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Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije
za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGER EDUCATION

SELF-EVALUATION REPORT FOR 2016 AND 2017

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the inclusion of the [Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education](#) (hereinafter: Agency) into EQAR shall expire in 2018, the Agency has requested an early external evaluation from the ENQA association in accordance with ESG, revised in 2015 (hereinafter: ESG). In this way, it would join the procedures for the renewal of the membership to ENQA and for the renewal of the registering to EQAR, and at the same time it would be, assuming that it complies with ESG, externally evaluated every five years, and not every two/three years. It is of key importance for the Agency to maintain the membership in the ENQA association and to successfully renew for EQAR listing, and simultaneously continue its international work in other European associations for agencies dealing with quality in higher education (ECA, CEENQA and INQAHEE).

The Self-Evaluation Report was prepared by the Agency for 2016 and 2017, mainly due to systemic changes in the field of accreditation and evaluation procedures introduced by the Act Amending the Higher Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 75/16; hereinafter: HEA-K). This amendment also legalizes the so-called shift to institutional evaluation, and for the first time, the act explicitly determines mandatory compliance with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (hereinafter: ESG) and the so-called European approach for joint programmes. This self-evaluation period lasted from 1 March 2016 to 28 February 2018. During this period, the Agency needed to adopt a new strategy of its development as the previous strategy expired at the end of 2016. The Agency needed to assess whether and how it achieved the strategic objectives which it set to achieve by 2016, and to set new or updated objectives for future operation. These are:

- Improvement of the professional work of the Agency.
- Enhancement of independence and authority of the Agency.
- Enhancement of the quality culture.
- Update of the criteria and other legal acts of the Agency.
- Implementation of an efficient and user-friendly information system of the Agency.
- Renewal of membership in ENQA and EQAR and enhancement of the international cooperation of the Agency.
- Reorganization of the Agency's work.
- Development work.

The new strategy of the Agency demonstrating the meeting of strategic objectives for the period between 2017 and 2020 is publicly available on Agency website.

Please note: The Agency performs periodic self-evaluation according to the respective Quality Manual, therefore the SAR presented in this document is not equivalent to the original SAR but adapted to the Guidelines for ENQA Agency review. All Agency's SARs are publicly available at the [SQAA website](#).

2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT (SAR)

According to the findings of SAR the Action Plan for the next self-evaluation period is adopted and the members of the self-evaluation group are nominated. The group consists of SQAA staff. Following this procedure, the Action Plan for 2016 and 2017 was prepared after the adoption of the Self-Evaluation Report for 2015. It considered all the suggested actions for the improvement of the work of the Agency, found in the self-evaluation, proposals made by international ENQA experts, and the recommendations of the Court of Audit of the Republic of Slovenia (hereinafter: Court of Audit), it included the sets of activities in the following areas:

- accreditations and external evaluations;
- internal quality assurance system of the Agency;
- external quality assurance system of the Agency;
- criteria and other regulations of the Agency, and
- the information system and notifying.

At the beginning of this self-evaluation period, plenty activities regarding **accreditations and external evaluations** were directed towards the improvement of the conducting of accreditation and evaluation procedures at the Agency. The Agency organized special thematic meetings for a unified, more transparent and efficient work in this field. The enforcement of HEA-K extended these activities into the period after the enforcement of **new criteria and regulations**. Since there are considerable changes in the operation of the Agency, priority activities from the action plan needed to be partially modified. Although the fields in the plan have not changed, the activities from individual fields were firmly linked. HEA-K required from the Agency an adjustment of all the basic criteria which in practice meant the preparation of drafts and proposals of the criteria and their coordination with all stakeholders and adoptions at the [Agency Council](#) (hereinafter: the Council). Coordination of internal stakeholders of the Agency (the staff, members of the Council, experts) proved an excellent opportunity for a reflexion of the previous operation of the Agency and the realization of the recognized opportunities for improvement, for example, the implementation of the revised ESG 2015 to new criteria with application forms, cooperation in the establishment and implementation of the information system of the Agency (hereinafter: eNakvis) and a unification of the operation of the Agency through the cooperation with the experts of the Agency – who also actively participated in the creation of the new criteria. After the adoption of the criteria, the Agency trained additional experts, and presented to higher-education institutions (hereinafter: institution) the online forms and standards of quality through the assessment of their usefulness in practice.

The internal quality assurance system is undergoing a comprehensive revision because of the changes in the operation of the Agency and the transition to **eNakvis**. In the information system, the elements of self-evaluation of the agency's activities will also be inseparably linked, namely:

- traceability of procedures (information regarding the duration of procedures and all individual actions in procedures),
- traceability of changes (all changes which shall be forwarded to the Agency by the stakeholders shall be chronologically logged in the system and traceable),

- transparency of procedures (stakeholders will be able to monitor the status and progress of individual applications, depending of copyrights for individual actions in the procedure),
- monitoring the work of experts, work of employees at the Agency and the performed procedures (survey questionnaires about the satisfaction of various stakeholders shall also be part of eNakvis),
- analysis of the results.

Most activities regarding the **external quality assurance system** of the Agency were mainly linked to the participation of stakeholders (institutions/colleges, students, Rectors' Conference...) in the preparation and harmonization of the new criteria, adjustments and implementation of eNakvis, training of the experts of the Agency and concluding accreditation and evaluation procedures in accordance with the "old criteria". The majority was completed in 2017, only a handful of procedures remain, mostly because of multiple extensions of deadlines for the supplementation of applications (following a proposal by an HE applicant), claims for elimination of experts and the changes of deadlines for the preparation of the experts' report.

3. HIGHER EDUCATION AND QA OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AGENCY

In the Republic of Slovenia, the education system is mainly organised as a **public service** as part of which public and private institutions and private persons who hold a concession provide accredited programmes. It is laid down by law that public schools are secular and the school environment autonomous; political and denominational activities are forbidden in public schools. [The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia \(1991\)](#) stipulates freedom of choice in education, and guarantees the autonomy of higher education institutions. Slovenia is a signatory country for Bologna Declaration.

Language of instruction is Slovenian; the Italian and Hungarian ethnic minorities have the right to have primary education in their own language. The Constitution also protects the status and gives special rights to members of the Roma community who live in Slovenia. Children of migrants have the right to compulsory basic education under the same conditions as other citizens of the Republic of Slovenia.

Over the previous decade, the main priorities have been to improve the education levels of the population and offer all Slovenian citizens equal educational opportunities, regardless of their residence, cultural or linguistic origin, health condition, social background or gender.

The tertiary education in Slovenia consists of short-cycle higher vocational education and higher education. Since 2012, both domains have been under the responsibility of the [Ministry of Education, Science and Sport](#). Both subsystems of tertiary education are interrelated. The graduates of the short-cycle higher vocational education have the option to continue their studies to advanced years of the higher education. At higher education there are university (academic) studies and more to practice oriented professional study. Tools for expanded transparency of education (credit system, diploma supplement, and system of quality, including the system of external evaluation) are instituted at all levels of tertiary education.

3.1 Short-Cycle Higher Vocational Education

The short-cycle higher vocational education in Slovenia is specified by law, namely the Post-secondary Vocational Education Act (2004, 2013) (Annex 4; in Slovene; hereinafter PVEA). It is provided by both public and private higher vocational colleges. The practice oriented programmes extend over 2 years and emerge out of actual economic staffing needs. The students develop vocational competences in accordance to vocational standards. The graduates are qualified to manage, plan, and supervise work processes.

The short-cycle higher vocational education, in Slovenia too, has been interrelating increasingly to the international environment, and its development has been under great influence of the Bologna declaration and the Copenhagen declaration. To implement freedom of movement of persons and recognition of vocational qualifications in the EU member states, the law states explicitly that the vocational standards and study programmes shall be comparable at the European level. The responsible authorities promote and encourage the combined study programmes and programmes of continuous training and/or lifelong training.

In the field of Higher Vocational Education, the Agency has the following tasks:

- to ensure the operation of the quality assurance system in Higher Vocational Education;
- performs external evaluations of vocational colleges;

- cooperates with higher vocational colleges, advises and encourages self-evaluation;
- collects and analyzes reports on self-evaluations and external evaluations of vocational colleges.

3.2 Higher Education

The higher education in Slovenia is provided by law, namely the Higher Education Act (HEA). The studies are organised by both public and private universities, and other higher education institutions, namely at faculties, art academies, and higher professional institutions. Private faculties and art academies, and public and private higher professional institutions may be established as autonomous higher education institutions that may further form an association of higher education institutions. Under special conditions, it is allowed to form an international association of universities.

The main functions of the higher education institutions, i.e. scientific R&D and education, are provided by law. The five to ten year strategic goals are defined with the Higher Education Master Plan that was adopted by the Parliament. The development of such a plan is the result of higher education partners, the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education, and the National Science and Technology Council joined forces.

The key goals of the Higher Education Master Plan from 2011 to 2020 that the Parliament adopted in May 2011 are quality and excellence, diversity and accessibility, internationalization, diversification of study structures, and substantial financing of higher education; in particular the plan's goals are:

- to redefine the types of higher education institutions and requirements or conditions of founding and pursuing the activities of such institutions;
- to enable autonomous decision-making about internal organisational structure within the new arrangement of higher education institutions;
- to create a system of internal organisation of universities that shall promote cooperation between departments and/or members and support greater number of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programmes;
- to arrange adequate conditions for separate provision of academic and professional tertiary education;
- to reduce the number of study programmes and allow for greater selectivity of content;
- to update the system of habilitations and reduce the number of habilitation domains;
- to arrange workloads, compensations, and progression of staff;
- to improve the cooperation of higher education institutions with public research institutions;
- to improve the cooperation of higher education institutions with the economic and non-commercial sectors.

The amended HEA of 2004 and 2006 constitutes legal framework for the implementation of the three-cycle higher education system that recognises the goals of the Bologna process and the goals of a common European higher education space. The first cycle study programmes or bachelor degree programmes are academic or professional. The second cycle programmes are master programmes. The common master study programmes that lead directly to master's degree shall focus on education and training for occupations or professions according to the EU directives or special rules of the Republic of Slovenia. The third-cycle programmes are PhD programmes. At all three levels, students may choose to take combined study programmes. The higher education institutions may develop, accredit, and provide programmes of further training, i.e. within the scope of lifelong learning. The implementation of the credit system (ECTS) has been required since 2002.

Universities, faculties and art academies may provide study programmes of all cycles. Higher professional institutions provide, as a rule, the first cycle programmes (undergraduate); if they meet special stipulations, they may provide the second cycle programmes (graduate). The entry requirements are provided by law provisionally, in detail they are specified for a given study programme. If certain requirements are met, students have the option to transfer from one study programme to another at the same level. Graduates receive a diploma and a professional or academic title in accordance with the Professional and Academic Titles Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, Nos. 47/1998, 55/2003, 83/2003-official consolidated text, 61/2006) (in Slovene). Since 2001/2002, graduates receive diplomas and diploma supplements, and since 2007, they receive them both free of charge in Slovene language as well as in one of the official languages of the EU (usually English).

The studies are either full-time or part-time. The school year begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. The study programmes are specified in detail by higher education institutions, namely the institutions issue respective study calendars. The school year commonly includes two semesters of 15 working weeks each, and three examinations periods. The language of instruction is Slovene. Under conditions stipulated by law and relevant Statute, higher education institutions may provide a specific study programme or part of it in a foreign language, too.

To assure quality of the higher education institutions and study programmes, one institutes the procedures of accreditations and applies an internal and external evaluation. From 1994 to 2010, the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes was the responsibility of various institutions; since 2006, its responsibilities extended to the voluntary external evaluation. In the spring of 2010, the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (Slovenian abbreviation: NAKVIS; English abbreviation SQAA; in this document referred to as the Agency) was established by law to assume those functions. The internal evaluation remains the responsibility of higher education institutions.

In accordance with the Recognition and Evaluation of Education Act (in Slovene), the studies completed abroad shall be recognized in Slovenia, too. *(Please note: The above text was taken mainly from Eurypedia - Eurydice)*

3.3 Higher vocational colleges and higher education institutions in details

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

Both tertiary education sub-systems are interconnected. Upon fulfilling the conditions, students may transfer from higher vocational study programmes to first-cycle study programmes. Decisions in this regard are made by higher education institutions. Credit transfer system of studies, diploma supplement, accreditation of study programmes and quality assurance system have been implemented in the entire tertiary education. Although higher vocational colleges are defined in PVEA, the implementation of external evaluations of higher vocational colleges is also stipulated in Article 51f of HEA as one of the Agency's tasks beside accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions and study programmes. According to the data of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (June 2014), four universities are entered into the register of higher education institutions in the Republic of Slovenia: University of Ljubljana (public university), University of Maribor (public university), University of Primorska (public university), University of Nova Gorica (private university) and an international association of universities named EMUNI university. 42 private higher educational institutions are entered into the register. According to the data of the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges Secretariat, 43 higher vocational colleges operate in the Republic of Slovenia.

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

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

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

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

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

3.4 Higher vocational education and higher education

The higher education system which was introduced in 1994 was composed of undergraduate and post-graduate studies. Undergraduate studies were composed of higher professional (3 to 4 years) and university (4 to 6 years) study programmes, while

the professional title acquired after graduation was "university graduate in / BSc/BA..." and "graduate in / BSc/BA...".. Post-graduate studies were composed of specialisation (1 to 2 years of professional studies), masters' studies (2 years of research-oriented studies) and doctoral studies (4 years of scientific-research work).

