions of the employees and members of the Council are slightly more positive, the opinion of the experts of the Agency has slightly worsened.

According to the opinion of the Council, the report clearly demonstrates the growth and the development of the Agency. In the future, the Agency should strive towards adapting the self-evaluation to the calendar year so that that the self-evaluation period would start with the beginning of the year. The SWOT analysis should contain a correct division between internal and external factors.

102nd meeting of the Agency Council, 19 May 2016.

The working group of the Agency should anticipate in the update of the criteria for accreditation the procedure of the assessment and deciding about which changes were so extensive that they require an implementation of a new study programme, thus introducing an initial accreditation procedure of a new study programme.

Another consideration will be necessary regarding the demonstration of vocational possibilities and employability of graduates. Of special importance are study programmes educating for a vocation which are not yet established or are under the control of employers' associations, chambers etc. Assurances/proof regarding employability or the need for graduates should be issued by national associations, not



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local. A question is also raised here whether the higher education should regulate vocational qualifications and until when, if it intends to educate for a title which opens the door for new vocations.

In April, the Agency organized a consultation for experts which was attended by 62 experts and 16 employees. The topic of the consultation was the revised ESG standards and a student guide to the ESG standards, which was created within the EIQAS project. At the conclusion of the consultation the experts and the representatives of the Agency exchanged opinions regarding the operation of the Agency and the quality in higher education. An important aspect was the initiative to translate and coordinate the use of the relevant expressions. The responses of the participants were positive and among the recommendations the most important was the initiative for more emphasis on the content and depth of the consultations and to organize more of such consultations.

On 28 and 29 April 2016, Budapest hosted the ENQA forum, which was attended by 91 participants from 32 countries. The main topics of the seminar were the connection of the ENQA organization and the African higher education, how to recognize cheating in higher education, the connection between teaching, science and innovation, the assessment of study programmes, directed towards scientific research work, and the concern for the education of employees at the quality assurance agencies.

On 13 and 14 May 2016, Krakow hosted the meeting of the CEENQA organization, which was attended by 49 participants from 22 countries. The main themes of the meeting were transnational education, the meaning of transnational education according to mobility, a unified European approach to quality assurance of joint study programmes. The elections for the executive board were carried out. The Director remains the vice president of the organization.

On 13 May 2016, the Agency was visited by a delegation from Serbia with a representative of the Centre for Vocational Education; in Serbia they are preparing a national qualifications framework and have inquired how it is done in Slovenia. They also inquired about accreditation and evaluation procedures in higher education in Slovenia.

The Agency received a letter from the ENIC-NARIC centre claiming the Slovenia is part of the procedure in the European Court regarding the organization of franchise schools in Slovenia. The GROW general directorate for the internal market appealed in 2011 that Slovenia is closed for the organization of such schools and that Article 33.c of HEA should be interpreted which regards transnational education. It should also be explained how the Agency adjusted the criteria for transnational education to this article of HEA.

The Director participated at two round-table discussions along with Dr Soršak on the topic of the amendments to HEA; and the other, which was organized by the Association of private higher education institutions, was organized on the topic of the future of Slovenian higher education and as well as regarding the amendments to HEA.

In Germany, higher education institutions initiated a constitutional dispute against the interventions of quality assurance agencies into the freedom of education and research at higher education institutions. Great Britain is changing its legislation which is



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liberalizing the establishment of new universities where only pedagogical activity shall be carried out, and which will enable a cheaper study.

The Council of the National Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for quality in higher education gives consent to the Report on the Work and Operation of the Agency in 2015.

103rd meeting of the Agency Council, 16 June 2016.

On 22 June 2016, a meeting of the working group for the preparation of the updated criteria was called. The group shall begin with its work regardless of the adoption of the amendments to the Higher Education Act (hereinafter: amendment to HEA). The group agreed on the initial distinction between the minimal standards in the first accreditation, as determined with the law, and the quality standards for the re-accreditation in the criteria. The draft shall be prepared by the September meeting of the Council.

The Agency shall inform higher education institutions that they as the applicants of study programmes educating for new vocation obligated to ensure the graduates the possibility of employment in new vocations.

The Agency prepared a draft of the response report to the audit report of the Court of Audit which imposed 7 corrective measures to the Agency. The response report will be followed by the post-audit report. The corrective measures may be assessed as satisfactory, partially satisfactory or unsatisfactory. An unsatisfactory measure means the violation of good operation, or a major violation of good operation, and in such case the Court of Audit may suggest to the Council that it dismiss the Director. The deadline for the submission of the report is 13 July 2016. The Director added that the response report should be amended with the explanations regarding the financial and accounting matters at the Agency and emphasized that the Agency would require staffing reinforcements, for example for analytical-development work.

On 20 May 2016, the Director did an interview with the representatives of the general directorate for education and culture of the European Commission. The current buzzword in the European Union is innovation in higher education, in addition to pedagogical and research excellence. It was checked which indicators would be suitable for the measuring of innovation.

On 26 May, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopt the amendments to HEA and sent it to the National Assembly for the regular procedure. This act is coordinated with the Rectors' Conference of Slovenia and the Slovenian Student Union. In the public debate, the issue of the use of English or Slovenian in the study process is exposed.

On 30 May, the Agency reported to the Corruption Prevention Commission regarding the implemented measures from the integrity plan for 2015.

104th meeting of the Agency Council, 15 September 2016.

On 15 September 2016, the working group for the update of the criteria discussed the proposal of the update of criteria for the procedure of initial accreditation of a higher



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education institution. The field of assessment "placement in the environment" was transferred to the field "operation of the higher education institution" and other areas of assessment. The field "students" was also reallocated. The update of the criteria will also include the new staffing norms which are anticipated with the update of the higher education act (HEA).

The Agency did not inform the higher education institutions that they are as the providers of study programmes educating for new professions obligated to ensure the graduate the possibility of employment in the new professions. The higher education institutions cannot be accountable and cannot ensure the employability of graduates. They can only approximately plan, monitor, encourage and support the employability. Such a requirement is also not included in the legal and executive acts the Agency uses for quality assurance. The issue of employability is also different according to the fields of study, study cycles and the types of study programmes.

The Agency responded to the audit report of the Court of Audit of the Republic of Slovenia within the deadline. It provided a response to every requirement and also prepared additional extensive explanations at the initiative of the Court of Audit – it prepared its action plan, the update of the accreditation criteria, the measures of the Council and provided an explanation of the circumstances regarding its premises.

The experts, whose five-year entry into the register of experts expired, were invited to again enter the register of experts for the period of five years or to apply for the next public call for the entry into the register of experts.

The Council discussed important events between the two meetings. It was informed of the death of a co-worker, Nataša Gašparovič.

The Agency organized a training for the members of the Council which took place before the October meeting of the Council. It was carried out by the representatives of the Agency and the Corruption Prevention Commission on the topic of objectivity and impartiality in the assessment and decision-making, and the topic of the ESG standards.

The Agency received various questions regarding the elimination of non-Bologna study programmes on 30 September 2016 and finally published an opinion regarding the transition from the old to the Bologna study programmes. Higher education institutions wished such a regulation of the completion of the study obligations and transition to Bologna study programmes which would be the most favourable for students.

The Council acquainted itself with the development of the eNAKVIS information system and the audit upon the completion of the ESF project within which the activities of the Agency were financed. The preliminary findings of the audit are encouraging. The framework of the information system with the applications is developed. Its technical and functional shortcomings are currently being eliminated. The Agency will then present it to the future users and deploy it in the school environment where it will be possible to test it. The system will be likely be ready for deployment to the school environment by the next meeting of the Council.



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The Council has been acquainted with the application for the accreditation of the change of the New University which was joined by a new member.

105th meeting of the Agency Council, 20 October 2016.

The Council discussed the assessment and decision-making in the procedures of re-accreditation of study programmes or higher education institutions where the study activity is not being implemented because of the lack of enrolment or stagnates because of the modest enrolment. The approach to the decision-making from the aspect of ensuring development and progress (as the standards of quality), for which the Agency has the basis in the accreditation criteria (but not in the Higher Education Act, HEA), does not make a distinction regarding the number of students enrolled. Therefore, in practice the development and progress in such cases are not demonstrated and it is not possible to check them.

This year, the Director did not attend the ENQA general meeting in Gloucester, Great Britain, because of important obligations at the Agency.

The financial situation of the Agency is facing difficulties. Since the end of September, the Agency must for each expenditure ask the permission of the Ministry of Finance. The proposed budgets for 2017 and 2018 are comparable with the previous years and ensure normal operation of the Agency.

From 22 to 23 September 2016, the Agency hosted a seminar for new ENQA evaluators who evaluate quality assurance agencies in accordance with the ESG standards. The 28 participants from 12 countries were joined by Klemen Šubic from the Agency.

On 30 September 2016, the Agency received a positive report of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for budget control regarding the performed audit or the project "Establishment of a national quality assurance system in higher education 2010–2014(2015)" within ESF. The project was valued at EUR 14,847,484 before the confirmation, and at EUR 10,090,257 after confirmation. Then, after the assessment that the Agency would not require all of the funds, the value of the project was lowered to EUR 6,426,402. In the five years, the Agency spent EUR 4,606,499. The audit found a discrepancy in the amount of EUR 395.

On 30 September 2016, the accreditations expired for pre-Bologna study programmes. The materials for the meeting include the data on the study programmes, summarized from the listing of higher education institutions led by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports (MESS). From a total of 1,600 study programmes, the number of study programmes is now 914. Up to 30 September 2016 there were approximately 10,000 diploma defences which were mostly payable.

The Council acquainted itself with the allegedly illegal dismissals at the University of Primorska. The Agency receives on a daily basis the questions from reporters regarding how will the dismissals affect the quality at the university. The materials for the meeting has attached the response of the Director to questions of the media. The dismissals were probably a consequence of the separation of the Scientific Research Centre and the



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university. The quality is primarily the responsibility of the universities themselves. MESS and the University of Primorska should be urged to provide an explanation of the circumstances of the alleged dismissal of 12 higher education teachers and the effect of this circumstances to the quality of education and research.

On 5 October 2016, the Director attended the meeting of the Committee of the National Assembly for Education, Science, Sports and Youth, which discussed the Student Communities Act and the amendments to HEA. The Committee adopted the decision that a public presentation of the opinions should occur before a discussion. This presentation took place on 13 October 2016 in the National Assembly. It was attended by the Director and a member of the staff of the Agency. The most common topics were the use of the Slovenian language, financing of higher education and the transition to institutional accreditation. The latter should be carried out in connection with programme evaluation. The register or the listing of higher education institutions and study programmes should be joined. A public service should be defined in a systemic act.