The Bologna declaration which was signed in 1999 by ministers responsible for higher education from nineteen European countries, including Slovenia, thoroughly changed the tertiary education in Slovenia. In Slovenia, wider interest in the Bologna process and the implementation of the Lisbon strategy signed in 2000 started to be expressed only after 2002. For the introduction of all recommendations given by the Bologna declaration and the Lisbon strategy, Slovenia had to adopt a series of legal background documents in the area of tertiary education. In December 2003, the Decree on budgetary financing of higher education and other university member institutions from 2004 till 2008 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 72/2004) was adopted. This Decree enhanced the financial autonomy of universities (independence in distributing the funds, human resource management, definition of norms, quality assurance) with the goal to stimulate the restructuring and rationalisation of operation and study programmes and to reorient towards monitoring of results (learning outcomes, qualification of graduates) and quality. In the following year (May 2004), the Act Amending the HEA (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 63/04) was adopted; this was the basis for the implementation of three priority tasks of the Bologna process and thus for fundamental changes: 1) adoption of a higher education system with two or three main cycles; 2) introduction of a system with easily recognisable and comparable levels; 3) introduction of the national quality assurance system.

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

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

- the level of education acquired under vocational study programmes adopted before 1 January 1994 and the level of education acquired under professional study programmes adopted before 11 June 2004 (hereinafter: pre-Bologna study programmes) is equal to the level of education acquired under first-cycle Bologna professional higher education study programmes;
- the level of education acquired under pre-Bologna university study programmes is equal to the level of education acquired under second-cycle Bologna study programmes;
- the level of education acquired under pre-Bologna professional higher education study programmes, including the completed specialisation study programme, is equal to the level of education acquired under second-cycle Bologna study programmes;
- the level of education acquired under pre-Bologna masters' study programmes and the level of education acquired under previous university study programmes, including the completed specialisation study programme, is equal to the level of education acquired under third-cycle Bologna study programmes;
- the level of education acquired under previous doctoral study programmes is equal to the level of education acquired under third-cycle Bologna study programmes.

The Act Amending the HEA (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 63/04) introduced the three-cycle structure of study programmes. Student workload in study programmes is evaluated by ECTS credits. One academic year corresponds to 60 ECTS credits. Professional higher education study programmes and university study programmes typically comprise 180 to 240 ECTS credits and last between three and four years.

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

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

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

The first Bologna study programmes were offered in the 2005/2006 academic year. The progressive introduction of the Bologna reform was completed in the 2009/2010 academic year. Students in non-Bologna study programmes have to complete their studies by the 2015/2016 academic year. After this date, the studies will be allowed to be completed only under reformed study programmes.

First-cycle study programmes are university and professional higher education study programmes. Uniform masters' study programmes leading directly to the masters' degree are designed if they educate for professions regulated by EU directives or special regulations of the Republic of Slovenia. Starting with 2011, the financing of studies is regulated by the new Decree on budgetary financing of higher education institutions and other institutions – NPB1 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, Nos. 7/11, 34/11 – Constitutional Court Decision, and 64/12). Funds for the first- and second-cycle study activities of public higher education institutions and subsidised study programmes at private higher education institutions are provided from the state budget. The state provides financing of: 1) regular undergraduate studies (including uniform masters' studies) and 2) regular studies under second-cycle study programmes. By giving consent to the call for enrolment, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia decides every year which study programmes and how many enrolment places are financed for regular studies.

Second-cycle study programmes include masters' study programmes and uniform masters' study programmes. The third cycle includes doctoral study programmes. Joint study programmes are enabled as well within all cycles. Enrolment conditions are generally stipulated by HEA and detailed in individual study programmes. Upon the fulfilment of certain conditions, transfers between study programmes of the same cycle are possible. Graduates obtain their diplomas and professional or academic titles as stipulated in the Professional and Academic Titles Act. Along with a diploma, a diploma supplement has also been issued since 2001. The language of instruction at higher education institutions is Slovenian. Under the conditions stipulated in Article 8 of HEA and pursuant to the articles of association of a higher education institution, an institution may also carry out study programmes or their parts in a foreign language.

According to the data of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (28. March 2018), a total of 1010 study programmes are accredited and entered in the register of higher education institutions, 480 of which are of the University of Ljubljana, 214 of the University of Maribor, 108 of the University of Primorska and 26 of the University of Nova Gorica. Other study programmes are accredited on two newly established universities (Nova univerza and Univesrity of Novo mesto) and on 43 independent HEIs.

4. HISTORY, PROFILE AND ACTIVITIES OF THE AGENCY

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education was established in **2010** as a non-governmental direct budget user and public authorisation holder by a Resolution on the Founding of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. The Agency performs professional and developmental tasks in higher education and regulatory functions in the field of external quality assurance in higher education.

The **Agency** undertakes to follow the **standards and instructions from the European Higher Education Area** in carrying out its activities in the following fields:

- building of efficient system of external and inner quality assurance;
- maintaining its legal status as a public agency and independent spending authority according to the national legislation;
- acquiring recognition by the competent associations of the European Higher Education Area;
- lawfully implementing the procedures of quality assurance on institutional and programme levels (accreditation and external evaluation procedures);
- providing and developing adequate resources (material, personnel and information resources) to support efficient and successful conduct of accreditation procedures;
- forming and implementing its mission, vision and development strategies;
- making its functioning transparent and public through publicly accessible evaluation reports and all related decisions;
- maintaining its independence and not allowing interference by any third party - stakeholders in the higher vocational and higher education, and administrative and political bodies – in conducting its procedures and carrying out its activities;
- regularly evaluating its activities according to the mission, vision, strategies and annual action plans, and providing permanent public access to self-evaluation reports of the Agency.

According to the HEA the Agency has the **following tasks**:

- to ensure the operation of the quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education;
- determines the procedures and criteria for external evaluations and accreditations and other criteria and regulations;
- sets minimum standards for the election to the title of higher education teacher, researcher and higher education staff at higher education institutions,
- carry out external evaluations of higher education institutions and study programmes and vocational colleges;
- performs first accreditations of higher education institutions, accreditation of study programs, extension of accreditation of higher education institutions and accreditation of changes in higher education institutions;
- examines the changes of the obligatory components of study programmes and in case of major defects or inconsistencies takes appropriate measures in accordance with a 51.t of the HEA;
- establishes and update a register of experts;
- appoints expert groups for external evaluation and accreditation, and organize and participate in their education;

- publicly publishes the Agency's decisions, evaluation reports, annual evaluation and accreditation reports and agency analyzes, which must be transparent and accessible;
- keeps publicly accessible records of accredited higher education institutions and study programmes;
- keeps a publicly accessible record of contracts for the implementation of transnational higher education;
- provides to the Ministry responsible for higher education data for enrollment in the eHS from Articles 81.č and 81.d of the HEA;
- cooperates with higher education institutions and vocational colleges, advises and encourages self-evaluation;
- cooperates with international institutions or quality assurance bodies in higher education;
- to ensure compliance with the European standards and international principles in the field of quality assurance;
- collects and analyzes self-evaluation and external evaluations reports of higher education institutions and vocational colleges;
- performs development tasks in the area for which it is established;
- performs other tasks in accordance with the HEA and the founding act.

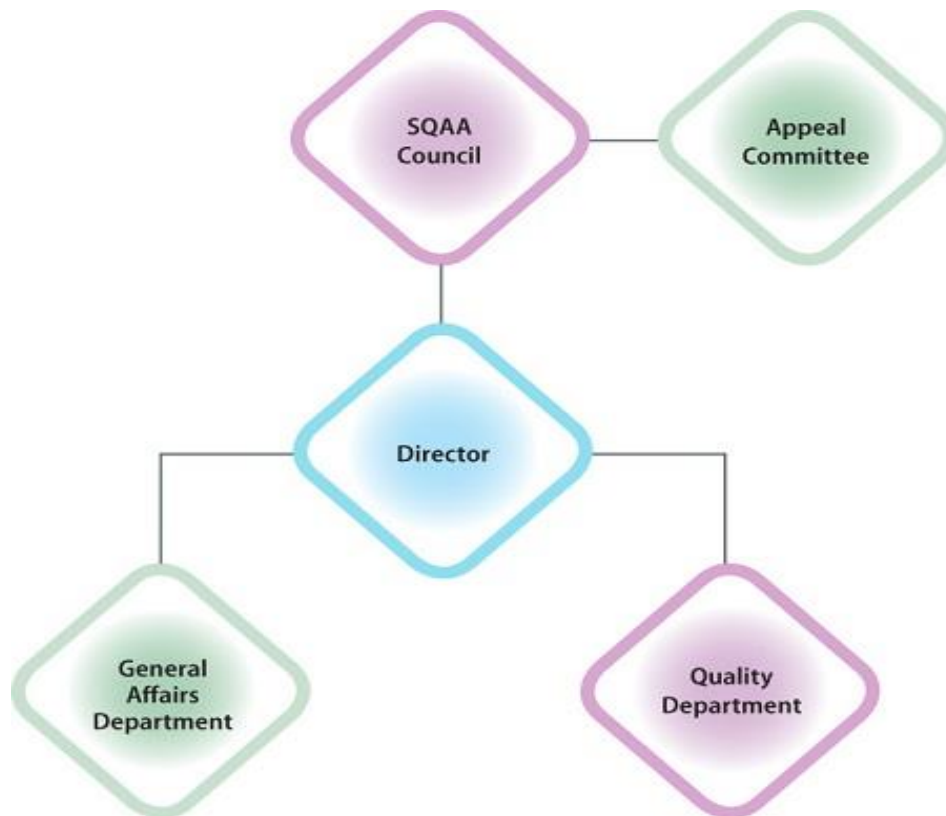
There are several **milestones** concerning the external quality assurance system in higher education in Slovenia:

1994	Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia (hereinafter: the Council) established by the Higher Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 67/1993) in 1994 began to implement duties associated with accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions. It was established as an independent professional body composed of experts in the field of higher education. Through the granting of accreditation and observance of European development guidelines, quality culture was being developed and regulatory bases were being made, in addition to quality assurance in the study process.
1996	In 1996, <i>the National Commission for the Quality of Higher Education (hereinafter: NCQHE)</i> was established at the university level on the initiative of the Rectors' Conference to enable development of the internal and external quality assurance system in the Slovenian higher education area subject to European development policies.
2004	The 2004 amendment of HEA renamed the Council into the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia (CHERS). In addition to accreditations, it was assigned new duties (habilitations of higher education teachers, researchers and faculty assistants at private higher education institutions). These amendments to HEA also provided for a quality agency for higher education; however, it was never established. Some tasks pertaining to external quality assurance (external evaluations) were performed by NCQHE further on.
2006	The 2006 HEA amendments extended the responsibilities of CHERS to the field of evaluations of study programmes, of scientific-research, artistic and professional work, of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. It assumed these duties from NCQHE in 2007, which had been until then responsible for managing evaluation procedures in higher education. It functioned through three senates (for accreditation, evaluation and habilitation).

2007	<p>In 2007, a CHERS Specialist Service, the Office of Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia (OHE) was established as a body of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology. As the Office was not an independent budget user, the 2008 HEA amendment transformed it, together with CHERS, into the so-called "other state body", which was CHERS with its Secretariat, Specialist Service for performing administrative, technical and expert tasks. Notwithstanding the fact that CHERS, the duties of which are further pursued by the Agency, had no formally established procedures for regular monitoring, assessing and assuring of its own quality, it carried out surveys among stakeholders in the external evaluation procedures and gathered opinions of experts (evaluators) on the course of evaluations, thereby improving the quality of its work. The questionnaires were primarily intended to gain information regarding the performed external evaluations, satisfaction with the work of CHERS Secretariat and satisfaction with evaluation committees' work. Questionnaires on the satisfaction with external evaluations were intended for both management of institutions / colleges and students. Members of the staff participating in external evaluations assessed the work of evaluation committees.</p>
2010	<p>Based on 2009 HEA amendment, the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (Agency) was established in 2010 as a non-governmental direct budget user and public authorisation holder by a Resolution on the Founding of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 114/2009; hereinafter: Resolution on the Founding of the Agency) in order to, upon the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professionalise evaluation procedures and include stakeholders in the decision-making process; • carry out its task in a transparent manner, be responsible to the public and observe the principle of impartiality; • conduct procedures according to the pre-set criteria, monitor procedures and control them in order to eliminate weaknesses. • The 2009 HEA amendment provided for organisational changes of the quality assurance body for higher education. All working committees of CHERS which provided expert aid to the CHERS staff and members in dealing with applications and adoption of decisions were abolished. The 2009 HEA amendment appointed the role of CHERS sectoral committees and reviewers (external experts in accreditation procedures) and evaluators (external experts in evaluation procedures) to groups of experts.
2016	<p>The 2016 HEA amendments extended the operations of the Agency and implemented the »european approach« and the transition to institutional evaluation.</p>

Structure of the Agency

The Agency has three bodies: the Council, the Director and the Appeal Committee. It is organised into two internal organisational units led by the Director: the Quality Department and the General Affairs Department.



The Council is the highest decision-making body within the Agency. Its tasks are laid down in Article 51h of HEA. Among others, they include appointing and dismissing of the Director, and the members of Appeal Committee, defining procedures and accreditation criteria, criteria for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, criteria for international cooperation, criteria for SQAA experts and other acts, adopting decisions on accreditations and external evaluations, appointing groups of experts. The Council adopts decisions at regular sessions and works in line with the Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council. Regular sessions are planned once a month (usually every third Thursday).

The Director shall be appointed and dismissed by the Agency Board on the basis of a public competition in accordance with the conditions and criteria laid down in the HEA. The Director is appointed for a period of five years and may be reappointed. His tasks are laid down in Article 51 i of HEA.

The Appeal Committee is appointed by the Agency Council on the basis of a public call. The Appeal Committee consists of three members, each member has his / her deputy. The members of each of them shall nominate the President and the Deputy President. The alternate replaces a member in decision-making procedures in the event of his / her absence or exclusion.

The General Affairs Department provides expert support to the management in personnel procedures and in legal and financial issues. It assists the Quality Department in solving financial issues and legal issues while conducting procedures. It assures that the Council conducts sessions in compliance with the Rules of Procedure and other regulations, and provides legal advice to working and project groups of the Council. The legal service of the department provides full support for the functioning of the Appeal Committee: preparation of invitations and materials for the sessions, coordination of members of the

Appeal Committee, participation at sessions, preparation of session minutes and draft decisions of the Appeal Committee.

The staff in the [Quality Department](#) conduct accreditation and evaluation procedures, whereby they examine applications, they call upon the applicants to supplement their applications, they advise them and act as intermediates between the applicant, the Agency, and groups of experts. They cooperate with experts, as well as monitor and support the organisation and realisation of site visits in accreditation and evaluation procedures. For the Agency Council, they prepare materials for decision-making and conduct oral hearings.

In the last self-evaluation period (2016 and 2017), the Council decided on 421 applications for accreditation or re-accreditation of a study programme or an institution, and the applications for transformations of 25 study programmes and issued opinions about 15 higher-vocational colleges. The Council was informed about 473 transformations of study programmes. The procedures for applications were initiated before HEA-K entered into force, and the applications were submitted by 30 September 2016.

Table: ACCREDITATIONS AND EVALUATIONS (situation on 15 February 2018)				
Accreditations in higher education				
Assignment	Implementati on and accountability by	Positive decisions about applications submitted by 29 February 2016	Positive decisions about applications submitted from 1 March 2016 to 14 December 2016	Total
Study programmes				
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality Department / Agency Council	21	38	59
Re-accreditation of study programmes		240 (one for a shorter period)	62	302
TOTAL		260	100	360
Higher education institutions				
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions	Quality Department / Agency Council	0	1	1
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		12 (one of which was extraordinary)	5	17

Transformations of higher education institutions		2	1	3
TOTAL		14	7	21
Evaluations in higher vocational education				
Higher vocational colleges				
External evaluation of higher vocational colleges	Quality Department / Agency Council	5	10 (one termination of the procedure)	15

Negative Decisions

The Council:

- a) denied an application for the accreditation of 1 study programme because the applicant failed to demonstrate within the operation of the institution any relevant scientific-research activity, contextually related with the study programme, and had no research projects. Despite being urged to supplement, there were still not study plans for parts of the study programme, and the professional title was also contrary to regulations. Furthermore, the institution did not have its own library;
- b) did not re-accredit 3 study programmes. Since they were not being implemented, it was not possible to review the quality of the implementation of the study;
- c) denied the application for the accreditation of 1 institution due to non-compliance with Article 10 of the Accreditation Criteria. The habilitation areas of some higher-education teachers (subject carrier) did not comply with the contents of some subjects, and together did not show the references which would comprehensively cover the area for which the institution was established.

The Council entered 3 agreements regarding the implementation of transnational higher education TNE into public records.

The members of the Council self-eliminated themselves from the decision-making procedure about accreditations and evaluations on 19 occasions.

Extraordinary evaluations

In this self-evaluation period, the Council received 7 initiatives for the initiation of the procedure of so-called extraordinary evaluation. The initiatives are reviewed by a special commission of the Council for extraordinary evaluations which suggested the initiation of the procedure of extraordinary evaluation of two study programmes. The Council confirmed the proposals about the initiation of the extraordinary evaluations.

The Council also discussed the initiatives for the introduction of the extraordinary evaluation procedure of two universities and one higher-vocational college:

- the first university was founded by the state which, without the knowledge of the Agency, decided on the elimination of a scientific-research centre from the university. The Council assessed that in this case it is not competent for the regulation of the status and staffing conditions, therefore, it did not initiate the procedure of extraordinary evaluation, but will review the quality at the university at the next regular external evaluation;
- it discussed the potential extraordinary evaluation of the second, private university on several occasions. It was an initiative because of alleged violation of HEA regarding the legal subjectivity of the members of this university. The initiative

was not directly related with the question of a possible decrease in quality of the university.

The committee of the Council for extraordinary evaluation discussed the initiative to introduce an extraordinary evaluation of a private university and various legal opinions regarding the alleged violations of HEA. The Council reviewed the situation at all Slovenian universities and decided that it shall not introduce the procedure of extraordinary evaluation due to the legal subjectivity of the members of the university. But since HEA-K determined stricter conditions for the establishment of new institutions, which should be met by all the accredited institutions, the procedure of extraordinary evaluation can also be introduced if major flaws are suspected which should be evaluated. The Council called for the university to submit all documentation it has regarding the quality assurance system. Based on that it shall decide on potential further procedures;

- it sent the higher-vocational college the initiative for the extraordinary evaluation for a response and decided after obtaining the response of the college to not initiate the evaluation procedure.

The Council also discussed two anonymous reports:

- in one case it determined that the complaints about the originality of study programmes are not substantiated and decided that it shall no longer consider the matter;
- in the second case it dismissed the anonymous report because of the unclear information.

Table: NUMBER OF ACCREDITATIONS OF STUDY PROGRAMMES ACCORDING TO ISCED

Initial accreditations			
ISCED	Implementation and accountability by	No. of accredited programmes	% of accredited programmes
(14) Teacher training and education science	Quality Department / Agency Council	1	1.7%
(21) Arts		2	3.4%
(22) Humanities		4	6.8%
(31) Social sciences		23 (22 of which were study programmes of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana)	39%
(32) Journalism and information		2	3.4%
(34) Business and administration		11	18.6%
(38) Law		0	0%
(44) Physical sciences		1	1.7%
(46) Mathematics and statistics		0	0%
(48) Computing		0	0%
(52) Engineering and engineering trades		4	6.8%
(54) Manufacturing and processing		0	0%
(58) Architecture and building		1	1.7%
(64) Veterinary		0	0%
(72) Health		5	8.5%

(76) Social services		1	1.7%
(81) Personal services		1	1.7%
(84) Transport services		0	0%
(85) Environmental protection		0	0%
(86) Security services		0	0%
more ISCED classifications		3	5.1%
Total		59	100%

5. HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES, PROCESSES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE AGENCY

5.1 Overview

The enforcement of HEA-K affected the whole development and operation of the Agency in this self-evaluation period. A systemic approach to institutional evaluation has been legalized, for which the Agency strived for a longer time. It took into consideration the National Higher Education Programme (hereinafter: NHEP2011-2020), initiatives by SSU and instructions (recommendations) of international groups of experts (external evaluations of the Agency in 2013 and 2014) for the period of the transition to institutional evaluation be moved to a time when the first round of re-accreditations for the majority of accredited Bologna study programmes shall be completed. The application for this was sent to the Agency by the end of 2016, when HEA-K entered into force.

HEA-K dictated thorough changes of accreditation and evaluation procedures, harmonization and adoption of new criteria, a change of the training programme for experts and the training of candidates for entry into the register of experts. Despite the efforts put in the preparation of the new criteria, it was not possible to harmonize and adopt them within the legal deadline (three months after the enforcement of HEA-K). The reasons for a relatively late adoption were mostly in the intensive harmonization of the content of new criteria spanning months with the accompanying application forms with external stakeholders and the necessary adjustments to eNakvis.

In the second half of 2017, the Agency was actively involved in the presentation of the new criteria and application forms and eNakvis at institutions and at trainings of the experts of the Agency.

The establishment of eNakvis was postponed to the period after the enforcement of all the new criteria. We are now certain that the new information system shall enable a more transparent and easier entry of information, tracking of all changes in the accreditation and external evaluation procedures, and an easier flow of information between the information systems of the Agency and the ministry, competent for higher education (hereinafter: Ministry of Education, Science and Sports-MESS), to all participants.

Despite intensive efforts, eNakvis still does not operate in a production environment and is not yet available for users. The delay occurred because of new security schemes (applicable since August 2017) at the Ministry for Public Administration (hereinafter: MPA), since eNakvis is being hosted on MPA servers. We have decided for such an arrangement for eNakvis to be fully connected with the higher-education information system (hereinafter: eVŠ), which shall ensure an uninterrupted information flow and simplify the applicants' work; it is mostly a significant decrease of the duplication of their work. The system shall also simplify the work of experts and the Council, mainly with a comprehensive audit trail of changes and supplementations of applications.

In this self-evaluation period, the Council:

- confirmed the Self-Evaluation Report of the Agency for 2015;
- adopted the strategy of the Agency: Strategic development of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for higher education for the period 2017–2020;

- adopted new Criteria for Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education institutions and study programmes;
- adopted new Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education;
- adopted Guidelines for Accessibility in tertiary Education in the Republic of Slovenia;
- gave approval to the Report on the Work and Operation of the Agency in 2015 and 2016;
- confirmed the Work and Financial Plan of the Agency for 2017;
- confirmed the Plan for External Evaluations of Higher Vocational Colleges for 2017 and 2018;
- twice adopted the Act Amending the Rules of Procedure about the work of the Agency Council of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education;
- adopted the supplemented Instructions for the Preparation of the Agreement for the Implementation of Transnational Higher Education TNE;
- gave approval to the proposal of the Rules on the Changes of the Rules about the Diploma Supplement;
- discussed the proposal of the Criteria for the Experts of the Agency (it should be adopted by March 2018), and
- adopted new Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher-Vocational Colleges.

5.2 Types of accreditation

The Agency performs the following types of accreditation according to the Criteria for Accreditation and External Evaluation of HEI and Study Programmes:

- initial accreditation of a higher education institution,
- accreditation of a study programme,
- re-accreditation of a higher education institution,
- accreditation of transformations of higher education institutions.

One month after the receipt of the complete application for the initial accreditation of a HEI or the accreditation of a study programme, the Agency Council shall appoint a group of experts.

A group of experts shall prepare a joint report on the compliance with the criteria for the initial accreditation of a HEI or accreditation of a study programme in three months of its appointment. It shall be prepared according to the areas of assessment and quality standards, determined in the criteria for initial accreditation of a HEI or accreditation of a study programme, namely, based on the application with supplements, other required documentation and the tour of the premises in which the institution shall perform its activity or implement its study programme.

A tour of the premises is mandatory when it regards an accreditation of a higher education institution. If a study programme is being accredited, a tour shall be done when it is necessary to fully determine the actual situation (when special equipment, laboratories etc. are required for the implementation of a programme).

5.3 Types of external evaluations

A regular external evaluation of a higher education institution is a mandatory part of the re-accreditation procedure for a higher education institution. The external evaluation may also be performed as an extraordinary evaluation of a higher education institution or as an extraordinary evaluation of a study programme anytime during the validity of the accreditation.

The competences of the Agency include:

- regular evaluation of a higher education institution,
- extraordinary evaluation of a higher education institution,
- extraordinary evaluation of a study programme,
- an evaluation of a sample of study programmes.

5.3.1 EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME

External evaluation of a study programme shall be performed in the re-accreditation procedure of the higher education institution, extraordinary evaluation of a study programme or it shall be performed as an evaluation of a sample of study programmes.

External evaluation is a process of assessing the transformation and update of a study programme, its implementation and the quality assurance system of a higher education institution in the part referring to quality assurance and improvement of a study programme (self-evaluation). The basis for the assessment is a self-evaluation report containing the evaluation of the areas of assessment from this chapter.

5.3.2 TRANSFORMATIONS OF HEIs

Transformations of higher education institutions are:

- transformation to another type of higher education institution;
- merger by acquisition, merger by the formation of a new entity or division of higher education institutions;
- changing the location in Slovenia.

The founders of higher education institutions may decide that the institution shall be transformed to another type (for example, a higher vocational college is transformed to a faculty).

The transformation to another type of higher education institution shall be processed in accordance with the criteria for re-accreditation of a higher education institution.

The accreditation shall be granted for five years.

5.3.3 RE-ACCREDITATION OF A HEI

A procedure for the re-accreditation of a higher education institution shall begin by submitting the application of a higher education institution in accordance with the provision of the fifth paragraph of Article 14 of HEA and shall continue with an external evaluation and conclude with a decision regarding the re-accreditation.

The external evaluation usually consists of two site-visits of the higher education institution spanning over several days each. The number of members in the groups of experts and the number of days of an individual visit shall be determined by the Agency with regards to the size of the higher education institution, diversity of its activities (number of fields and disciplines) and a number of study programmes it implements. The basis for the accreditation report is the self-evaluation report.

The group of experts shall perform its first visit and prepare a report with the findings with any suggestions for a more detailed assessment of individual areas of the institution's activity at the second visit, related with the organization, implementation, transformation and self-evaluation of certain study programmes, in three months of its appointment. The findings report shall be processed by the Agency Council in one month of its receipt and shall decide on the suggestions for the second visit. The Agency shall inform the higher education institution of this in one week, the institution shall in one month from the

acquaintance with the decision fill out the application form "Evaluation of a study programme" (for all programmes determined by the Agency Council).

The group of experts shall generally perform the second visit three months after the decision of the Agency Council about the suggestions for them. During the second visit, it shall in more detail and in depth assess the area of operation of the institution or the study programmes which were determined by the Agency Council with a decision. The group of experts shall present its findings to the higher education institution on the last day of the visit. The higher education institution may after the presentation of the findings in five working days state their views on the findings or provide a written explanation of the situation. The group of experts shall take any valid remarks of the institution into consideration in the preparation of the evaluation report.

5.4 Areas of assessment according to the types of accreditation or external evaluations

ACCREDITATION OR EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION	
<i>INITIAL ACCREDITATION</i>	<i>RE-ACCREDITATION WITH A REGULAR OR EXTRAORDINARY EVALUATION</i>
1. operation of the higher education institution	1. operation of the higher education institution
2. human resources	2. human resources
3. material conditions	3. students
	4. material conditions
	5. internal quality assurance and improvement, transformation, update and implementation of study programmes
ACCREDITATION AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME	
<i>ACCREDITATION</i>	<i>EXTRAORDINARY OR SAMPLE EVALUATION</i>
1. composition and content of a study programme	1. internal quality assurance and improvement of a study programme
2. concept of the implementation of a study programme	2. transformation and update of a study programme
	3. implementation of a study programme

5.5 Groups of experts

In the accreditation and evaluation procedures, the Agency Council usually appoints groups of independent experts consisting of at least three members, at least one of which is a foreign expert and one a student.