From 10 to 12 September 2016, the Director attended the session of the executive board of the ECA organization in Paris, he is the vice president of the executive board. The following week he will attend the external evaluation of the university in Samara, Russia. He informed the Council that the Russian quality assurance agency wishes to cooperate with the Slovenian and Croatian agency for the external assessments in Russia.

The President of the Council attended the meeting in the National Assembly in the commission for culture where the discussion about the use of Slovenian language in higher education took place. She explained that the Agency Council did not discuss the use of the language, because it is not the centre point of the Agency's operation.

SSU expressed its disappointment over the modest participation of the representatives of the Agency at the EQAF forum, which will be held in Slovenia for the first time. The Agency requested the funds from the Ministry of Finance, but the ministry did not approve them.

The Council debated the update of the Agency strategy for 2016–2020. For this purpose, the Agency prepared the proposal of a questionnaire for the stakeholders of the Agency and the list of the following updated strategic objectives (they are not listed in the order of their importance):

- (1) renewal of membership in ENQA and EQAR – because the Agency promises to have stable financing in the future, the membership in the abovementioned organizations is not threatened. The Agency will retain the membership, and shall remain active in the CEENQA and ECA organizations. It shall strive to strengthen international cooperation;
- (2) development work of the Agency – the Agency shall strive to develop an analytical and developmental department which will regularly prepare analyses, connected with accreditations, external evaluations and self-evaluations;
- (3) strengthening of its advisory role with emphasis on the help in the development of the systems of internal quality assurance – the Agency shall especially strive to support



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and guide higher education institutions in the improvement of their own concern for quality;

(4) improvement of professional work – the improvement is anticipated for both technical members of the staff as well as the experts of the Agency and the members of the Council;

(5) changes of the criteria and the legislation – a comprehensive update of the criteria of the Agency, adaptation to the ESG standards and the transfer of the quality standards and the procedures of its assurance into the legislation;

(6) development of the eNAKVIS information system;

(7) monitoring progress and quality assurance – strengthening the quality culture.

106th meeting of the Agency Council, 17 November 2016.

The Agency urged the rector of the University of Primorska and the minister for education, science and sports to state their opinion regarding the happenings at the university and the related dismissals, institutional divisions and quality. The Rectorate of the University of Primorska sent lengthy documentation to the Agency, which it supplemented with the opinion of the former constitutional judge Dr Ciril Ribičič and with the opinion of the European Universities Associations, EUA. The University informed us that it regrets the events in relation with the allegedly illegal dismissals. The decision about the initiation of such a procedure is in the authority of the Agency; the Agency Council shall decide on it when the fate of the Scientific research centre in Koper will be known.

The Agency published the Public call for candidates for the entry into the register of experts and also informed higher education institutions about the publication.

The National Assembly adopted the budgets for 2017 and 2018, which ensure the Agency the funds in the same extent as in the previous years, that is approximately EUR 1.2 million annually.

On 17 November 2016 the European Quality Assurance Forum, EQAF, began in Ljubljana, titled "Quality in context – embedding improvement", which is organized by the Slovenian Student Union (SSU) and the University of Ljubljana, with 400 people participating. The forum shall be attended by 4 representatives of the Agency.

On 3 November 2016, the Director attended the session of the Committee of the National Assembly for Education, Science, Sports and Youth, where the amendments to HEA were discussed for the second time. Approximately 40 amendments were adopted, mostly the responses of the Legislation-legal service of the National Assembly. The article regarding the Slovenian language was stricken. The 2nd and 3rd discussion follow in the National Assembly.

The minister for education, science and sports passed the interpellation.

SSU addressed to the Agency the request for public information relating with travel costs, business trips, reports regarding business trips etc. Since this is an extensive request, the Director addressed a letter to SSU inquiring about the reason for this



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request, also requesting that SSU limit their request in the light of the fact that the Agency is being reviewed by the Ministry of Finance, Court of Audit, Budget Control Office, Office for Cohesion Funds and other institutions.

107th meeting of the Agency Council, 15 December 2016.

Since the Agency does not have authority for the regulation of status and staffing situation at the abovementioned institutions, it did not initiate a procedure of extraordinary evaluation for the University of Primorska, but it shall review its quality at the next regular external evaluation.

The European Quality Assurance Forum, EQAF, titled "Quality in context – embedding improvement" concluded in Ljubljana, which was organized by the Slovenian Student Union and the University of Ljubljana, with approximately 400 people participating. The forum was attended by 4 technical members of the Agency staff and 4 members of the Council. The content of the meeting was on the new ESG standards, competences and learning outcomes, the update of the quality system in Europe, and on transformative learning, also known as student-centred teaching. The external quality assessment in Europe is shifting from the inspection-, bureaucratic-type of assessment towards collegiate, contextual assessments. Student-centred teaching raises the question of the transition from traditional, authoritative methods of teaching towards the improvement and the empowerment of students.

The representatives of the Agency attended the meeting of the communities of higher vocational schools at the twentieth anniversary of the operation of the community. An initiative was formed at the meeting, claiming that the Agency should define in more detail in its regulations the completion phase of the evaluation procedures of higher vocational schools.

In December, a new version of the higher education act entered into force, HEA-K. The significant change for the Agency is the transition to institutional accreditation. Study programmes will now receive their accreditation for an unlimited period, the change of the act at the same time implements sample evaluations of study programmes, these evaluations being of advisory nature, and keeps the instrument of extraordinary evaluation which still offers the option of revoking the accreditation to study programmes.

The Agency must update its legislative instruments in three months, and harmonize them with the legislative regulation. The proposal of the change of the first part of the accreditation criteria which determines the quality standards and their assessment is already in the works – it was discussed by the working group of the Council before the meeting. The draft of the proposal shall be prepared in the following week, and the members of the Council will likely receive it for review by the end of the year. By the January meeting of the Council the second, procedural part of the criteria shall be prepared. Finally, the Agency will have to harmonize the proposals of new regulations in the broader circle of stakeholders; a special consultation will be devoted to it, likely in February 2017. The transitional and final provisions of HEA-K stipulate that the applications submitted before the implementation of HEA-K shall be assessed in accordance with the old criteria, and the decisions in these procedures shall be adopted



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in accordance with the new legislation. Starting from today, the accreditation shall be extended for 5 years for higher education institutions, and for an indefinite period for study programmes. For study programmes whose accreditation shall expire after the entry into force of the HEA -K, the applications for re-accreditation shall not be submitted.

The Council acquainted itself with the report and analysis of the results of the survey for the update of the Agency strategy and the final proposal of strategic objectives of the Agency up to 2020. The Council consents that the main strategic objectives of the Agency up to 2020 are:

- Strengthening of the consultation work of the Agency.
- Developmental work of the Agency.
- Improvement of the technical work of the Agency.
- Renewal of the membership in ENQA and EQAR and the strengthening of the international participation of the Agency.
- Update of the criteria and other acts of the Agency.
- Reorganization of the operation of the Agency.
- Establishment of an efficient and user-friendly information system of the Agency.
- Strengthening of the independence and authority of the Agency.
- Strengthening of the quality culture.

The Agency provided the translation of the ESG standards from 2015 into Slovenian. This version of the ESG 2015 has also been published at the www.enqa.eu website.

Two more pieces of information to conclude this overview. 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 at the 15th place and Higher education was ranked at the 22nd place. The total ranking of Slovenia is 59th place among 140 ranked countries.



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OVERVIEW OF THE FIRST- AND SECOND-CYCLE DECISION-MAKING BODIES AT THE AGENCY

A detailed overview of the operation of the bodies with the relevant measures and proposals for improvement shall be given in the Self-evaluation Report of the Agency for 2016.

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. (summarized from the Higher Education Act; hereinafter: HEA). In 2016, the term of some of the members of the Agency Council expired. The Rectors' Conference appointed Dr P Purga to the Council, and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia appointed Dr M. Kalin Golob, representative unions of higher education appointed Dr B. Završnik, and the representative association of higher vocational colleges appointed Dr B. Škafar. Dr A. Kocijančič was appointed as the President of the Council.

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 burdened with the deciding on individual applications. 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.

The Agency Council met in 2016 **at ten regular meetings** (97th to 107th meeting). It also held one correspondence meeting.

On average, the meetings of the Council **lasted a full 3 hours**.

The presence of the members of the Council at the meetings was **95 percent**.

The Agency Council **adopted 462 decisions** at the meetings.
The extensive minutes have the status of public information.

Detailed information are as follows:

Initial accreditation of study programmes

The Council granted **accreditation to 20 programmes** (of the first, second and third Bologna cycle and the programmes for further education).

Here, it returned the report to the group of experts for supplementation. Three times it acquainted the group of experts with the response of the institution and requested a supplementation of the report. Once it urged for an oral discussion for additional explanation.

The Council did not grant the accreditation to one study programme.

Initial accreditation of an institution

In 2016, there was no case involving the initial accreditation of a higher education institution. This has happened for the second time in a row.

Re-accreditation of study programmes

In 2016, there were **224 re-accreditations of study programmes** which are valid for 7 years (after 15 December 2016 the validity of an accreditation has been extended to an indefinite period).

In this activity the Council postponed the decision-making to the next meeting three times. Eleven-times it urged the applicants to supplement their applications and submit an action plan including the measures, deadlines and persons responsible for the implementation. Three times the Council urged the applicants to provide their opinion regarding the inconsistencies and three times it urged the groups of experts to supplement their reports with the responses of the applicants.

One study programme was not granted re-accreditation because it had zero students enrolled. Eight study programmes were also not re-accredited, because they were not implemented, but they had students enrolled.

One study programme was conditionally granted re-accreditation for three years.

In one case the Council urged for an oral discussion to clear the inconsistencies.

The Agency Council also decided to do two extraordinary evaluations.

In one case the Council discovered that one member of a university does not know the higher education legislation regarding accreditations.



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Re-accreditation of an institution

In 2016, there were **8 re-accreditations of private higher education institutions and one re-accreditation after an extraordinary evaluation.**

The Council once requested a report by the experts be supplemented and once urged the institution to prepare an action plan for the elimination of discrepancies.

Transformation of the institution

The Council accepted **3 transformations of higher education institutions** to faculties or an academy.