Foreign experts are evaluators of foreign agencies, entered in the EQAR register (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) or experts from the field of quality assessment in higher education.

The candidates for experts of the Agency and experts shall be trained by the Agency.

In cooperation with the Agency, a group of experts shall perform a tour or a visit to the higher education institution or an evaluation of a study programme. It shall be announced at least fifteen days in advance. The group of experts shall be enabled efficient work by the applicant who shall submit all documents required for the assessment.

One month after the receipt of the complete application for the initial accreditation of a higher education institution or the accreditation of a study programme, the Agency Council shall appoint a group of experts.

5.5 Types of procedures according to Criteria for International Cooperation (Cross-border activities)

The Agency decides on:

- accreditations of international joint study programmes;
- meeting the requirements for entry of transnational higher education to a SQAA public register;
- notifications of international joint study programmes and study programmes of international associations of universities accredited abroad.

5.5.1 ACCREDITATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL JOINT STUDY PROGRAMME

The accreditation of an international joint study programme shall be done when a Slovenian higher education institution shall intend to implement it together with a foreign higher education institution which is not accredited by the agencies from the list of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – EQAR. The Slovenian higher education institution must be entered in the public records at the Agency. The only difference in comparison to accreditation of national joint study programme is in the duration of the accreditation procedure, which, in case of international joint study programme shall be completed sooner than determined for the national joint study programme (within 5 months after receiving formally complete application).

An external evaluation of an international joint study programme shall be carried out within the re-accreditation procedure of a higher education institution, extraordinary evaluation of a study programme or shall be carried out as an evaluation of a sample of study programmes.

5.5.2 NOTIFICATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL JOINT STUDY PROGRAMME (EUROPEAN APPROACH)

A notification of an international joint study programme accredited abroad shall be done when a higher education institution with a registered office in the Republic of Slovenia shall intend to implement it along with foreign higher education institutions which are on the EQAR list and if the accreditation of this programme was done by a foreign agency from the EQAR list.

The Agency Council shall allow the notification with a decision if the conditions from the paragraph above shall have been met.

5.5.3 TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Transnational higher education (THE) represents all forms and methods of higher education in which a publicly recognized study programme in whole or in part is carried out in another country.

THE in the Republic of Slovenia can be carried out or organized on the basis of a contract between a higher education institution accredited in the Republic of Slovenia and foreign higher education institutions that performs publicly recognized study programmes and issues a public diploma in the country where it is established.

Transnational higher education may be implemented or organized based on the THE agreement which shall regulate all the relationships between the participating institutions in THE.

The THE agreement shall comply with the national legislation concerning higher education, both in the country of the THE provider and the THE holder if the public validity of the offered study programme has been proven.

The THE agreement shall be drafted in written form and shall indicate that the following shall be provided:

- information about the programmes, obtained public documents, participating institutions and their roles in the cooperation in transnational higher education,
- relevant qualifications of the staff and adequate premises,
- internal quality assurance mechanisms,
- relevant records about the cooperation and implementation of THE,
- regular external evaluations.

The higher education institution shall inform the Agency about every change of the THE agreement within 30 days after the occurrence of the change.

The THE document of completion/diploma, which is conducted in the Republic of Slovenia as part of a foreign higher education system, is considered as a foreign document and is subject of the recognition procedure in the Republic of Slovenia.

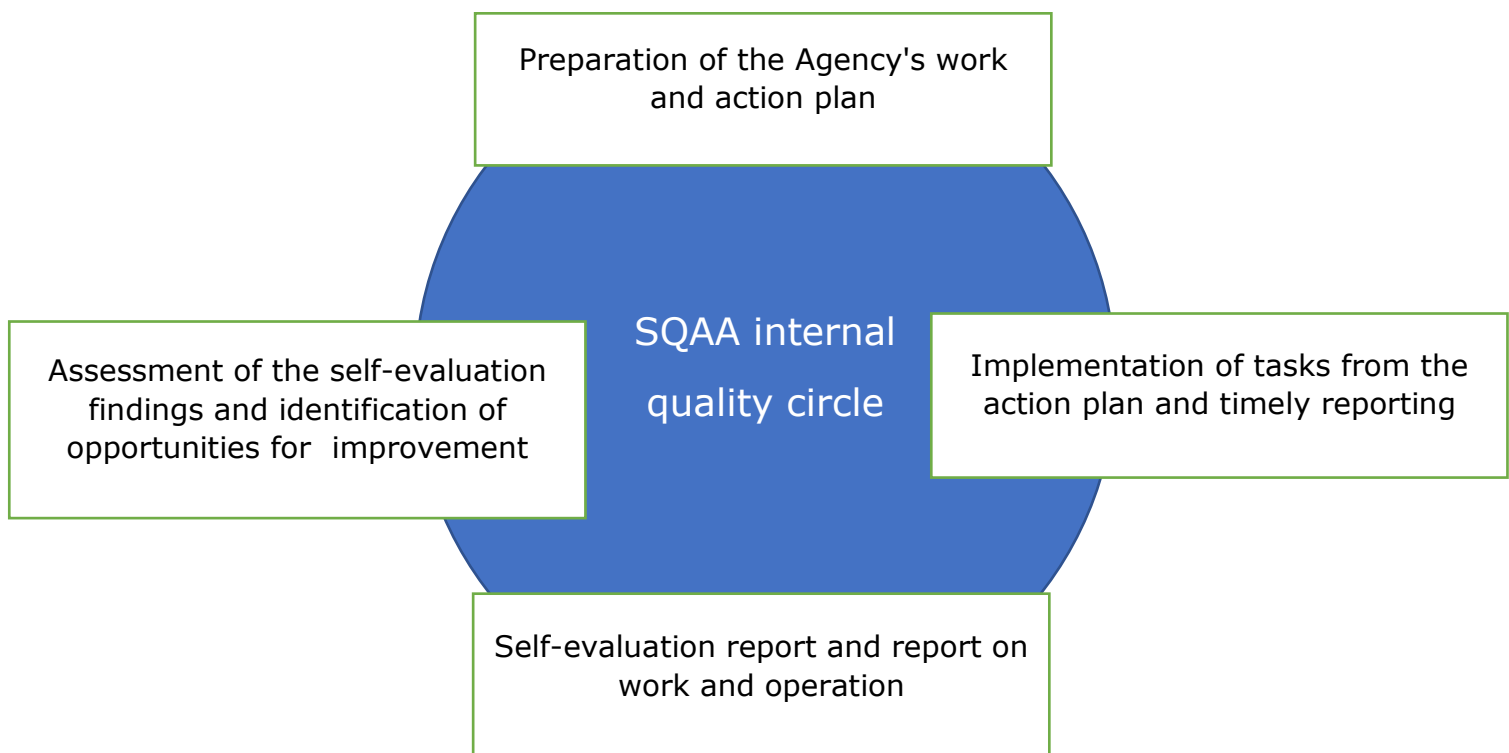
7. AGENCY'S INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Since its inception, the agency has developed a **comprehensive and transparent internal quality system** involving both internal and external stakeholders. The basis for the successful implementation of its internal quality system and its continuous improvement is contained in the [SQAA Quality Manual](#), which was adopted in 2011 and thoroughly updated in 2015.

The Agency fulfills its tasks and objectives by:

- the professionalism and ethics of the management, members of the agency's council, staff and experts of the agency;
- with good personnel structure and efficient organization of work;
- providing a quality work environment;
- with consistent efforts for objectivity and calibration of work;
- regularly inform stakeholders about their work and advice;
- with annual work planning;
- by evaluating all activities and procedures involving all stakeholders;
- with good information support.

SQAA internal quality circle



In order to fulfill its mission, goals and tasks, it must first of all provide for the continuous development and improvement of its own quality system in transparent self-evaluation procedures - with emphasis on the development of a quality culture. Therefore, with the consent of all stakeholders, the **Agency adopted a special document – Quality Manual**.

It is evident from the Quality Manual that the Agency periodically assesses its functioning in such a way that a quality circle is concluded:

- with an ongoing assessment of its work by identifying advantages, disadvantages and opportunities for improvement;
- the adoption of improvement measures;
- by identifying those responsible for the implementation of the measures or tasks adopted on their basis;
- with continuous monitoring of the implementation of tasks;
- to identify possible errors/inconsistencies in the performance of tasks or missed tasks and effective action on this basis;
- monitoring the elimination of possible errors and corrective actions.

The Quality Manual specifies in particular:

- the way the agency works and its responsibility;
- quality areas, quality indicators, measures or activities and quality standards;
- preparation of annual work plan, self-evaluation report and report on work and operations.

Leadership (the director and the president of the agency council) is responsible for developing the quality system; where all employees of the agency are involved. Management, employees, members of the board and experts of the agency are obliged to work in accordance with the Quality Manual.

On the basis of self-evaluation results, the Agency reviews regularly and, if necessary, supplement or update the Quality Manual.

All internal stakeholders (employees, management, members of the SQAA Council, SQAA experts) endeavor for an effective internal quality system. They accept quality as a common value, they constantly improve it, which means that they shape and develop a quality culture based on the realization of the mission, vision, strategic goals and values of the Agency.

One of the tools for improving the quality of the Agency's work is the regular survey of all internal and external stakeholders. Employees, members of the council and experts are interviewed at least once a year, and external stakeholders, such as institutions / schools, at least every two years. The results of the analysis of the surveys are taken into account in the self-evaluation of the Agency and in the preparation of an action plan and for a work plan for the next calendar year. The Agency provides all stakeholders with the findings.

The survey mainly seeks opinions and suggestions on:

- self-evaluation procedures;
- managing and organizing work at the agency - the work of the director;
- work of employees or management of procedures;
- work and decision-making process of the Council;
- the work of the expert groups and their composition;
- visits to HEI/higher vocational colleges;
- reports from expert teams;
- opportunities for career development of employees and their motivation for work;
- relations in and outside the Agency, and overall satisfaction of employees with the working environment;
- cooperation among employees, members of the council, experts, HEI/HVC and other stakeholders;
- annual consultations, conferences and other important events;
- improving the work of the Agency, training programs for experts and criteria;
- usability and efficiency of accreditation and evaluation procedures ...

The Self-Evaluation Report is prepared annually by the Self-Evaluation Working Group. It is appointed by the Director of the Agency. When preparing the final version of the self-evaluation report, all employees, director and members of the Council are involved.

The basis for self-evaluation is an annual action plan. Of great importance are also:

- the analysis and comparison of responses from different stakeholders to survey questions,
- information on the operation of the agency, obtained at meetings with various stakeholders,
- monthly meetings of the SQAA Council,
- conferences,
- participation in domestic and international projects and interdepartmental groups.

The Council gives the consent to the self-evaluation report which is adopted by the Director, not later than 31 March.

The self-evaluation report is published on the agency's website in Slovenian and English and is communicated to all stakeholders.

8. AGNECY'S INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

SQAA as a national Agency primarily performs its operations on national level. On international basis the Agency is involved in:

- international projects (EIQAS, CEQUINT, QROSSROADS, DEQAR, MULTRA);
- international activities as a member of various QA Associations (ENQA, ECA, CEENQA, INQAHEE);
- transnational education;
- joint study programmes;
- bilateral collaboration with different QA Agencies.

The Director actively represent the Agency in the international higher education area. He is also acquiring rich work experience in quality assurance in higher education as:

- vice-president of the ECA association,
- vice-president of the CEENQA association,
- active evaluator of EUA IEP,
- member of various working and interdepartmental groups in quality assurance in higher education.

He regularly attends **international events, conferences, consultations and workshops** of the ENQA, ECA and CEENQA associations and advocates for the enhancement of cooperation with other agencies around the world. During his time as a Director, several formal agreements of cooperation were concluded among our Agency and the related agencies from Poland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Holy See, Bulgaria and Russia.

From 2015 the Agency participated in a **joint initiative** (EIQAS project) of national quality assurance agencies, rector's conferences and higher education institutions HEIs of four countries: Poland (coordinator), Portugal, Bulgaria and Slovenia. The overall goal of this project was to illustrate approaches and options that can be considered as good principles and a source of inspiration to guide other higher education institutions in the design and development of their own IQA systems.

The **Erasmus+ EIQAS project** (titled: Improvement of internal quality assurance systems) is concerned with internal quality assurance (IQA) in higher education and has two objectives: to increase the capacity of HEIs in the participating countries to develop IQA by enhancing their awareness and understanding of Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015 version) and identifying, developing and disseminating good innovative practice in IQA; and to increase the capacity of the participating QAAs in external quality assurance by comparing their methodologies for the assessment of internal quality assurance systems and exchanging and developing good practice in IQA assessment at a broader context. Along with partners from four countries we organized three five-day trainings (the first for the agencies; the second for students-experts; the third for experts) and numerous documents were prepared (guide for internal quality assurance, national and international (country in cross-country) reports regarding the analysis of survey questionnaires, examples of good practices in connection with updated ESG standards, framework for the training of the experts of agencies, comparative analysis of the methods of external quality assessment with internal quality assurance systems). The project has finished in February 2017 (<http://eiqas.com/>).

Since November 2017 we are partnering with members of **E4 Group**, 16 QAAs and other Associate partners in the DEQAR project (Erasmus +, KA3, Forward-Looking Cooperation

Projects (FLCPs) are trans-national co-operation projects aiming to identify, test, develop or assess innovative policy approaches that have the potential of becoming mainstreamed and giving input for improving education and training systems). The main aim of the DEQAR project is the development of a database that will enhance access to reports and decisions on higher education institutions/programmes externally reviewed against the ESG, by an EQAR-registered agency.

Organization and participation at important events		
Event, location	Date	Participants
Consultation of the Association of Medical Schools in Europe (Berlin)	March 2016	Director
Meeting of the executive board of ECA (Paris)	March 2016	Director
Execution of a consultation about the revised ESG and the Student's Guide which represents an intellectual result of the Agency's cooperation in the EIQAS project (Ljubljana)	April 2016	62 experts of the Agency, the Director and 16 members of the staff
ENQA seminar (Budapest)	April 2016	Director
CEENQA meeting (Krakow)	May 2016	Director
Visit by a delegation of teachers from Serbia (at the Agency's premises)	March 2016	Director and the staff
Hosting a seminar with ENQA for new ENQA evaluators (Ljubljana)	September 2016	Director and the staff ENQA staff, 28 participants
Meeting of the executive board of ECA (Paris)	September 2016	Director
EQAF (Ljubljana)	November 2016	Director, members of the Council and the staff
Organization of a dissemination conference of the EIQAS project (Ljubljana)	January 2017	Director and the staff, who participated in the project
CEENQA workshop (Zagreb)	April 2017	Director

Forum and general assembly ENQA (Oslo)	May 2017	Director
Discussion about the amendments of HEA and the criteria of the Council which was organized by the University of Maribor (Maribor)	October 2017	Director and the staff
Meeting of the Association of Higher Vocational Colleges of the Republic of Slovenia (Novo mesto)	November 2017	Director and the staff
Attendance at EQAF (Riga)	November 2017	3 members of the staff
Organization and execution of 4 trainings for the experts of the Agency (at the Agency's premises)	November and December 2017	Director and the staff 65 participants
Participation in the establishment of the Macedonian quality assurance agency (Skopje)	December 2017	Director
Meeting of the executive board of ECA and ECA working groups (Warsaw)	December 2017	Director and the staff

9. COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 3)

We summarize the most important positive findings of ENQA evaluators (from 2015) and their recommendations for the improvement of the work.

The following was listed among the advantages:

- a **recognized, established and progressive role** of the Agency in the Slovenian higher education area;
- **prompt and periodic** (cyclical) **assessment** of institutions, study programmes and colleges;
- **tendencies** for a shift to re-accreditation of institutions and gradual abandonment of re-accreditation of study programmes which is currently reflected in a (too) high number of accreditation procedures and visits at institutions and therefore a too large burden of the institutions;
- **strong development potential** of the Agency in its operation which exceeds the potential observed in other agencies in the European higher education area.

The evaluators mostly recognized the opportunities for improvement in the following:

1. enhancement of the efforts **for a unified understanding and interpretation of the criteria among all stakeholders**, while they simultaneously advised the criteria not be amended too often;
2. publication **of the interpretation of the Criteria**;
3. improvement of the integration of universities/colleges and the **creation of guidelines for the preparation of self-evaluation reports** and accreditation applications;
4. a change of procedures of continuous and further monitoring of quality at institutions with the abandonment of procedure for re-accreditation of study programme and the transition to institutional re-accreditation which shall also be reflected in the preparation of suitable mechanisms for monitoring quality (follow-up);
5. **arrangement of the financing of the Agency from the national budget**, and upon admission to ENQA, a different arrangement of appointment of two members to an 11-members' Council, which are now appointed by the government, for an even greater independence of the Agency.

9.1 ESG Standard 3.1: Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

The Agency constantly verifies the efficiency and applicability of the established external quality assurance system for HEIs and HVCs, thus the accreditation criteria have been amended several times (last time in 2017).

The basic activity and the assignments and procedures of external quality assurance are defined in HEA (Article 51f, Article 51h), the criteria, in the Quality Manual and in the Rules of operation of the Council. The Agency carries out initial accreditations of institutions and

higher education study programmes, evaluations of HEIs in re-accreditation procedures, evaluations of study programmes and evaluations of HVCs. Accreditation and evaluation procedures in higher education are concluded with a decision of the Council to grant (or not) the accreditation to an institution or a study programme, to (not) re-accredit an institution, but could also withdraw the accreditation from an individual study programme. In higher-vocational education, the procedure concludes with an opinion regarding the meeting the standards of quality.

An important new assignment is the regular sample evaluation of study programmes (Article 51t of HEA), intended to advise the institutions in quality assurance and the improvement of quality of the educational, research and professional work as well as of study programmes. The procedure shall conclude with recommendations to institutions/colleges for the improvement of quality.

External stakeholders (institutions, colleges, Rectors' Conference, students, employers...) were actively involved in the amendment of the legislation (HEA-K), which newly regulates the assignments (transition to institutional re-accreditation, sample evaluations, shortening the period for regular assessment from 7 to 5 years, more accurate accreditation and evaluation procedures) and in the creation of new criteria. The coordination was long, there were plenty of meetings with the stakeholders, we considered numerous comments and suggestions. In the next self-evaluation we will be able to assess how successful were our efforts.

The mission of the Agency also reflects the objectives regarding quality assurance.

Involvement of stakeholders in the SQAA governance and work

The Agency's Council consists of 11 members:

- three members are appointed by the Rectors' Conference,
- one member is appointed by a representative association of independent higher education institutions,
- one member is appointed by a representative association of vocational colleges,
- two student members are appointed by a representative organization of students in cooperation with student councils,
- one member is appointed by representative employers' associations by agreement,
- one representative is appointed by representative trade unions in the field of higher education by agreement,
- two members are appointed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the basis of a public call, one of the experts in the field of higher education or quality assurance, who is studying or working in the Republic of Slovenia, and one of the experts in the field of higher education or quality assurance therein; who is studying or working abroad.

As a members of the Agency's Council may not be appointed rectors and vice-rectors, deans, members of the university councils, members of the university members councils, or members of the independent HEI councils, directors of universities, their member and other independent HEIs or other organisations on the field of higher education activity and directors of HVCs.

Evidence:

[SQAA Strategic development for the period 2017 – 2020](#) (in Slovene)

[Report on work and operation in 2016](#)

[Work and financial plan 2017](#)

[Mission, vision, values](#)

9.2 ESG Standard 3.2: Official status

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

The official status of the Agency is evident from HEA (Article 51e.) and the founding document. The Republic of Slovenia founded it as an entity of public law for quality assurance in higher education and with an advisory role in this area.

According to the public authorization, the Agency regulates legal relations on the basis of HEA and decides in individual matters. In executing these tasks, the Agency issues:

- general acts for the exercise of public authority, which are published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia;
- individual administrative acts for deciding on individual public law issues.

Agency was established in 2010 as a non-governmental organization for quality assurance, financed as a direct budget user meaning that it has its own budget.

The Agency is officially recognized as a legal entity of public law, responsible for accreditations and external evaluations of institutions / colleges and study programmes. The Council decides on the compliance of institutions / colleges and their study programmes with the law and the criteria of the Agency.

Evidence:

[Resolution on the Founding of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education](#) (in Slovene)

9.3 ESG Standard 3.3: Independence

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

The status of the independence of the Agency, whose decisions are influenced by no one is evident from HEA; this includes the act on the establishment, the criteria and other legal acts of the Agency. The Agency is thus **autonomous and independent** in its operation. The Agency is a **direct non-governmental budget user**.

The Agency is committed by law to the **principles of professionalism, impartiality, legality and political neutrality**.

The Council is the highest decision-making body of the Agency. The members of the Council operate in a professional, independent and autonomous manner and are not bound in their work by decisions, positions and instructions of institutions which appointed them and other institutions. In carrying out tasks and adopting decisions, they follow the principles of preventing conflicts of interest and of impartiality. For this purpose, they sign a special statement with which they commit to respect these principles.

Independent decision-making and operation of the Agency is guaranteed with properly developed mechanisms for the prevention of the conflict of interests. The experts, in addition to signing the statement about the prevention of conflict of interest before entering the register of experts, declare a potential conflict of interests and partiality in a

considered matter before being appointed to a particular group. After the appointment to a group of experts, the applicant is notified about the structure of the group and has, for the entire duration of the procedure, the possibility to demand an elimination of an individual expert due to partiality or reasonable doubt about his/her professional conduct. The Council shall decide on the request for the recommendation to withdraw an expert.

The same principle applies to members of the Council and technical members of the staff. If it is a conflict of interests, individual members of the Council must eliminate themselves from the discussion and the voting, and the technical members of the staff from the procedures.

Substantiality of a conflict of interest is therefore a reason to eliminate an expert, a member of the Council, a member of the Appeal Committee as well as a member of the staff, and the grounds for appeal.

a) Proposal of the amendments to PAA

In the summer of 2017, MPA prepared a proposal of the amendments to HEA, where it tried to regulate the position of our Agency differently as it is now. The most contentious was the proposal according to which the Agency would no longer be an independent and autonomous body but would be under the ministry competent for higher and higher-vocational education, and the proposal that the government would appoint all the members of the Council. The Agency resisted it, so far, successfully. It shall continue to strive to retain the status of an independent professional body for quality improvement in higher and higher-vocational college, as it must remain an autonomous body in this field now and in the future.

Evidence:

[Commitment of Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education](#)

9.4 ESG Standard 3.4: Thematic analysis

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

Every three years the Agency prepares an extensive thematic analysis of accreditation and evaluation procedures with emphasis on the segments for which it believes that are the most important in that period. At the end of 2013 it published its first systemic analysis based on self-evaluation reports by institutions/colleges and reports by groups of experts. It covers the period from 2010 to 2013. Previous analyses were undertaken by the predecessor of the Agency, the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education (from 2007 to 2009), which enabled it to connect the findings from the previous period of operation in the field of the assessment of quality-assurance systems in higher education.

The Agency finished the systemic analysis where it discusses the external evaluation reports of experts in re-accreditation procedures of institutions, their study programmes, and colleges and self-evaluation reports of institutions/colleges in the period from 2014 to 2017. The Report "Quality in the Slovenian Higher Education and Higher Vocational Education Area in the Period from 2014 to 2017« is publicly available on SQAA website. The analysis offers a statistical and descriptive overview of cumulative results of individual research and represents a transparent introduction into a series of further-oriented

research which shall include more detailed comparative analyses and a research of the results according to individual indicators or groups of filtered information.

Evidence:

[Quality in the Slovenian Higher Education and Higher Vocational Education Area in the Period from 2014 to 2017](#)

9.5 ESG Standard 3.5: Resources

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

a) Financing

In accordance with Article 51.m of HEA, the resources for the operation of the Agency shall be provided from the national budget. Until 2015 the operation of the Agency was mainly financed from the European Social Fund ESF (60%) and partially from the budget of the Republic of Slovenia (40%), and after that the Agency (after strenuous efforts) assured 100 percent financing from the national budget. Annually, there are approximately EUR 1,300,000 provided for its operation which fully suffices for an uninterrupted performance of all activities (*quality assurance and accreditation and evaluation costs, investments and maintenance, salaries of the staff, payment to experts*).

If it was found in previous self-evaluation periods that the operation of the Agency was placed in danger because of the uncertain financing, we can now be secure in having found a resolution to this problem.

b) The premises and the staff

The Agency has leased the premises in the centre of Ljubljana, measuring 900m², which is suited for 30 work positions. In addition to the Director, there are 18 members of the staff working there. Since 2015, all employees have been employed for an indefinite period (before, the majority was employed for a definite period through the project financed from ESF resources), which has certainly improved intrapersonal relationships.

Every employee has the possibility to express his/her opinion at joint meetings, in self-evaluation procedures, at individual annual interviews with the Director, to participate in discussions about proposals and amendments of the legislation and the preparation of important documents and legal acts of the Agency (in the last year, they actively participated especially in the preparation of the new criteria, thematic analysis, establishment and testing of eNakvis).

Once a year, the Director performs individual work interviews with every employee. The objective is to make an assessment and an overview of the work performed in the previous year (also the method of work and the relationships between co-workers), creation of a work plan for the next year and the expected results.

An integrity plan and a Code of Conduct of Civil Servants (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 8/2001), is applied for the staff at the Agency, whose purpose is to develop and retain high professional and ethical standards, to enhance the affiliation to the Agency, the transparency and accountability of its operation and social reputation.

Two departments operate at the Agency:

- the **General Affairs Department** and
- the **Quality Department**.

The most important assignments, in addition to conducting accreditation and evaluation procedures, preparation of reports regarding procedures for the meetings of the Council and the Appeal Committee, decisions about accreditations, opinions regarding external evaluation, offering professional help to the management in staffing and financial issues, resolving legal matters, assignments from the action plan and other permanent assignments, were performed by the staff of the Agency.

c) Information-communication resources

Simultaneously with the creation of the new criteria, electronic application forms (for initial accreditation, re-accreditation, evaluation, international cooperation) were being created in eNakvis. The Agency has regularly visited institutions/colleges and presented the functioning of electronic application forms.

Since eNakvis shall operate in the MPA's information structure (network), which is reasonable due to the automatic transfer of data from various records, thus simplifying the work of mainly the institutions/colleges, but the electronic application forms still cannot be used in practice. In accordance with new European regulation regarding data protection (it entered into force in August 2017), MPA must inspect whether the data in eNakvis are adequately protected or if it is possible to harm MPA infrastructure through the system. In our opinion this has been going on for far too long, of which we have advised MPA several times. Dissatisfaction at the institutions/colleges has increased as they cannot submit the application forms despite the validity of the criteria, an integral part of which are the forms. Therefore, the Council has decided that – should these issues not be resolved by the end of February 2018 – the institutions will be temporarily able to submit the application in another way.

Evidence:

[Report on work and operation in 2016](#)

[Work and financial plan 2017](#)

9.6 ESG Standard 3.6: Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

The Agency regularly assesses its work in several ways which is shown in self-evaluation reports, assessments undertaken by independent international experts, minutes of the meetings of the Council, as well as the regular weekly meetings of the staff with the Director. In 2015, also on the recommendation of international experts, the Agency changes its Quality Manual, a publication which demonstrates self-evaluation procedures, methods of collecting information from internal and external stakeholders, processes of analysis, assessment and planning the Agency's work as well as the conclusion of the circle of quality. The Quality Manual is published on the Agency's website.