Accreditations of transformations of study programmes and institutions

In 2016, the Council **accredited 24 transformations of study programmes.** Where there were extensive changes involved, groups of experts were appointed. There was also a question where a new programme is being formed upon these changes. Most of the changes included: transformation of the curriculum, implementation method, conditions for enrolment, conditions for transitions, change of professional title, change of classification etc.

In seven cases the Council gave its consent for the change of the location of the implementation of the study programme and the change of the dislocated unit.

Appointment of commissions for external evaluations

In 2016, the Council appointed commissions for external evaluations: for the initial accreditation of study programmes, for re-accreditation of study programmes, for re-accreditation of institutions, for more extensive transformations of study programmes, and other.

In 2016, the Council **appointed 111 commissions** in accordance with the legislation. The General Administrative Procedure Act enabled us to join the applications into one procedure due to rationalization and economic efficiency of the conducting of the procedures. There were 46 of such cases. In one case there were 15 study programmes joined into the unified procedure, and in another 25 study programmes.

In one case the Council justifiably accommodated the change of the entire group of experts which gave a negative opinion in the previous assessment of the transformation of a study programme. In eight cases one expert was justifiably changed.

Extension of the deadline and corrections of the decisions

The Council in nine cases justifiably extended the deadline for the preparation of the opinion and monitored closely the corrections of the decisions. These were mostly writing errors.



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Register of experts

In 2016, the Council renewed the register of experts (the 5-year deadline expired) and again entered 89 experts into the register. 26 experts were entered for the first time.

Higher vocational colleges

The Agency only performs external evaluations of higher education institutions and adopts opinions regarding the compliance with the standards adopted by law. Accreditation decisions are in the jurisdiction of the ministry.

In 2016, the Agency received 10 applications for the external evaluation of higher vocational colleges. The final opinion for higher colleges that they comply with the standards prescribed by law, determined with the Criteria for external evaluations of higher vocational colleges, were given by the Agency for **6 higher vocational colleges**.

The Agency Council was also acquainted with the plan for external evaluations of higher vocational colleges for 2017.

Summary of accreditation procedures for 2016

Granting accreditations or re-accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes is the basic activity of the Agency. It is an external quality assurance system due to a continued improvement of higher education and the enabling of quality education. A lot of work was done. In 2016, the Agency concluded **283** accreditation or evaluation procedures, of which:

- it granted accreditation to **20** study programmes (of the first, second, and third Bologna cycle, and to programmes for further education);
- it re-accredited **224** study programmes;
- in 2016 **there were no** initial accreditations of higher education institutions
- it accepted **10** transformations of higher education institutions;
- it re-accredited **8** private higher education institutions;
- it performed **25** procedures for the changes of study programmes and **1** procedure for the transformation of a higher education institution.

In addition, within the statutory deadlines, there accreditation procedures are being conducted for approximately **80** study programmes and **8** procedures related to higher education institutions.

In the period from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2016 (years 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), the Agency concluded $212+150+157+172+283 = \mathbf{974}$ accreditation or evaluation procedures, of which:

- it granted the initial accreditation to $93+37+22+17+20 = \mathbf{189}$ study programmes (of the first, second and third Bologna cycle, and the programmes for further education),
- it re-accredited $68+71+85+98+224 = \mathbf{546}$ study programmes,
- it granted initial accreditation to $6+2+4+0+0 = \mathbf{12}$ higher education institutions,
- it granted re-accreditation to $1+18+4+4+8 = \mathbf{35}$ higher education institutions,
- accredited $44+22+40+43+25 = \mathbf{174}$ transformations of study programmes.

In 2016, the Agency received **10** applications for the external evaluation of **higher vocational colleges** and it performed **6** evaluation visits. The final opinion



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regarding the compliance with the standards prescribed by law was submitted by the agency for **6** higher vocational colleges.

In 2013 and also in 2015, the Agency expected the changes of higher education legislation and a transition to institutional accreditation, but these changes did not happen. In 2015, two ministers for education, science and sports resigned (Setnikar-Cankar, author's fees; Mlekuž, plagiarism) and these changes consequently did not happen. In 2016, the amendment of HEA which was adopted in November 2016 was announced. At the same time, a significantly bigger, systemic change of HEA is expected (including a definition of public service).

**OVERVIEW OF STUDY PROGRAMMES according to ISCED Feb2017
for 2015/16***

ISCED	Description	UL	UM	UPR	FINF	UNG	Private	No.				
14	Teacher training and education science	60	35	14		1		110				
21	Arts	37	3	1		2	7	50				
22	Humanities	84	28	24		6	3	145				
31	Social and behavioural science	66	10	22	4	1	13	116				
32	Journalism	5					3	8				
34	Business and administration	19	19	7			61	106				
38	Law	3	6	1			8	18				
42	Life sciences	12	5	8		4		29				
44	Physical and chemistry sciences	11	7			4		22				
46	Mathematics, statistics	10	4	5				19				
48	Computing	5	11	3	1		3	23	Only approx. 3500 FTE teachers			
52	Engineering and engineering trades	16	34	1			13	64				
54	Manufacturing and processing	13	3			2	3	21		2007	2013	2015
58	Architecture and building	18	6	1		1	1	27	PhD s	415	721	742
62	Agriculture, forestry and fishery	14	12	2		1	1	30				
64	Veterinary	2						2				
72	Health care	20	6	4			19	49				
76	Social services	6						6				
81	Personal services	5	5	9			7	26				
84	Transport	7	5					12				
85	Environmental protection	3	1				7	11				
86	Security services	2	5				1	8				
Interdiscipl.		6						6				
	Total	424	205	102	5	22	156	914	914			
	% study prog.	46.4	22.4	11.2		2.4	17.1					



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No. of students	40842	14958	5345	200	388	8148	=	69881
% No. of students	58.4	21.4	7.6	0.3	0.6	11.7		

*The explanation of abbreviations is on the following page!

UL = University of Ljubljana
 UM= University of Maribor
 UPR= University of Primorska
 UNG= University of Nova Gorica

Slovenian tertiary education - 2015/2016 - 80798 students in total

3 + 1 university, 1 network university, 48 private higher education institutions (VSZ)

48 (27/21) higher vocational colleges (VSŠ)

Univ. + VSZ = 69881 students

VSŠ = 11162 students





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Accreditations in higher education					
Task	Implementation and accountability	Applications received in 2016	Applications processed in 2016	Anticipated No. of applications in 2017	Notes
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality Department / Agency Council	55	21	20	
Re-accreditation of study programmes		77	234	According to HEA-K the assessments will be samples for the time being. Assessment 20	
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions		2	0	2	
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		5	8	2	
Transformation of higher education institutions		13	10	10	
Transnational higher education		2	0	2	
Evaluations of higher vocational colleges					
Task	Implementation and accountability	Applications received in 2016	Applications processed in 2016	Anticipated No. of applications in 2017	Notes
External evaluations of higher vocational colleges	Quality Department / Agency Council	10	6	12	



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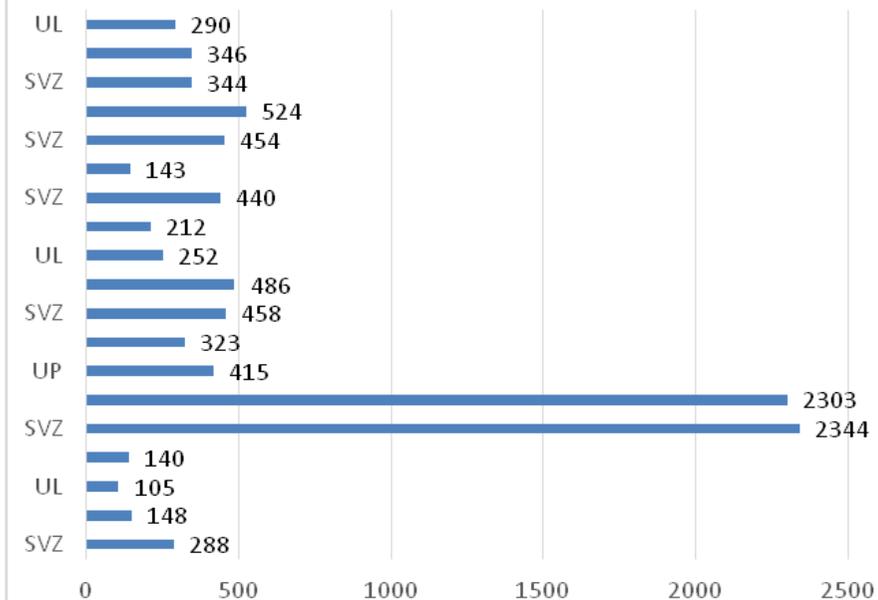
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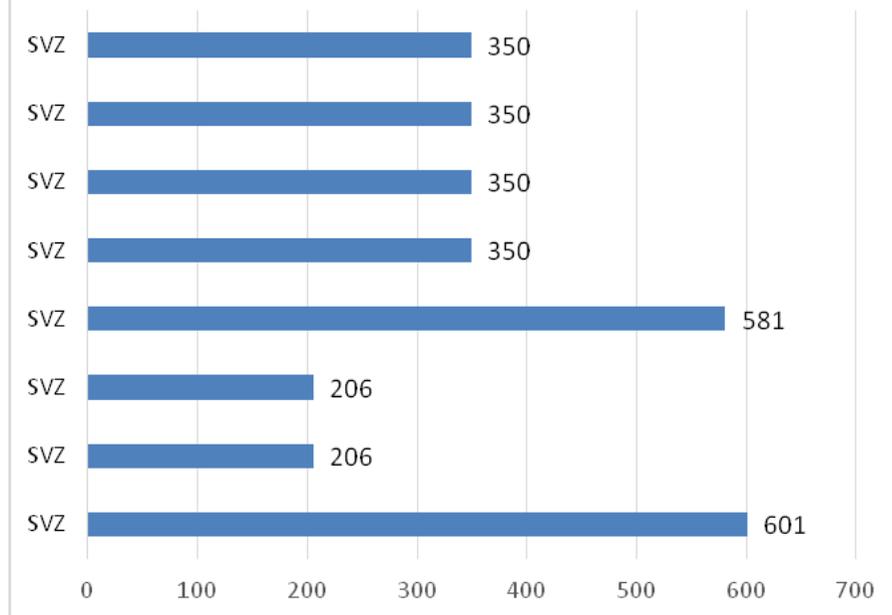
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Duration of individual procedures (decisions adopted in 2016)

Prve akreditacije programov (trajanje postopkov v dneh)



Podaljšanje akreditacije zavoda (trajanje postopkov v dneh)