In this self-evaluation period – as every year – the satisfaction of the staff was reviewed mainly in individual annual discussions carried out by the Director. There was no special

survey about satisfaction, it is planned for the end of 2018, when there will be more experience with conducting procedures in accordance with new criteria. At the end of 2016, a survey was distributed among the staff about strategic orientations of the Agency for the period from 2017 to 2020.

The annual interview is intended for an overview and assessment of the work of each individual technical member of the staff, total assessment of the realization of objectives and assignments and the total assessment of its performance. The employees can emphasize good and bad practices and the opportunities for the improvement of the work of the Agency. For this self-evaluation period they recognized the following:

a) good practices:

- consistent publication of the reports by experts and the decisions of the Council;
- establishment and operation of the Agency in the international area;
- competences of the all members of the staff;
- suitable participation in the update of HEA;
- active participation in the creation of new criteria;
- regulated employment of all the staff for an indefinite period of time;
- good relationship of the management towards the staff;
- successful completion of the ESF and EIQAS projects;
- very competent student experts;
- concern for the consolidation of the Agency's independence – relationship with MESS and the University of Ljubljana;
- flexible working hours;
- successful conclusion to the audits of the Court of Audit;
- very stable and regular work of the Council, and
- regular training of the experts of the Agency.

b) bad practices or opportunities for improvement:

- reduction of the burden with accreditation and evaluation procedures;
- more equal distribution of work and improvement of the monitoring of the work of the staff;
- too slow and too difficult preparation of e-forms;
- sometimes foreign experts are not involved enough in the assessments;
- the Council should contribute more to the strategic, conceptual and development shifts of the Agency;
- more opportunities for improvement;
- unjustified requests of institutions for a priority consideration of applications.

The Quality Manual shall be revised shortly by taking into consideration new assignments of the Agency and legislative provisions and criteria.

In the next self-evaluation period, the thematic meetings shall continue, where the members of the staff shall have the opportunity to improve the professional conduct of their work. Everyone's cooperation was planned for the discussion of individual application forms, whereby special attention shall be paid to the transition from meeting minimal standards (according to the previous criteria) to a qualitative assessment according to the standards of quality from the new criteria.

Evidence:

[SQAA Quality Manual](#)

9.7 ESG Standard 3.7: Cyclical external review of agencies

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

The Agency undergoes regular external assessment. For the first time, external evaluation was carried out in 2013 because of the entry to EQAR, and for the second time at the end of 2014 because of the admission to ENQA, and is now preparing for an international assessment, anticipated for June 2018 because of the possible renewal of the entry in EQAR and the possible renewal membership in ENQA.

Evidence:

[ENQA Review Report 2015](#)

[ECA and ESU Review Report 2013](#)

10. COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (PART 2)

10.1 ESG Standard 2.1: Consideration of internal quality assurance

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

In accreditation and evaluation procedures, the Agency consistently complies with the criteria which are coordinated with stakeholders and where there is a special emphasis on internal quality assurance of institutions/colleges, which is demonstrated throughout the entire regulation, and especially in detail from application forms.

The Agency's external QA procedures include the assessment of internal QA systems of HEIs according to the standards laid down by the HEA and the accreditation criteria. In re-accreditation and external evaluation procedures, the assessment focuses not only on the organization and functioning of internal QA procedures of HEIs and HVCs, but also on determining progress and development throughout the entire past period of accreditation. In initial accreditation procedures, the assessments focus on the appropriateness of organization and planning of internal QA procedures. The agency also collects and analyses self-evaluation reports of HEIs for the purpose of establishing the state of quality in the higher education area and for the purpose of system wide analyses. According to the accreditation criteria, internal QA systems should cover the evaluation of HEIs' pedagogical and research activities, its resources, development, strengths, weaknesses and the analysis of their achievements.

**Mapping table and detailed explanation how ESG Part 1 is reflected in Agency's criteria for accreditation and external evaluation is attached to this SAR:
Annex 1 – Mapping table ESG (institutional accreditation);
Annex 2 – Mapping table ESG (accreditation of study programme).**

Evidence:

[Criteria for Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes](#)

[Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education](#)

[Manual for experts](#)

[SQAA webpage](#)

[Report on work 2016](#)

10.2 ESG Standard 2.2: Designing methodologies fit for purpose

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

External quality assurance has been defined new in HEA-K, and in more detail in the new criteria. The Agency has reduced the burden of institutions/colleges in accreditation and evaluation procedures and the related costs (in addition to a lower number of procedures also a reduction and simplification of administration electronic application, automatic

transfer of already sent/entered information, more precise and transparent definition of self-evaluation procedures, contents of assessment and thus help and support to institutions/colleges in the improvement of quality – especially in sample evaluations of study programmes – and enabling the institutions/colleges to prove this improvement). All criteria guide towards the improvement of all activities as in the same area of assessment and define different standards of quality and content of its assessment depending on the fact if it is an initial accreditation or re-accreditation.

Clear information is also important as to what is evident mainly from the prescribed reports of the groups of experts and precise explanations in the decisions of the Council.

All external QA procedures follow the aims and objectives set in advance. These aims and objectives refer to assuring, monitoring, encouraging and improving the quality of HEIs, their study programmes and HVCs.

In the first half of 2016, the Council regularly discussed the amendments of HEA and gave remarks to MESS about the amendments right until its enforcement through HEA-K. Many suggestions of the Council, mainly regarding the shift to institutional evaluation and accreditation and evaluation procedures, were taken into consideration by the legislator. Unfortunately, it did not take into consideration the suggestions to regulate the accreditation of dislocated units of institutions, and there is also some lack of clarity regarding the individual accreditation of the new members of a university. The disorder of these issues in HEA caused between MESS and the Agency a different understanding of the competences of the latter (MESS even made complaints that the Agency's conduct was unlawful), and therefore, there were some joint meetings in 2017 to resolve this issue. The Council assessed that without an amendment to HEA or at least a clear interpretation of its provisions it cannot decide on the accreditation of dislocated units abroad nor the accreditation of individual members of a university. At a meeting with the ministry for higher education, and other representatives of MESS in January 2018 it was agreed that MESS shall prepare a written interpretation of the legislative provisions or, based on that, clear instructions for the Agency.

At the end of 2016, the Council appointed a working group for the revision of the Agency's strategy and imposed on the Agency to review the opinions of its key stakeholders by using a survey questionnaire before preparing a strategy. The draft of the survey questionnaire was created in coordination with the members of the working group and the Agency's staff. Finally, the Council was acquainted with it and it also discussed it. The findings of the survey were taken into consideration for the preparation of the Agency's strategy up to 2020. That is also when the NHEP 2011-2020 shall expire.

In addition to deciding on accreditations and external evaluations, the Council devoted plenty of time to the preparation of new criteria, discussing the stakeholders' remarks (mostly institutions/colleges, students, Rectors' Conference), coordinating the criteria with them – also on special workshops – and the adoption of the Criteria. The Rectors' Conference had the most reservations to the new criteria. The Council urged it to offer constructive solutions and invited the rectors to an extraordinary meeting (end of June 2016), where the final version of the criteria was created; they were adopted in July 2017.

Evidence:

[Manual for experts](#)

[Site Visit Protocol](#)

[Criteria for SQAA experts \(2018, in Slovene\)](#)

10.3 ESG Standard 2.3: Implementing processes

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up

The new criteria enable more reliability, transparency, usability and objectivity of the external quality-assurance system. The areas of assessment, standards of quality and the assessment of each individual standard, procedures, applications and attachments are precisely defined for an individual type of accreditation and evaluation. Institutions/colleges have more clear provisions in the criteria as in the old ones.

Compliance with standard 2.3 is especially evident in the procedures of re-accreditation of institutions and evaluation procedures. All procedures are based on self-evaluation reports of institutions/colleges, the integral parts of which are visits by groups of experts, independent reports of experts and recommendations for further monitoring of quality. Reports (their structure) are presented in more detail in ESG 2.6.

Follow-up procedures have been formalized and incorporated in the various procedures and operation of the Agency also by adopting the amendments to the HEA. The transition to institutional evaluation in its essence includes the monitoring of the entire operation of higher education institutions within the accreditation period and also for the future, ie the assessment of educational, scientific, professional activities, services and the assessment of the internal quality assurance system, but there is still great emphasis on the quality of the study programmes. In order to formalize the follow-up procedure, the Agency developed and incorporated (following the HEA) several approaches to its operation, such as:

- Evaluation of a sample of study programmes. Each year, the Council of the Agency determines a set of study programmes that shall be included in the evaluation of a sample of study programmes (of at least 2% of all accredited study programmes). According to the HEA and SQAA criteria, the external evaluation of the study programme is a procedure for assessing the monitoring and updating of studies. The purpose of the evaluation of a sample of study programmes is precisely in the continuous monitoring and counseling to HEIs for the improvement of their study programmes and operations. If a significant violation of the provisions of the HEA and criteria is found in the evaluation of a sample of study programmes, the Council may, on the basis of findings and evidence, introduce an extraordinary evaluation process.
- Periodic monitoring and analysis in the field of higher education. The Agency periodically performs systematic and meta-analyses to monitor the development of Slovenian higher education, while at the same time determining the efficiency of the internal and external quality system, and on the basis of which it proposes measures for improvement.
- On the basis of perceived irregularities (in the process of evaluation of a higher education institution or study programme, anonymous notifications from stakeholders, student complaints, reports of violations of legal provisions and provisions of criteria), the Agency's board may, at any time, introduce the procedure of extraordinary evaluation of both the HEI and/or the study programme.
- Periodic collection and analysis of self-evaluation reports of HEIs and HVCs.
- In the re-accreditation procedure of a higher education institution the Council shall grant re-accreditation for a shorter period, which should not be longer than three

years, if major flaws or inconsistencies have been discovered in their operation or the quality assurance system, and shall set a deadline for its remedy (the HEI action plan is required).

Evidence:

[Criteria for Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes](#)

[Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education](#)

[Criteria for SQAA experts \(2018, in Slovene\)](#)

10.4 ESG Standard 2.4: Peer-review experts

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

An independent assessment by groups of external experts is fundamental in all accreditation and evaluation procedures. In all groups, it is required by law that one member is a foreign expert and one a student. The Agency has been functioning this way all the years since its establishment in 2010.

A constant is the selection of candidates for experts based on the criteria for them, education and training of experts, periodical consultations of experts from the Agency's register of experts and a concern for their independent operation.

To achieve the above mentioned even more consistently, the Agency began to amend the criteria for experts at the end of 2017 by:

- more precisely defining the conditions which must be met by candidates for experts for an individual type of accreditation or evaluation;
- more precisely regulating the selection of candidates for the training of experts and the entry or removal from the Agency's register;
- more precisely defining the assignments (obligations) of experts (continuous improvement of knowledge, compulsory participation at consultations organized by the Agency, a timely preparation of accreditation and evaluation reports);
- defining the structure of the groups of experts depending on the type of accreditation and evaluation.

The new Criteria for Experts of the SQAA are more precise than the previous criteria. It takes into consideration the initiatives by the Council and its committees and working groups and is based on the previous experience with experts in accreditation and evaluation procedures. It regulates the public call and the selection of candidates. It anticipates a new electronic application of the candidates, determines more detailed requirements for entry into the register of experts, changes the method of training, more clearly defines the requirements for appointment and structure of groups of experts according to the type of accreditation and evaluation, as well as the assignments and obligations of experts, such as continuous training, participation at consultations organized by the Agency, and, *inter-alia*, writing relevant evaluation reports.

- An important change in the criteria for the experts shall also be the preparation of candidates for experts where a more responsible role shall be given to members of the staff of the Agency. It will take place in a group of experts in an actual accreditation and evaluation procedure. Before preparing a group of experts and the candidate for collaboration in the accreditation and/or evaluation procedures, in-depth preparatory meetings shall be organized. A key emphasis shall be on the

special features of the accreditation and evaluation procedure, preparation of the experts for the work in a group, assessment of the standards of quality, planning and execution of action in a procedure and taking into consideration the contractual provisions. The contracts for experts shall be supplemented with clauses regarding their professional accountability, commitment to enhance the good name of the Agency, taking into consideration the deadlines for the preparation of the report and ethical work in a group of experts during their appointment.

- The candidate for an expert shall perform all assignments in a group, thus making the training more efficient, and the change shall also shorten the procedure for the confirmation of candidates for experts of the Agency. We have discovered that the process of training of candidates is too long. This is especially true for students-candidates, as the first training and selection was undertaken by SSU, only then were the candidates able to train at the Agency. Since the SSU only organized one training of candidates in average per year, the entry into the register of experts could be delayed for more than a year. The other reason is that the student status of students-experts expires too quickly. On average, the Agency has only approximately 20 students-experts available, which has been significantly insufficient with regard to the recent number of procedures and their duration.

The Agency addresses the candidates for entry in the register of experts through a public call. Applications of candidates are first considered by the Council committee in accordance with the criteria. Upon approval, the candidates are listed for the training for entry in the register of experts. Student candidates are proposed by the Slovenian Student Union (SSU) or through a public call.

The Agency carefully selects foreign experts according to their experience with quality assessment and achievements in the field of research or pedagogical work.

In order to reduce the possibility of a conflict of interests, experts have to sign a confidentiality of information statement and a non-conflict of interests statement before they sign a cooperation contract with the Agency.

The programme for the training of experts was revised several times, but since March 2018, when new Criteria for SQAA experts were adopted, the training for experts is focused only on compulsory practical training (the candidates partake in actual accreditation or evaluation procedures as observers and cooperate with the group of experts and the agency staff).

The agency staff extensively cooperate with the groups of experts in order to assure that the expert reports assess the matter completely and according to accreditation or evaluation criteria, as well as to secure the comparability of the reports. In doing so, the agency staff also consider the periodic recommendations by the Council members and other relevant stakeholders for improvement (also based on survey results), and thus ensure that the review procedures are good and provide proper evidence for the Agency Council.

Evidence:

[Criteria for SQAA experts \(2018, in Slovene\)](#)

[Criteria for Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes](#)

[Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education](#)

10.5 ESG Standard 2.5: Criteria for outcomes

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

The new Accreditation Criteria, Criteria for International Cooperation and the Criteria for Evaluation are even more consistent, they include more precise provisions for the assessment of all standards of quality than the previous criteria, to ensure on the one hand even more consistent, quality and objective assessment of institutions/colleges and study programmes, while on the other hand better informedness of institutions/colleges about the assessment. We took into consideration the findings from previous self-evaluations and the recommendations of international groups of experts in the external evaluation of the Agency. The criteria also represent progress in the assessment of self-evaluation and internal quality assurance of institutions/colleges at all areas of assessment: *operation of institutions/colleges, human resources, students, material conditions, quality assurance and enhancement, modification, update and implementation of study programmes.*

To make the criteria as clear as possible for the institutions/colleges, the detailed provisions on the assessment and the interpretation of individual standards of quality are part of the electronic application forms, the attachments and other documents which must be supplemented in the accreditation and evaluation procedures are also indicated. This way, we aimed to reduce the unnecessary work of institutions/colleges and shorten the time of the preparation of a complete application, suitable for further accreditation and evaluation procedures.

All criteria are published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia and at the Agency's website.

Even though the criteria were presented to stakeholders several times during the creation, also in special workshops, where we created the final decisions together, the Agency has been regularly visiting the institutions/colleges after the adoption of the criteria, presenting them the new information system (eNakvis), work with electronic application forms and responding to questions about the interpretation of the new criteria.

10.6 ESG Standard 2.6: Reporting

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

Accreditation and evaluation reports of experts and the decisions of the Council about the granting of accreditation or re-accreditation and the evaluations are regularly published at the Agency's website. In this self-evaluation period there were 166 reports published at the website www.nakvis.si and (separately) 166 decisions regarding accreditations and evaluations.

Accreditation and evaluation reports as well as the decisions of the Council are available to all interested individuals in a transparent and clear manner. More unification in the reports was achieved by the Agency by using templates for writing reports which are divided into the topics of advantages, opportunities for improvement and inconsistencies and, in addition to the basic information (about the type of procedure, institution/college, analysis

and assessment), also include a summary of findings for an easier and faster overview and its translation into English. The applicant has the possibility to comment on the report, before it becomes final.

In addition to information about evaluations and accreditations, the website offers a schematic overview of the Slovenian higher and higher-vocational education, it promotes institutions/colleges with its base of reports and decisions (the address and external weblink is indicated for each) and offers their spatial distribution in the form of a map for the entire Slovenia.

The website includes a list of institutions and study programmes in the accreditation process, where students and other stakeholders can find credible information about not yet finished procedures. In addition, the Agency advises the students to inquire about the programme's public validity before enrolling. In accordance with the new legislation, the Agency prepares a revised and updated brochure containing basic information about its operation.

All nominated expert shall equally participate in the group of experts. Their assessment shall be autonomous. The findings shall be evident from the accreditation and evaluation report and a report on the transformation of higher education institutions which shall be prepared on the prescribed forms, according to the areas of assessment from the criteria by taking into consideration every quality standard and the provisions for their assessment and statutory provisions. The Agency concludes a cooperation agreement with each nominated expert, before the beginning of their work, where conditions of operation, participation in the group of experts and obligations are defined. The cooperation agreement also provides for the possibility of reducing the fees of an expert in the event of a delay in submitting the report and/or inaction in the group. In case of serious violations of contractual terms, the Council of the agency may delist the expert from the expert register.

Evidence:

[SQAA website](#)

[Criteria for SQAA experts](#) (in Slovene)

10.7 ESG Standard 2.7: Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Every institution has the possibility to appeal against a decision of the Council. They can lodge the appeal to the appeal committee, whose members are independent experts with a completed state law examination and have at least five years of experience from courts (Article 51j of HEA).

The Appeal Committee is appointed by the Agency Council on the basis of a public call. It consist of three members, each member has his / her deputy.

The Appeals Committee decides on appeals against decisions of the Agency's Council in the procedures of accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes. It also decides on appeals against decisions of the Agency's Council on granting consent to the transformation of higher education institutions and changes in study programmes and

the issuing of consent to contracts for the implementation of higher education transnational education.

An appeal may be lodged against the decision of the Agency Council within 30 days of the notification of the Council's decision to the Agency.

The Appeal Committee decides on the complaint within three months of its filing. If the Appeal Committee accepts the appeal, it shall return the matter to the Agency's Council for reconsideration. The decision of the Appeal Committee is final and an administrative dispute is possible against it.

All written decisions of the Agency's Council in the accreditation and evaluation procedures also include instruction on a legal remedy. It provides information on the possibility of appealing to the Council's decision, the conditions for the appeal and the deadline within which the complaint must be sent to the competent authority.

The trend of a small number of complaints by applicants, which began in 2014, continued. The Appeal Committee met every time it received a matter for consideration, namely in March and September 2016, as well as June 2017. It decided on three matters, whereby one matter was considered twice, after being returned it to the Council for renewed decision-making.

In the last self-evaluation period, the Council also followed the recommendations of the Appeal Committee. The Council consistently considered the provisions of a General Administrative Procedure Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 24/06 – official consolidated text, 105/06 – Administrative Dispute Act-1, 126/07, 65/08, 8/10 and 82/13; hereinafter: GAPA) and ascertained the correct and complete factual situation before adopting final decisions. Where necessary, it additionally urged the applicants in written form to supplement the applications, and the groups of experts to issue supplementary opinions, even after they submitted their final reports. The Council also continued the practice of sending the responses of applicants to the reports by groups of experts in the procedures of initial accreditation of study programmes to prepare a potential final opinion which is comparable with the preparation of a final evaluation report in re-accreditation procedures and gives the applicants an opportunity to be considered equally in procedures in accordance with the possibilities given by GAPA.

In all three matters, the Appeal Committee denied the appeals of applicants as unsubstantiated.

The Appeal Committee also denied an appeal against a decision of the Council which dismissed an appeal against a decision regarding an initiation of the procedure of extraordinary evaluation of an institution as unauthorized. The Appeal Committee found that it is a procedure which is initiated *ex officio*.

In the third matter, discussed by the Appeal Committee, the Council denied the request of higher-education teachers for their third-party participation in the procedure of extraordinary evaluation of a study programme. The appellant claimed against such a decision the appeal grounds of the violation of material law from item 1 of paragraph one of Article 237 of GAPA in relation to the violation of the withdrawal of the possibility of participating in the procedure (item 2 of paragraph two of Article 237 of GAPA) and a fundamental violation of the rules of the procedure. The Appeal Committee dismissed all the appellant's indications as unsubstantiated and confirmed the decision of the Council. In this self-evaluation period the Agency did not receive any requests from appellants against the decisions of the Council which were confirmed by the Appeal Committee with which the appellants could use judicial protection.

a) Appeals by applicants

The trend of a small number of complaints by applicants, which began in 2014, continued. The Appeal Committee met every time it received a matter for consideration, namely in March and September 2016, as well as June 2017. It decided on three matters, whereby one matter was considered twice, after being returned it to the Council for renewed decision-making.

In this period, the Council also followed the recommendations of the Appeal Committee. The Council consistently considered the provisions of a General Administrative Procedure Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 24/06 – official consolidated text, 105/06 – Administrative Dispute Act-1, 126/07, 65/08, 8/10 and 82/13; hereinafter: GAPA) and ascertained the correct and complete factual situation before adopting final decisions. Where necessary, it additionally urged the applicants in written form to supplement the applications, and the groups of experts to issue supplementary opinions, even after they submitted their final reports. The Council also continued the practice of sending the responses of applicants to the reports by groups of experts in the procedures of initial accreditation of study programmes to prepare a potential final opinion which is comparable with the preparation of a final evaluation report in re-accreditation procedures and gives the applicants an opportunity to be considered equally in procedures in accordance with the possibilities given by GAPA.

b) Appeals by stakeholders

Stakeholders in higher education, students and higher education teachers, mainly made complaints because:

- of irregularities in the implementation of study programmes (mainly the reduction of contact hours, in some cases even for 25%, which is significant for appeals in previous self-evaluation periods), and
- deprivation of students' rights (representation in the bodies of the institutions, implementation of the practical part of the study programme, inappropriate premises and equipment, employability of graduates).

All appeals and/or complaints of the stakeholders are examined by the Agency's Council and in accordance with the provisions of the HEA and SQAA Criteria it may also reflect in the introduction of the extraordinary evaluation procedure (of HEI or study programme). That is in cases when serious violation of the provisions of the HEA and/or SQAA's Criteria is recognised.

In November 2015, the Council appointed a special committee to consider the initiatives for the introduction of extraordinary evaluation procedures which shall propose to the Council whether or not to introduce such procedures.

The Agency has developed appropriate mechanisms to prevent a conflict of interests. The statement of conflict of interests prevention is also signed by experts before their entry in the register of experts; in addition, they are asked to declare any possible conflict of interests or impartiality in the case assessed before their appointment to the group of experts.

In accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, the same principle applies to the Agency staff. In all cases, the merits of the conflict of interests allegation can be a reason for the exclusion of an expert, a staff member or a Council member from the procedure, and can be a ground for appeal.

After the appointment of a group of experts, the applicant is notified on the composition of the group and may, any time throughout the procedure, request the exclusion of any expert on the grounds of his/her partiality or if there is reasonable doubt in his/her professionalism. The request for the exclusion of an expert is decided upon by the Council.

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

In accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) the decision of the Council may be challenged by appeal (Article 237 of APA):

1. if the material provision was misapplied or not used at the time of issuing the decision;
2. if the factual situation was found incomplete or incorrect;
3. If there are violations of the rules of procedure.

In any event, a material breach of the rules of the administrative procedure shall be deemed to be:

1. if the decision has been issued by a non-legally valid body;
2. if a person who should have been involved as a party or a party to a proceeding has not been granted this option, it is not a case referred to in the second paragraph of Article 229 whether someone who could not be a party appeared;
3. if the party or the party concerned has not been given the opportunity to declare the facts and circumstances relevant to the issuing of the decision;
4. if the parties did not represent the legal representative in accordance with the law, or if the proxy holder did not have the appropriate authority;
5. if the provisions of this Act on the use of the language in the procedure have been violated;
6. if a person has been involved in the decision-making or conduct of proceedings, which should be excluded by law;
7. if the decision can not be examined.

11. INFORMATION AND OPINIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

The Agency's main stakeholder are divided into:

- internal stakeholders including employees, agency management, members of the Council and SQAA experts, although they are not employed at the Agency nor appointed from external stakeholders;
- external stakeholders, of which the most important are students, higher education institutions and vocational colleges, the Ministry of Higher Education, Rectoral Conference, the Community of independent higher education institutions and the Community of HVCs and others (employers' associations, different Chambers, trade unions).

According to the SQAA Quality Manual one of the tools for improving the quality of the Agency's work is the regular survey of all internal and external stakeholders. Employees, members of the council and SQAA experts are interviewed at least once a year, and external stakeholders, such as HEIs / HVCs, at least every two years. The results of the analysis of the surveys are taken into account in the self-evaluation of the agency and the preparation of an action plan or work plan for the next calendar year. The Agency is providing all stakeholders with the findings of the surveys.

The surveys about the execution of external evaluations (for experts, members of the staff at the Agency and external stakeholders) has not yet been undertaken in such a form as in the previous self-evaluation period. In the previous self-evaluation periods we also surveyed the experts of the Agency and HEIs / HVCs (they are surveyed every two years) in addition to the staff and the members of the Council who are surveyed every year. Even though the survey questionnaires were slightly changed (from 2013 till 2015), the findings can still be compared with those obtained in previous self-evaluation periods, as the content, except for more detailed questions about the self-evaluation of the Agency and risk factors, has not been changed significantly. The detailed analysis of the surveys from previous years is part of the previous SARs and publicly available on [Agencies website](#).

After 15 December 2016, when HEA-K entered into force, the accreditation and evaluation procedures as well as some tasks of the Agency were changed quite significantly. The conducting of surveys is planned again for the end of 2018, when it shall be possible to assess the operation according to new criteria, eNakvis and the newly established advisory role of the Agency.

Instead, the Agency has prepared a survey questionnaire about strategic priorities and basic contextual dilemmas of the Agency which are important for its further strategic development before preparing a new strategy. We wanted to gain insight into the average of conception and the expectations of our stakeholders according to interest groups, towards quality, its assurance and enhancement. We especially wanted to identify the expectations which they have towards the work of the Agency and its strategic development in the future, particularly in relation to:

- expectations towards the mission of quality in higher and higher vocational education;
- orientation of quality towards the processes of its assurance and its final results in the form or achievements and recognitions;

- impact of quality on the entrance or existence in the publicly valid higher education area and its impact on competitiveness and the value added of the higher education activities;
- thinking of quality as achieving the minimal standards, achieving the above-average and achieving excellence and superiority;
- deliberation about which groups and objectives should quality serve;
- deliberation about which activities should the Agency strategically position itself towards;
- level of strictness of the standards of quality;
- and legal regulation and standardization of quality standards.

The survey was filled out by the staff at the Agency, members of the Council; it was sent to rectorates, dean's offices and to official addresses of all Slovenian institutions/colleges. It was also sent to the collected addresses of all students' councils of institutions/colleges as well as the Student Organization of the University of Primorska, the Student Organization of the University of Ljubljana, Student organization of the University of Maribor and the Slovenian Students' Union (hereinafter: SSU) as well as to the addresses of students' clubs available online.