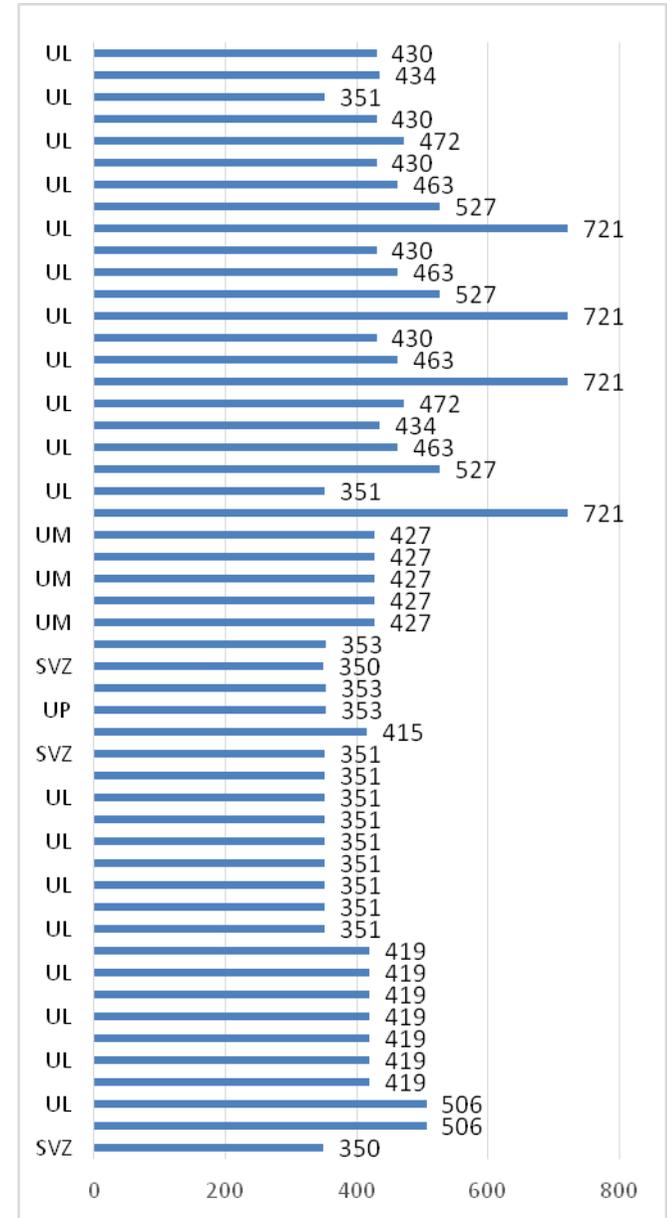
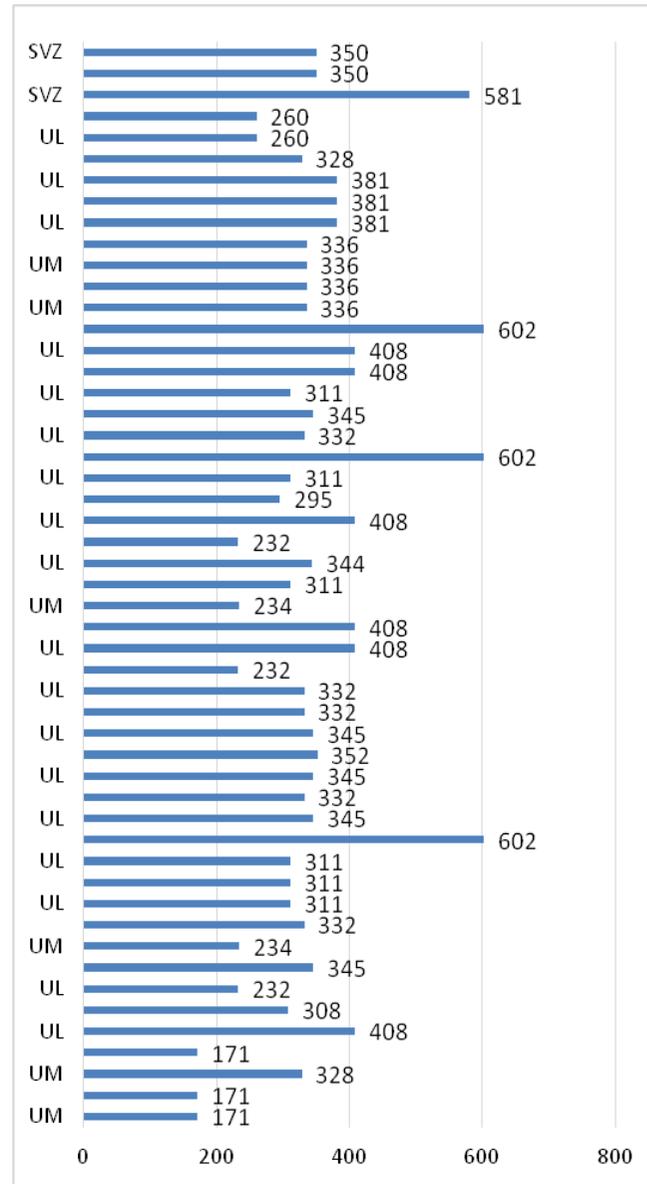
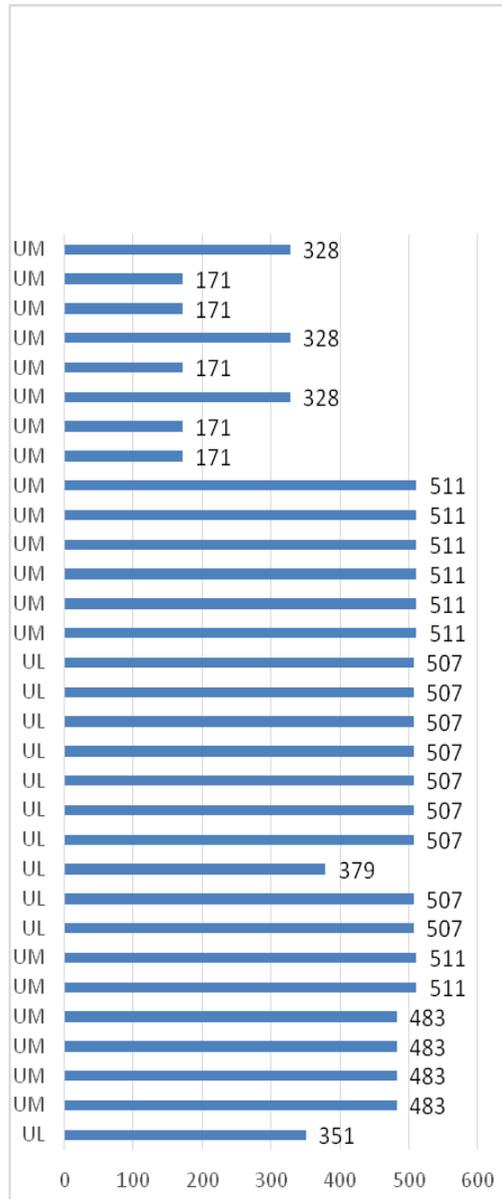
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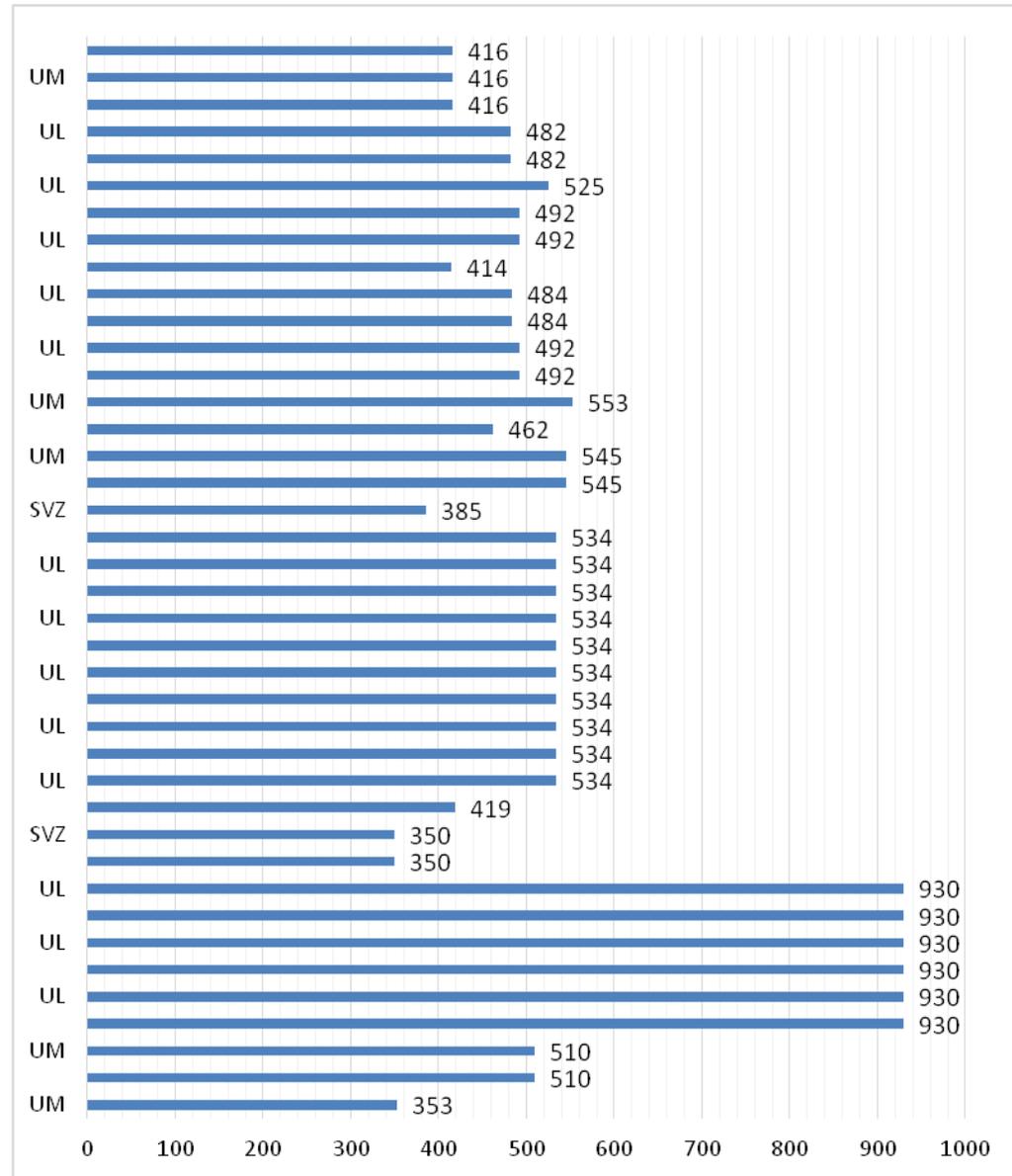
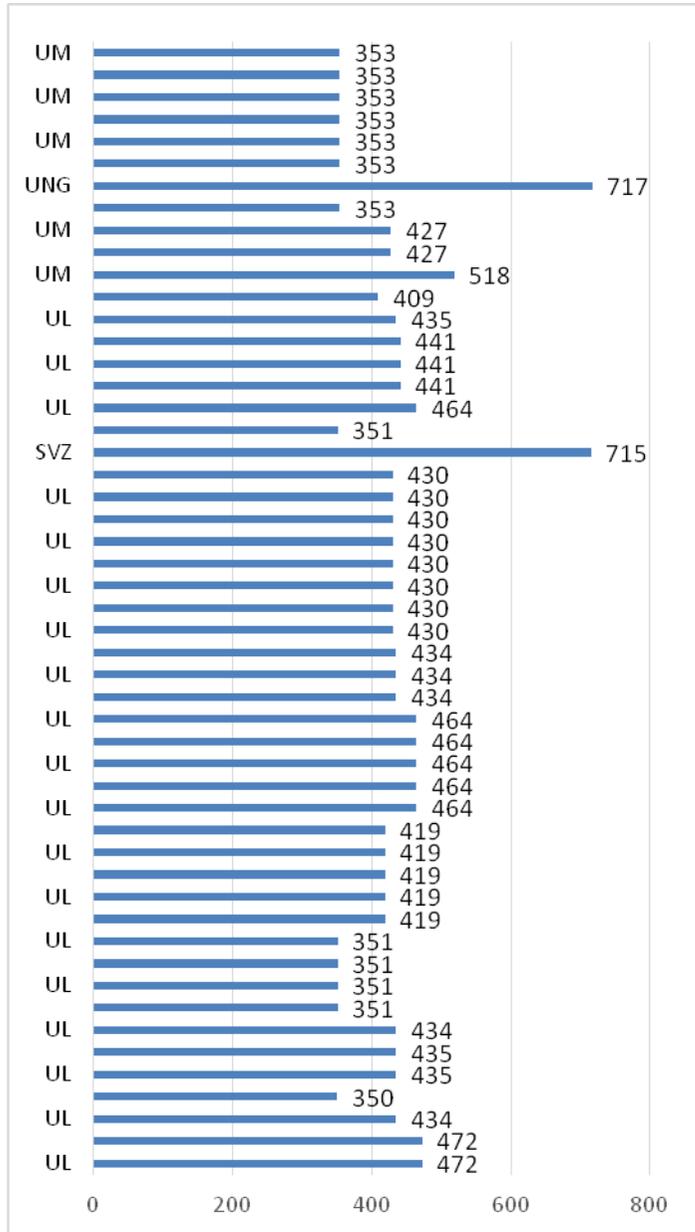
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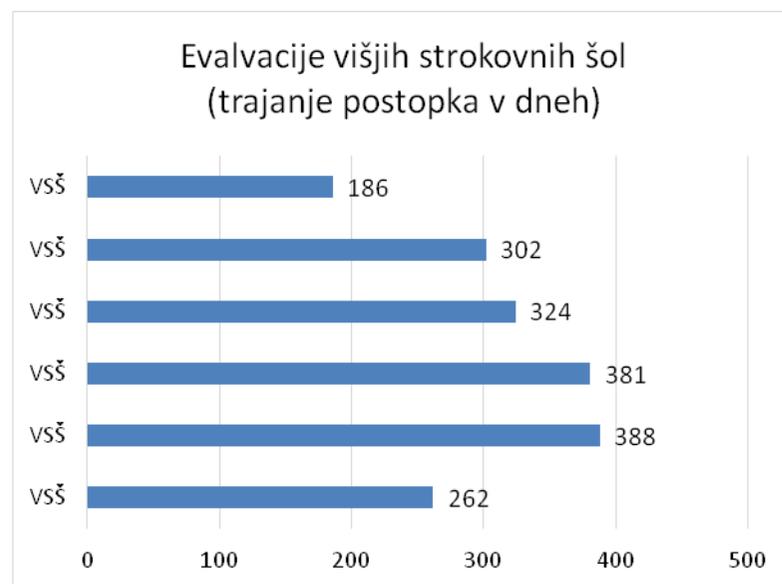
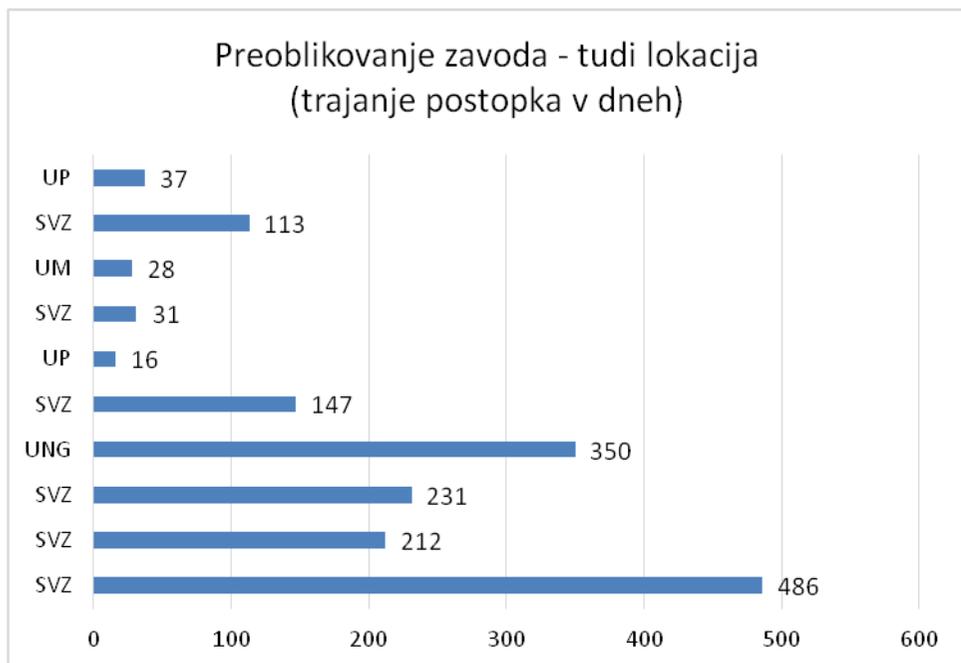
DURATION OF PROCEDURES – RE-ACCREDITATIONS OF STUDY PROGRAMMES



DURATION OF PROCEDURES - RE-ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMMES (cont.)



Duration of procedures – transformation of institutions and evaluations of higher vocational colleges



APPEAL COMMITTEE

The Appeal Committee is the appellate body of the Agency and it decides in the appeals against the decisions of the Agency Council, namely:

- in the accreditation procedures of higher education institutions and study programmes,
- about the issuing of consents for the transformations of higher education institutions and changes of study programmes,
- about the issuing of consents for the agreements for the implementation of the transnational higher education.

The Appeal Committee decides on the appeal. It can:

- discard the appeal;
- dismiss the appeal;
- uphold the appeal and fully or partially eliminate the decision of the first instance and returns the case to the Agency Council for new deciding;
- declares the decision of the Agency Council as null;
- eliminated the decision and sends it to the competent body to solve.

The decision of the Appeal Committee is final. An administrative dispute is possible.

Because the work of the Agency is linked with the General Administrative Procedure Act, the appeals of the applicants against the decisions of the Agency Council mostly occur because of claimed violations of material law, false or incomplete determination of the actual situation and the violation of the rules of the procedure.

In 2016, the tendency of submitting appeals has again been decreasing. Therefore, the Appeal Committee only met at two meetings where it decided on three matters. It dismissed the appeal in two procedures, and in the third it upheld the appeal, it eliminated the contested decisions and gave the case for competent deciding to the Agency Council. There were other long-term appeal disputes, of which we describe only one.

The Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia upheld two suits of the applicant, eliminated the decisions of the Appeal Committee and the Agency Council and returned the case to the Agency Council for another procedure. It was not clear from the indication in the judgment whether the case was returned to the Agency Council for another procedure or just for another deciding. Therefore, the question was raised whether the procedure must be started again at the beginning, by submitting a new application. This would require taking into consideration the actual situation and the applicable legislation from the time of the issuance of the decisions of the Agency Council. The specialty of the assessment in this matter is the determination of the actual situation on the date before the issuance of the decisions, 21 April 2011, and the assessment in accordance with the old accreditation criteria.

DIRECTOR

The Director as the management body of the Agency devoted a lot of time in 2016 and in 2015 to the audits of the Court of Audit. In addition to the obligations connected with the second audit of the Court of Audit: "Evaluation, accreditation and granting concessions in higher education 2010-2013", a scandal regarding the findings from the

first audit report for 2011 suddenly broke out, specifically, with one corrective measure out of three – which neither the Director nor the Agency Council implemented satisfactorily – for the Agency to claim the amounts for meeting fees paid in excess because of the so-called “double meeting fees”, as claimed by the media.

The Director replied almost daily to the numerous questions by journalists and accusations about not collecting “the amounts paid in excess”, and finally published an extensive response at the Agency's website explaining that the Agency did not perform this measure because 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, of which it informed the Court of Audit within the deadline (twice in 2015). Only after nine months did the President of the Court of Audit again inform the public that the collection of the meeting fees is still a current matter and that the Agency failed to comply with the requirements of the Court of Audit.

According to the Director, the Agency found itself in such a position because of the really poorly drafted legislation – collision between HEA and the decisions on the establishment of the Agency. The Agency is not one of the public agencies, but an institution, such as the Court of Audit, Corruption Prevention Commission, Constitutional Court, Public agent etc. Its operation is regulated by HEA, among other the payment for the work of the Council. Article 51.n of HEA clearly stipulates that the members of the Council are entitled to the payment and compensation of work-related costs. It is also stipulated by law that the Agency Council may by itself determine “the method and amount of payment and compensation of costs”. The public was additionally informed through the media that the Agency is part of the criminal proceedings and proceedings at the CPC, but the Agency received no such official document.

The main concern of the Director in 2016 was still 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 evaluation or the work of the experts of the Agency, the salaries of 14 out of the total of 23 members of the staff, the majority). The Agency was in its first five years mainly financed from the ESF funds, therefore more funds from the budget needed to be ensured for its work and the employments in the future. The negotiations with the ministry competent for finance were long-lasting; only in August 2015 were the budgetary means for the work 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 to 31 December 2015.

In 2016, the Agency was for the first time financed from the integral part of the budget (final page in the report) and all staff members at the Agency, apart from the Director are employed, for an indefinite period.

International cooperation has been strengthening with each year. The Director has an important role in the international institutions for quality. In 2016, he was the vice president of the European Consortium for Accreditation, ECA - <http://ecahe.eu>, and the vice president for the Central and Eastern European Association of Quality Assurance Agencies - <http://www.ceenqa.eu>. The Agency also organized a training for the ENQA evaluators in Ljubljana.



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The Director takes care of **international connections** of the Agency and reports promptly about his work to the employees at the Agency at the weekly meetings and the meetings of the Agency Council. The weekly meetings have been proven to be beneficial. It is a prompt exchange of information and an agreement about future work. In comparison with the previous meetings, a slight trend of improvement is felt. The meetings are more efficient, the employees actively participate and make joint decisions.

At the beginning of 2017 the Director performed, as every year, the annual **individual work interviews** with all employees. The annual interview is a conversation or the overview of the employee's work so far, a joint assessment of the realization of the objectives and tasks, and a joint assessment of the success of the employee and the leader. The annual conversation enables both of them to talk about the plans for the future and their wishes and expectations. Annual interviews are the basis for the **determination of the work success** of the employees. **Annual interviews** were performed with every employee. In their responses, the employees specified the examples of good and bad practices. Examples of **bad work practice** at the Agency are (in any order): a still too large burdening with the procedures; unequal distribution of work; sometimes irregular non-performance of duties; no regular control over the work of technical members of staff; a too slow preparation of e-forms and with plenty of difficulties; foreign experts sometimes lack the involvement in the assessments; the choice of experts is inappropriate; the register of experts also includes experts who cannot be used; the Agency Council should contribute more to the strategic, ideological and developmental movements of the Agency; failure to fulfil the tasks from the action plan; not enough possibilities for education, occasional disrespectful attitude of the applicants; constant requests for priority consideration. And examples of **good practice**: consistent publication of reports and decisions; establishment and operation in the international area; competency of the technical staff; suitable update of legislation; good atmosphere at the Agency; regulated employment of all employees for an indefinite period; considerate attitude of the leadership towards the employees; successful conclusion of the ESF and EIQAS projects; active participation in the update of the criteria; competent student experts; concern for expressing the independence of the Agency – attitude towards MESS and UL; flexible working hours; successful conclusion of the audits of the Court of Audits; very stable and regular work of the Agency Council; regular training of evaluators.

The Director regularly participates as the evaluator in the EUA IEP (European Universities' Association-Institutional Evaluation of Programmes) abroad. In 2016, he cooperated as an expert at the institutional evaluation upon the merger of two universities in Samara, Russia.

In December 2016, the Erasmus+ EIQAS project was successfully concluded. Along with the Polish (coordinator), Portuguese and Bulgarian agency and other partners (two rectors' conferences and UL and UNG), the Agency participated in the two-year EIQAS project (Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems). Our evaluators and our students-evaluators also participated. We received EUR 40,000 from Polish financial funds.



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INTEGRITY PLAN

In 2016, the working group for the integrity plan met twice. At the meetings, the members of the working group analysed how many of the measures from the existing register of risks were implemented so far, how many are implemented periodically and how many are still not implemented and why. In some cases, if necessary, the working group created a new assessment of the risks and the measures for the prevention of the fulfilment of such risks.

On 30 May 2016, the Agency submitted the annual report regarding the implemented measures from the integrity plan 2015-2016 to the Corruption Prevention Commission (CPC).

One of the joint findings of the working group for the integrity plan in 2015 was also that the Agency would need to educate the staff, with the purpose of raising awareness and better education of the members of the staff regarding the meaning of conflict of interest and about illegal influences and about how to best respond in actual cases when such risks come to life, that a seminar on this topic should be organized for all employees. The seminar was organized on 10 February 2016 in the offices of the Agency. The lecturers from CPC were Jure Škrbec and Katja Mihelič Sušnik. At the end of 2016, the lecturers from CPC acquainted the members of the Agency Council about a similar topic.

The working group has also decided that a similar training would be necessary for the experts, included in the register of the Agency, which is why we decided to prepare a presentation brochure or a short video on the topic in 2017.



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PRESENTATION OF PERFORMANCE OF TASKS DEFINED IN CHAPTERS OF THE AGENCY'S WORK PLAN FOR 2016

A) ACCREDITATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND STUDY PROGRAMMES AND EVALUATIONS OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES (2016)

EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 1: ACCREDITATIONS AND EVALUATIONS					
Activity 1: accreditations in higher education					
Task	Implementation and accountability	Applications received in 2016	Applications processed in 2016	Anticipated number of applications in 2017	Notes
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality Department / Agency Council	55	21	20	In 2017 HEA-K enters into force *extraordinary evaluation
Re-accreditation of study programmes		77	234	2% od 914	
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions		2	0	2	
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		5	7+1*	2	
Transformation of higher education institutions		13	10	10	
Transnational higher education		2	0	2	
Activity 2: evaluations of higher vocational colleges					
Task	Implementation and accountability	Applications received in 2016	Applications processed in 2016	Anticipated number of applications in 2017	Notes
External evaluations of higher vocational colleges	Quality Department / Agency Council	10	6	12	

The data on the anticipated number of applications in 2017 for initial accreditations of study programmes and higher education institutions and transformations of institutions are only estimates. For the differences in the number of received and processed applications it needs to be taken into consideration that the applications come throughout the entire calendar year, especially the applications for re-accreditation of study programmes (the submission deadline is 30 September). Their processing may only be concluded in the following calendar year. **Explanations:** The list of the registers of accredited higher education institutions and study programmes is published at the Agency's website <http://www.nakvis.si>, on 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](#)

The MESS register has been eliminated and transferred to eVŠ (December 2016).

Accreditations in higher education

Quality assurance system in higher education

1. Accreditation procedures in higher education

The accreditation or re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes is the fundamental activity of the Agency. It is an external system of quality assurance due to the constant enabling of higher education and a quality of education. In 2016, the Agency concluded **283** accreditation or re-accreditation procedures, in which:

- it granted accreditation to **20** study programmes (of the first, second and third Bologna cycle);
- it re-accredited **224** study programmes;
- in 2016, **there were no** initial accreditations of higher education institutions
- it adopted **10** transformations of higher education institutions;
- it re-accredited **8** private higher education institutions;
- it performed **25** procedures for transformations of study programmes and **1** procedure for the transformation of a higher education institution.

In addition to that, within the statutory deadlines there are procedures for accreditation of approximately **80** study programmes in progress and **8** procedures related to higher education institutions.

In the period from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2016 (these are the years 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), the Agency completed $212+150+157+172+283 = \mathbf{974}$ accreditation or evaluation procedures, in which it:

- granted the initial accreditation to $93+37+22+17+20=\mathbf{189}$ study programmes (of the first, second and third Bologna cycles and for the programmes for further education),
- re-accredited $68+71+85+98+224=\mathbf{546}$ study programmes,
- granted the initial accreditation to $6+2+4+0+0=\mathbf{12}$ higher education institutions,
- re-accredited $1+18+4+4+8=\mathbf{35}$ higher education institutions,
- accredited $44+22+40+43+25=\mathbf{174}$ transformations of study programmes.

In 2013 and also in 2015, the Agency expected the changes of higher education legislation and a transition to institutional accreditation, but these changes did not occur. In 2015, two ministers for education, science and sports resigned (Setnikar-Cankar, author's fees; Mlekuž, plagiarism) and these changes consequently did not happen. In 2016, the amendments to HEA which were adopted in November 2016 were announced. At the same time, a significantly bigger, system change of HEA is expected (systemic act including a definition of public service).

2. External evaluations of higher vocational colleges

In 2016, the Agency received **10** applications for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges and performed **6** evaluation visits. It gave the final opinion regarding the compliance with the standards, prescribed by law, for **6** higher vocational colleges.

In September 2016, all non-Bologna study programmes were concluded, but eVŠ still contains 914 study programmes.

The Agency also performs external evaluations of higher vocational colleges and issues opinions whether the higher vocational college is compliant with the standards anticipated by the law. The accreditation of higher vocational colleges itself is not the authority of the Agency.

For its startup activity the Agency received the European ESF funds. In 2016, the Agency received a positive report of the Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Budget Control about the performed audit of the operation or the project "Establishment of a national system for quality assurance in higher education 2010–2014(2015)" within ESF. The value of this project before confirmation was EUR 14,847,484, and EUR 10,090,257 after confirmation. Based on the assessment that the Agency will not require all the funds, the value of the project was lowered to EUR 6.426.402 EUR. In five years, the Agency spent EUR 4,606,499. The audit found an inconsistency in the amount of only EUR 395.

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

The path of the development of the Agency's information system was as follows.

In 2014, we prepared the applicable documentation and successfully carried out the tender for the selection of the provider for the building of 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.

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.

From the beginning of 2015 the information system (eNakvis) was built. There were regular weekly meetings of the contractor and the provider where the obligations were promptly delegated and the issues we faced were eliminated. In 2015 we performed the following:

- analysis of the previous electronic form,
- analysis of the processes,
- building of the processes,
- harmonization of the strict security requirement with the ministry of public administration,
- transformation of the forms,
- initial training of users,
- initial migration of data,
- preparation of everything necessary for the linking of the eNakvis system with other external systems,
- placement of the system to the test environment of the MPA,

- testing of the processes,
- acquisition of the system,
- formal update of the application forms.

Therefore, eNakvis, despite the extremely short deadlines, was built and operates in a local server environment, but it has not yet been uploaded to the so-called production environment at the Ministry of Public Administration, and is not yet available to 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 the January 2016 meeting (re-accreditation). For 2016, we anticipated the changes of the Higher Education Act which significantly altered accreditation procedures (transition from the evaluation of study programmes to institutional evaluation), which is why we postponed the final update of the forms. After the adoption of the abovementioned law we immediately began with the update of the accreditation rules and the preparation of the forms for the anticipated accreditation and evaluation procedures. The updated forms are expected to be coordinated with the stakeholders and available for the applicants in the first half of 2017.

C) UPDATE OF THE AGENCY STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR THE PERIOD 2017-2020

The assignments in the Work plan for 2016 were defined by taking into consideration the strategic objectives of the Agency from the Development Strategy of the Agency for the 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 2017-2020" was planned in the Annual Work Plan for 2015 and in the action plan, but it was not achieved.

In 2016, the Agency Council established a working group, consisting of the members of the Council and the employees at the Agency. Strategic guidelines were checked with the help of the Agency's stakeholders through a survey questionnaire (350 responses) before preparing the strategy itself. The strategy is expected to take into consideration the planned changes made to the relevant legislation and to include feasible objectives.

The updated fundamental strategic objectives are as follows (they are not listed in the order of importance):

(1) renewal of membership in ENQA and EQAR – because the Agency expects stable planning in the future, the membership in these organizations is not in danger. The

Agency will retain the membership and stay active in the CEENQA and ECA organizations. It shall strive towards the strengthening of the international cooperation;

(2) developmental work of the Agency – the Agency shall strive to develop an analytical and developmental department which shall regularly prepare analyses, which are connected with the accreditations, external evaluations and self-evaluations;

(3) strengthening of the advisory role with emphasis on the help with the development of the internal system of quality assurance – the Agency shall especially strive to support and guide higher education institution towards the improvement of its own concern for quality;

(4) improvement of the technical work – the improvement is intended for the staff of the Agency as well as for its experts and members of the Council;

(5) transformation of the criteria and the legislation – comprehensive update of the criteria of the Agency, adapting to the ESG standards and the transfer of the quality standards and quality assurance procedures into legislation;

(6) development of the eNAKVIS information system;

(7) monitoring progress and quality assurance – strengthening the quality culture;

(8) strengthening of the independence and authority of the Agency.

The entire text of the Strategic development 2017-2020 is available at the Agency's website:

<http://www.nakvis.si/sl-SI/News/Details/485>

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that out of the 46 planned actions from NHEP11-20 only 6 actions were done in full by 2016, among them also the strict requirement for NAKVIS to become a member of ENQA and EQAR (action 21).

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

Communication with and notifying of stakeholders regarding the activities of the Agency and the changes and good practice in the field of the improvement of internal and external system of quality is part of the permanent activities of the Agency since its beginnings. In 2016, the Agency gave more consideration to it and made an overview of the possibilities it has in this field.

Because of the changes dictated by the amendments to the Higher Education Act (December 2016), it is expected that in the future the communication with the stakeholders will be more intensive. The Agency is faced with many new tasks and adaptations of its internal operation and organization as well as the accreditation and external evaluation procedures which all have a significant impact on all stakeholders in higher education.

Efficient and clear distribution of information among all external groups plays a key role here, not just because of the increase of the Agency's recognition, but especially because of the strengthening of the trust given to it.

By publishing the decisions of the Agency Council and the reports of the groups of experts in the accreditation and external evaluation procedures, the Agency fulfilled one of the most important aspects of the transparency of operation. It gave the public access to the assessments and decisions regarding the quality of higher education institutions, found opportunities and advantages of study programmes and higher education institutions, methods of assessment and the course of external evaluations. A larger unification of evaluation reports was achieved by the Agency with the templates for the experts' reports, which will require an update in the future due to the changes of the higher education act.

The website features a list of higher education institutions and study programmes in the process of accreditation, and the students and other interested parties have available authentic information regarding the not-yet-concluded procedures. The website includes a map featuring the publicly valid higher education institutions, in accordance with the new law the Agency must publish at its website the notifications regarding extraordinary evaluations of study programmes, and a list of study programmes which are included in the sample for the evaluation of study programmes.

In addition to the permanent tasks of external evaluations and accreditations, the demand for our knowledge and services greatly increased in the last five years which is evident from the self-evaluation reports of the Agency. The Agency is well-known among the higher education institutions, and the stakeholders obtain the majority of the information from the website. Especially the experts of the Agency and higher education institutions claim that despite the clear presentation some information are harder for them to find or that more effort is required from them to find them. That is why one of the key recommendations to the Agency was a more efficient and selective notifying of stakeholders about the current activities of the Agency not only through the website, but also by e-mail.

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 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 is associated with other institutions, such as @ceenqa @ENQAtwt @ESUtw @ECA_association @eqartw. This Twitter profile features 692 tweets a year ago, we follow 292 users and tweets by @nakvis are read by 89 followers. The current numbers are: 740 tweets, we follow 340 users and we have 144 followers.

E) TRAINING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL AND EXPERTS

"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 a few members of the Council were replaced and we organized the appropriate training.

Because the lectures of the representatives of the Corruption Prevention Commission were already held for the staff of the Agency in February 2016, we organized a similar lecture for all the members of the Council and staff in October. The topic of the lectures was: risk factors and appropriate responses and the principles of recognizing and managing corruption and integrity risks. The representatives of CPC actually carried out a workshop with the lecture, as we sent them the relevant questions in advance.

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) ENQA – EVALUATOR TRAINING

The secretariat ENQA invited the Agency in 2015 to organize the 11th training of ENQA evaluators in Ljubljana. From 22 to 23 September 2016 there was a training in Ljubljana, carried out behind closed doors.

28 candidates from 17 European countries participated (Great Britain, Austria, Switzerland, Lithuania, Romania, Belgium, Ireland, Spain, France, Finland, Ukraine, Serbia, Italy, Slovenia, Russia, the Netherlands, Macedonia) and Israel. Among the known participants were among the students also Prof Ellen Hazelkorn, Higher Education Policy Research Unit, Ireland and the former rector of the University of Helsinki, Finland, Prof Hannele Niemi. The training covered the field of ESG 2015 standards, Part 3.

Lectures were held by the Vice President of ENQA, Prof Tove Blyt Holmen, and the members of the Executive Board ENQA. A well-received lecture was held by the Director of EQAR, Mr. Colin Tueck.

The Director of the Agency, as the host of the event, gave a presentation of the Slovenian higher education and made an overview of the quality assurance regarding the connection between the economy and higher education. The Agency now also has a trained evaluator for the evaluations of quality assurance agencies. The training, given to us organize, is a good example of the recognition of the Agency in the European higher education institution.



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FINANCIAL RESOURCES

OUTTURN OF THE TOTAL STATE BUDGET OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION FOR 2016

Budget heading (PP)	Policy / Main programme / Sub-programme / Budget heading	2016 adopted budget (v EUR)	2016 established budget (in EUR)	2016 budget outturn (v 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	603,000.68	574,000.68	569,366.64	99%
9886	Material costs	220,400.00	217,003.57	215,714.59	99%
9887	Investments	50,253.67	30,946.98	30,946.98	100%
9888	Higher education quality	303,960.65	405,663.77	393,931.34	97%
130163	Fixed assets – funds for compensation	3,960.65	3,960.65	0	0%
150022	Implementation of the EIQA project	40,288.00	40,288.00	33,262.79	83%

Budgeted expenditure, type 1, action 1217-11-0001 (budget headings PP 9885, PP 9886)

99% outturn of the available budgetary resources is the result of the following:

- the saved resources which resulted in the budget heading PP 9885 due to the maternity leave of two JU, a longer sick leave of JU and in the budgetary heading PP 9886 due to the rational use of budgetary funds; they were re-allocated to PP 9888, where we lacked funds.

Budgeted expenditure, type 1, project 1216-09-0001 (PP 9887)

100% outturn of the available budgetary resources is the result of us limiting ourselves to the absolutely necessary expenditure. The funds saved were allocated to the budget heading PP 9888.

Because of the lack of resources at the action 1217-11-0002, type 1 (budget heading PP 9888), which are intended for the payment of the costs of experts for external evaluation and accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes, the established budget increased from the adopted budget for 33.46%:

- reallocation of the funds in September from the budget reserve in the amount of EUR 50,000.00,
- reallocation of the funds in September from the budget heading PP 9887 in the amount of EUR 19,306.69,
- reallocation of the funds in October from the budget heading PP 9885 in the amount of EUR 29,000.00,
- reallocation of the funds in December from the budget heading PP 9886 in the amount of EUR 3,396.43.

The outturn of the available budgetary funds in 2016 at the budget heading PP amounted **97%**.

The outturn of the entire established budget, type 1, in 2016 amounted to 98.56%.

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

The outturn of the available funds of the *established budget* (in connection with the Polish EIQAS project) amounted to **83%** in 2016. The difference to the 100% is intended in the funds for management and dissemination which were determined in the budget for each individual partner. At the project level, these funds were managed by the coordinator (Polish accreditation commission - PKA), and not individual partners. The funds were used to ensure the participation of guest lecturers at the anticipated events (training events, dissemination conferences...), administrative costs and the costs for the preparation, proofreading and editing of the materials (the guide for students, guide for internal quality assurance...).

In accordance with the dynamics of inflows from the coordinator (PKA) of the project the outturn was 100% (EUR 33,262.79).

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

The outturn of the available funds for compensation amounted to **0%** in 2016: the owner of the premises shall repair the damaged or destroyed equipment at his own expenses because the equipment was destroyed due to the influx of water to the rented premises. In accordance with Article 44 of the Public Finance Act, the unused dedicated means were reallocated to 2017.

The Agency carried out the majority of the most important assignments from the work plan for 2016, in accordance with the strategic objectives and guidelines and by taking into consideration the descriptive indicators, determined in the explanation of the revised state budget:

- implementation of evaluation and accreditation procedures for higher education;
- implementation of external evaluations of higher vocational colleges;
- retention of the membership in the representative European organizations;
- membership in EQAR and ENQA
- active work on the implementation of the unified information system of the Agency - partially
- active participation in the development of the Slovenian higher education system.

The Agency continued in 2016 with the intensive review of the efficiency and usefulness of the established system of external assessment of quality of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, in the process of self-evaluation it also assessed the

suitability and usefulness of accreditation and evaluation procedures and the criteria in the stakeholders. Based on the findings, the proposals of the consolidated and updated criteria for accreditation and evaluation and the system for the training of experts.

In 2016, the Agency carried out a consultation of the experts of the Agency. The consultation was attended by 62 experts and 16 staff members of the Agency. The following was presented: revised European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in higher education– ESG 2015, Student's Guide for the external assessment of the internal quality systems (EIQAS project), the findings of the self-evaluation report for 2015. At the end of the consultation there was a discussion regarding the actions required for the improvement of the work of the Agency and the groups of experts.

The staff of the Agency also regularly participate in the training of students-evaluators of quality at the SSU headquarters and respond to the invitations from higher education institutions.

By adopting the HEA-K the assessment procedures shall be transformed in accordance with the changes criteria for evaluations and accreditations, and in 2017, it shall be necessary to organize the relevant training courses for experts.

The below includes information for the Agency which is the direct non-governmental user of the budget for the years 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016.

Until 2015, the integral resources have guaranteed the salaries for the Director and 9 employees employed for an indefinite period. The ESF resources guaranteed (up to 31 October 2015) the salaries for the 14 employees employed for a definite period and the costs of all evaluations (accreditations) and appeals. In 2016, this was covered from the integral resources.

COMPARISON OF THE RESOURCES SPENT (in EUR) IN 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016

		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
	INTEGRAL RESOURCES					
1	Salaries	343,976	295,849	304,464	385,307	569,366.64
2	Material costs	174,151	130,770	133,878	145,745	215,714.59
3	Investments	12,525	1,828	1,157	111	30,946.98
4	Council meeting fees	75,300	38,000	32,079	26,607	30,471.57
5	Accreditation costs	0	0	0	0	363,459.77
	1+2+3+4+5	605,952	466,447	471,578	557,770	1,209,959
	ESF funds					
6	Salaries	253,379	287,700	307,211	259,408	-

		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
7	Accreditation costs	432,369	539,618	425,246	401,631	-
8	Investments	3,747	7,349	4,987	87,228	-
	6+7+8	689,495	834,667	737,444	748,267	-
9	EIQAS	-	-	-	4,715	33,262.79
	TOTAL EXPENDITURE 1+2+3+4+ +5+6+7+8+9	1,295,447	1,301,114	1,209,022	1,310,752	1,243,222

The National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020 imposes on the Agency a high number of duties, while stating in action 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 funds likely expire), this would enable it to continue with quality work.

Preparation of financial plans for 2017 and 2018

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 later as well.

After the coordination meeting at the Ministry of Finance in July 2016, we coordinated the changes of the budget for 2017 and the proposal of the budget for 2018 together with the Director of the Directorate.

The Director was informed about the condition for the acceptance as a full member of ENQA, i.e. the suitable and long-term financing of the Agency's operation. The Agency should have adequate and proportionate resources, both human and financial, to enable it to organize and run their external quality

assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of its processes and procedures. This was also explained in detail to the director of ENQA.

In the Statement of the Estimate of Public Finance Internal Control, the Agency once again 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 in its current extent. In the Work Plans for 2017 and 2018 we shall evaluate the new duties we received upon the entry into force of HEA-K in December 2016. 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 even stipulates that the Agency will receive EUR 6 million from the budget; currently, the Agency operates with EUR 1.2 million per year."

HUMAN RESOURCES

The human resources were planned in the staffing plan of the Agency for employments which are financed from the budget or integral funds. They are always coordinated with the available established budget.

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 2016, the number of staff was decreased for 4 technical members of the staff because of the financial deficit at the Agency.

The ESF funds guaranteed the salaries of 14 employees employed for a definite period (until 31 October 2015) and the costs of all evaluations (accreditations) and appeals. In 2016, this was covered by the integral funds.

The Agency carried out the majority of the tasks from the work plan for 2016 – except for the establishment of the eNakvis information system and the regular notifying of the stakeholders. 2016-2020.

In the future, continued efforts should be made to increase the number of employees, and to improve work organization, new systemization, for promotions, and an amendment of HEA will cause a redistribution of work at the Agency. It will also enable it to devote itself to development-analytical work and regularly monitor the developments abroad regarding accreditation.

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 2017, the Director performed the annual work interviews. It is evident from the interviews and the filled-out questionnaires that the work environment at the Agency is beginning to normalize and there is no clear division of the employees to two groups: employees employed for an indefinite period and the employees employed for a definite period. The regular Monday meetings have now achieved their purpose – more active participation of all employees.



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Annual budgets SQAA 2010 - 2018

	SQAA												
	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		
	Approv. budget	Realization	Approv. budget	Realization	Approv. budget	Realization	Approv. budget	Realization	Approved budget	Realization	Approv. budget	Realization	
Integral part of budget	854.725	601.366,12	682.339	672.829,89	607.214,50	605.953,62	470.409,35	466.448,70	478.016,16	471.579,11	562.073,04	557.769,94	
ESF funds 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	626.907,76	785.169,09	636.007,41	
ESF funds-Slovenian 15%	303.667	0	303.667	72.406,87	119.555,53	103.454,14	243.636,00	125.211,11	117.136,45	110.535,81	138.531,66	112.259,44	
EIQAS											4.795,00	4.715,14	
Total	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	1.389.259,16	1.209.022,68	1.490.568,79	1.310.751,93	

Salaries cummulative

	SQAA								
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 plan	2018 plan
Integral part of budget	346.227,41	403.228,90	343.976,46	295.849,43	304.464,57	385.307,10	569.366,64	633.917,71	635.704,94
ESF funds	0,00	190.579,16	253.379,03	287.700,47	307.821,13	259.407,50			
EIQAS						4.715,14	19.853,88		
Total	346.227,41	593.808,06	597.355,49	583.549,90	612.285,70	649.429,74	589.220,52	633.917,71	635.704,94

2016		2017		2018	
Approv. budget	Realization	Approv. budget	Approv. budget	Approv. budget	Approv. budget
1.231.575,65	1.209.959,55	1.271.341,00	1.235.484,00		
0,00	0,00				
0,00	0,00				
40.288,00	33.262,79				
1.271.863,65	1.243.222,34	1.271.341,00	1.235.484,00		

Number of employees

	SQAA								
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 plan	2018 plan
Integral part of budget	12	12	12	10	10	10	20	20	20
ESF funds	0	10	11	14	14	10	0	0	0
Total	12	22	23	24	24	20	20	20	20

CONCLUSION

In 2016, the National Agency of Republic Slovenia for Quality in Higher Education (hereinafter: agency) followed its mission: "The Agency provides for development and operation of the quality assurance system in the Slovenian higher education area. It operates responsibly, both formally and contextually, and counsels all stakeholders and participants in tertiary education in line with European and global development trends. in tertiary education in line with European and global tendencies of development."

Tasks performed by the agency are in accordance with the law and other acts and are part of its regular operation. The Agency has an important role in the establishment of the Slovenian higher education area. In June 2016, there were 98 higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges in Slovenia.

Two events have marked the year 2016 – the conclusion of the accreditation of pre-Bologna programmes (30 September 2016) and the adoption of the amended Higher Education Act (17 November 2016) – HEA-K, which establishes the institutional accreditation and controlled evaluations of study programmes. In Slovenia, there is still an excessive number of 914 study programmes. With the amendment of the HEA-K the Agency shall take on a more advisory role.

For the first time since its establishment in 2010, the Agency was financed entirely from the integral budget funds and the funds will be provided to a similar extent in 2017 and 2018, respectively.

Two audits of the Court of Audits were completed in 2016: the audit of the regularity of operations of non-governmental and judicial budget users in 2011 as to express an opinion on the regularity of operations of each of the auditees in 2011. (Decision issued: 15 June 2012), and Quality assurance and diversity of study programmes – to express an opinion on the effectiveness of the procedures of evaluation, accreditation and granting concessions to ensure the quality and diversity of study programmes (Decision issued: 9 May 2014).

The Agency is constantly striving to improve its own quality, which is the basis for an effective system of external quality assurance in higher vocational and higher education. Unfortunately, the general public is still only getting to know the activity of the Agency in the light of negative events in our higher education (non-accredited programs, plagiarism, fraud, non-compliance with legislation, anonymous letters...).

In 2016, we continued with the upgrades of the eNAKVIS system, especially in the direction of the update of the forms (harmonization with the law) and the improvements of the support for certain processes at the Agency.

The two-year Erasmus+ EIQAS project (Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance systems) in collaboration with the agencies from Poland, Portugal and Bulgaria was

successfully concluded in 2016.

POVZETEK

V letu 2016 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 smermi 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 2016 je bilo v Sloveniji 98 visokošolskih zavodov in višjih strokovnih šol.

Dva dogodka sta zaznamovala leto 2016 – prenehanje akreditacij pred-bolonjskim programom (30. 9. 2016) in sprejetje novele Zakona o visokem šolstvu (17.11.2016) – ZviS-K, ki uvaja institucionalno akreditacijo ob kontrolirani programski evalvaciji. V Sloveniji je še vedno preveliko število 914 študijskih programov. Z novelo ZViS-K agencija bolj prevzema svetovalno vlogo.

Prvič od ustanovitve leta 2010 je bila agencija v celoti financirana iz integralnih sredstev proračuna in ima zagotovljena sredstva v podobnem obsegu tudi v letih 2017 in 2018.

V letu 2016 sta se zaključili tudi obe reviziji Računskega sodišča: Revizija pravilnosti poslovanja nevladnih in pravosodnih proračunskih uporabnikov v letu 2011- Izrek mnenja o pravilnosti poslovanja posameznega revidiranca v letu 2011. (Sklep izdan: 15. 6. 2012) in Zagotavljanje kakovosti in raznovrstnosti študijskih programov- Izrek mnenja o učinkovitosti postopkov evalviranja, akreditiranja ter podeljevanja koncesij pri zagotavljanju kakovosti in raznovrstnosti študijskih programov (Sklep izdan: 9. 5. 2014).

Agencija si nenehno prizadeva za izboljševanje lastne kakovosti, kar je temelj za učinkovit sistem zunanjega zagotavljanja kakovosti v visokem in višjem šolstvu. Na žalost širša javnost še vedno spoznava dejavnost agencije ob slabih dogodkih v našem visokem šolstvu (neakreditirani programi, plagiatorstvo, goljufije, nespoštovanje zakonodaje, anonimke..).

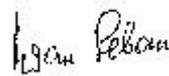
V letu 2016 smo nadaljevali z nadgradnjami sistema eNAKVIS, predvsem v smeri prenove obrazcev (usklajevanje z zakonodajo) ter izboljšave podpore določenim procesom na agenciji.

Skupaj z agencijami iz Poljske, Portugalske in Bolgarije smo v letu 2016 uspešno zaključili Erasmus+ projekt EIQAS (Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems).

Additional resources:

Work and Financial Plan for 2016
Business Report for 2016
Self-Evaluation report for 2016 – tba
Minutes of internal meetings of the Agency staff in 2016
Minutes of the Agency Council in 2016

I would like to thank everybody who participated in preparing this report on the work and operation of the Agency in 2016.



Dr Ivan Leban,
April 2016



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Prevod slik:

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P. 42: Evaluations of higher vocational colleges (duration of procedures in days)