The survey was filled out by 521 stakeholders. The findings of the survey have shown, without any pronounced deviations, that the Agency should focus on the enhancement of its advisory role and as help to HEIs/HVCs in the development of quality and towards performing development tasks and the preparation of professional analysis. Some groups of stakeholders explicitly emphasized the enhancement of the professionalism in carrying out procedures and assessments, especially the experts of the Agency and the members of the Council. The enhancement of professionalism is also highly ranked by the representatives of the boards of directors at institutions and colleges.

Evidence:
[SQAA SAR for 2015](#)

12. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS REVIEW(S) AND AGENCY'S RESULTING FOLLOW-UP

In March 2015, the Agency became a full member of ENQA. By achieving that it obtained its second very important strategic objective (the first was the entry to European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education; hereinafter EQAR, achieved in fall 2013), which was set to be achieved by 2016 and one of the objectives from the National Higher Education Programme (NHEP2011-20).

12.1 Main findings of previous ENQA reviews

First we would like to summarize the most important positive findings of ENQA evaluators and their recommendations for the improvement of the work. Among the advantages are mainly:

- a recognized and established role of the Agency in the Slovenian higher education area;
- up-to-date and periodic (cyclic) assessment of higher education institutions (institutions) and study programmes as well as higher vocational colleges (colleges);
- tendencies to transition to the re-accreditation of institutions and a gradual abandonment of re-accreditations of study programmes which is currently reflected in a (too) high number of accreditation procedures and visits at institutions and therefore a too big of a burden of institutions;
- strong developmental potential of the Agency in its operation which exceeds the potential seen in other agencies in the European higher education area.

The ENQA evaluators recognized the opportunities for improvement in:

- a uniform understanding and interpretation of accreditation criteria among all the stakeholders, but at the same time they advised that the criteria should not be changed too often;
- the change of the procedures of constant and further monitoring of quality at institutions by abandoning procedures for re-accreditation of study programmes which shall be reflected in the preparation of suitable mechanisms for monitoring quality (follow-up); and
- the regulation of the financing of the Agency from the national budget.

12.2 Resulting Follow up

The ENQA evaluators did not determine full compliance of the Agency with seven standards, for six standards (standards: 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 3.1, 3.5 and 3.7) the group found substantial compliance, for one (standard: 3.4) it found partial compliance. In addition, these are standards which were applicable until the update in May 2015, but it is possible to compare them contextually with the new ESG (2015).

Actual progress in improving the quality of the Agency's internal and external QA system is clearly evident also from the self-evaluation reports since its inception.

Below we address the key findings for the not fully compliant standards and the resulting follow-up.

ESG 2.3 CRITERIA FOR DECISIONS

ENQA recommendations:

The Agency should enhance its efforts to make the understanding of the criteria firmer and develop and publish its interpretation.

Newly implemented SQAA Criteria (for accreditation and external evaluation of HEI and study programmes; for international collaboration in higher education; for external evaluation of HVCs) are taking into consideration also the recommendations of the ENQA evaluation and include the interpretation of the criteria in the form of instructions and guidelines for the:

- *applicants to fill out the application form adequately,*
- *SQAA expert to conduct the assessment and prepare the report professionally,*
- *Council members to make legitimate, fair and transparent decisions in the accreditation and evaluation procedures.*

The new forms shall be part of the information system, and the instructions for the interpretation of individual areas of assessment are their integral part. This ensures the stakeholders a transparent and clear explanation for the filling out of accreditation and external evaluation forms.

As already mentioned above, the new criteria of the SQAA Council and the accompanying application forms, which were, prior the adoption on the Council, aligned with the waste majority of all internal and external stakeholders, are formed in order to facilitate the understanding of individual standards of assessment and criteria and to offer adequate level of transparency.

ESG 2.5 REPORTING

ENQA recommendations:

The group of evaluators finds that it is not entirely clear how the improvement of internal quality assurance systems at institutions / colleges is encouraged.

Even though it could, on the one hand, be an inconsistency with this ESG standard, because the Agency does not publish negative decisions in initial accreditation procedures, the group finds that there is not public interest for such information as the programmes shall not be implemented.

In accordance with the provisions of the HEA (c51.t Article) The Agency carries out annual evaluations of a sample of study programmes in order to provide advice to higher education institutions in ensuring the quality of study programmes.

A sample of study programs is determined by the Agency's Council. Higher education institutions may submit a proposal for the inclusion of individual study programmes in the sample.

Evaluation of a sample of study programmes is determined in the Agency's annual plan so that at least 2% of accredited study programmes, which are carried out at HEIs in the Republic of Slovenia, are held every year in the sample.

The Agency publishes on the website a list of study programmes that are included in the sample for the evaluation of study programmes.

The procedure starts with the decision of the Council of the Agency to start the process of evaluation of a sample of study programmes sent by the Agency to HEIs that carry out study programmes. The process concludes with recommendations to higher education institutions to improve the quality of the study program. A more detailed procedure for evaluating a sample of study programs is adopted by the Agency Council (Criteria for accreditation).

ESG 2.6 FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

ENQA recommendations:

Generally, there are no formal tools for the follow-up of further measures to improve quality assurance system in re-accreditation procedures. The only measure pointing at the appropriateness of the follow-up procedures is the request of the Agency for the institutions to submit action plans based on the findings from external evaluations before a final decision is made regarding re-accreditation. Even though the Agency does a lot of activities which enable it to monitor the development and improvement of quality of institutions / colleges. This includes the collections and analysis of annual self-evaluation reports of institutions / colleges, numerous re-accreditation procedures of study programmes, where the fulfilment of criteria at an institutional level is also assessed.

The transition to institutional accreditation will, in addition to reducing the number of procedures, enable more comprehensive and extensive assessments on an institutional level as well as at the level of programmes (combined with procedures of evaluations of a sample of study programmes); at the same time, it would guarantee enough space (and time) for a successful development and implementation of the model of continued monitoring of quality (systematic analysis of annual self-evaluation and external evaluation reports; SQAA self-evaluation procedures).

ESG 3.1 USE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

ENQA recommendations:

The group of evaluators commended the Agency for its good work it performed since being established, despite the obstacles it faces because of the applicable legislation. It is evident from the report that the applicable HEA is hindering a fully balanced system of the quality assurance system of the Agency which would encourage the development of internal quality assurance systems at institutions / agencies as well as the optimal execution of all the activities of an external quality assurance system (assessments). The proposal of the Agency, according to which the system would be balanced is the transition to institutional re-accreditation. This would require legislative changes.

With the new Higher Education Act, the recommendations of ENQA were adopted and enacted.

ESG 3.5 MISSION STATEMENT

ENQA recommendations:

The group finds that the mission, vision and strategic directions of the Agency are clear, public and appropriate. Key statements and strategic directions would also need to be translated into the business plan of the Agency. Room for improvement is seen in the sharing of responsibilities and the work with relevant stakeholder which would need to be better done in official documents of the Agency.

Evidence:

[Report on work and operation in 2016](#)

[Work and financial plan 2017](#)

ESG 3.7 EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE CRITERIA AND PROCESS USED BY THE AGENCIES

ENQA recommendations:

The improvement of the integration of institutions / colleges and the creation of guidelines for the preparation of self-evaluation report and accreditation applications is recommended, which the Agency has already been planning and preparing.

At this point, we emphasize that in the process of harmonizing new criteria and application forms with external stakeholders, we discussed also the possibilities of preparing guidelines or recommendations to HEI/HVC for writing self-evaluation reports. We have found that most higher education institutions want to maintain autonomy in improving existing internal quality assurance systems, and therefore the guidelines for the preparation of self-evaluation have been incorporated into SQAA Criteria and their standards. The fact is that the Slovenian higher education area is highly diversified, both in terms of the size of individual institutions, in terms of the number of study programmes per institution and in the number of students, therefore it is more important that the institutions focus on improving their existing internal quality system, through enhanced advisory support of the Agency.

ESG STANDARD WHERE THE OPERATION OF THE AGENCY WAS FOUND TO BE PARTIALLY COMPLIANT

ESG 3.4 RESOURCES

ENQA recommendations:

Because the Agency has the status of a direct budgetary user, it makes agreements regarding its own financial sustainability directly with the ministry competent for finance, not the ministry, competent for higher education. In accordance with Article 51.m of HEA, the resource for the operation of the Agency shall be ensured from the national budget. Currently, the operation of the Agency is mainly financed from the European Social Fund (60%) and partially from the budget of the Republic of Slovenia (40%). ESF resources are anticipated until the end of August 2015, therefore all financial, human and material resources are guaranteed until then.

The group of evaluators finds that the current annual resources sufficed for its entire operation, also for the developmental and analytical activity of the Agency. It is concerned about the high percentage of financing, coming from ESF resources. If look at that from a staffing point of view, it means that 14 out of 24 employees has an employment agreement for a definite period. Even though the general commitment of MESS is to offer support to the Agency in the negotiations with the ministry of finance, the group of evaluators believes that the financial position of the Agency is endangered. It has therefore decided that the operation of the Agency is only partially compliant with this ESG standard. The improvement of the integration of institutions / colleges and the creation of guidelines for the preparation of self-evaluation report and accreditation applications is recommended, which the Agency has already been planning and preparing.

In accordance with Article 51.m of HEA, the resources for the operation of the Agency shall be provided from the national budget. Until 2015 the operation of the Agency was mainly financed from the European Social Fund ESF (60%) and partially from the budget of the Republic of Slovenia (40%), and after that the Agency (after strenuous efforts) assured 100 percent financing from the national budget. Annually, there are approximately EUR 1,300,000 provided for its operation which fully suffices for an uninterrupted performance of all activities (quality assurance and accreditation and evaluation costs, investments and maintenance, salaries of the staff, payment to experts).

If it was found in previous self-evaluation periods that the operation of the Agency was placed in danger because of the uncertain financing, we can now be secure in having found a resolution to this problem.

13. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • international recognition of the Agency • arranged long-term sustainable financing of the Agency • good relationships between the staff at the Agency • transparent operation of the Agency (publication of all criteria and regulations, guidelines, analyses, SERs, reports by experts and the decisions of the Council) • intensive cooperation and coordination with stakeholders in the preparation of the criteria • advisory role of the Agency • active participation of the Director and the staff in international associations, working groups and projects (EIQAS, EQAR, ECA) and applications for new projects (within the Erasmus+ programme and other programmes for financing) • enhanced international cooperation and connecting with other quality assurance agencies from abroad • rational management of public resources (joining together accreditation procedures) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eNakvis is not yet available for applicants in the production environment • inadequate informatization of the Agency (dispersed databases, difficult transparency, regular English translations) • not enough experts from certain deficit areas and students-experts • unequal work burden and distribution of accountability • insufficient in-depth work of some experts
Opportunities (for improvement)	Threats

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• implementation of eNakvis• reorganization of the work at the Agency in accordance with the changes of the Agency's operation and its strategic objectives and guidelines• integration of the mechanisms for self-evaluation of the Agency and the monitoring of the satisfaction of stakeholders (in eNakvis)• establishment of a more efficient system for notifying stakeholders through eNakvis (about important events, amendments to legal acts of the Agency and the activities of the Agency)• development of the new advisory role of the Agency, especially through annual sample evaluations and systemic analyses• reorganization of the Agency's website (also friendly for people with disabilities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• potential legislative amendments, the enforcement of which would make the Agency from a formal-legal standpoint a public agency which would seriously endanger its independence and autonomy of the Agency• unpredictable amendments to legislation which endanger the stable operation of the Agency demand constant adjustments from the stakeholders• computer safety of information
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14. CURRENT CHALLENGES AND AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

An overview of the tasks performed from the action plan for 2016 and 2017 has shown that the most difficult aspects to achieve were those planned activities which are linked to the amendments of the legislation and those the realization of which depends on external circumstance over which the Agency has no direct influence. HEA-K has impacted the systemic operation of the Agency, therefore, the priorities in this self-evaluation period were the adoption of a new strategy of the Agency, active participation in the amending of HEA, the preparation, adoption and publication of new criteria, transition to institutional evaluation, implementation of eNakvis and cooperation with stakeholders.

14.1 Accreditations and external evaluations

Objectives and assignments	Findings in the self-evaluation
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<p>Improvement of the quality of accreditation procedures and decisions</p>	<p>At the end of 2015, a systemic amendment to HEA began preparing; therefore, the Agency intensively participated with its proposal with the legislator and the stakeholders to prepare a consistent proposal of the act which would define accreditation and external evaluation procedures more clearly and would also eliminate the detected flaws of the then valid act. Since HEA has been amended several times, and there were no amendments afterwards, we organized coordination meetings in the first half of 2016 to adopt an interpretation of the old criteria and improve management and decision-making in procedures. After the enforcement of HEA-K, the working group of the Council prepared a proposal of the new criteria in cooperation with the members of the staff. The work was intensive, and it spanned several months. To cooperation to prepare coordinated proposals of the Criteria were invited all external stakeholders (institutions /colleges, students, Rectors' Conference, MESS) and the experts of the Agency.</p> <p>After the adoption of the criteria, meetings with applicants were organized where we introduced them to the use of new electronic application forms and the operation of eNakvis and answered to contextual questions.</p> <p>In the future, we shall enhance the cooperation with external stakeholders. For the operation of the employees conducting procedures at the Agency to be as unified as possible we shall organize joint trainings and joint discussion of the initial applications according to new criteria. We shall thus ensure a unified understanding of the provisions of HEA-K and the criteria and reduce the possibility of different interpretations of the standards of quality and the rules of procedure.</p>
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14.2 Internal quality assurance system

Objectives and assignments	Findings in the self-evaluation
Reorganization of the work at the Agency	Systemic changes in the operation of the Agency have linked even more closely the performance of tasks in the area of accreditation, internal and external quality assurance system, the criteria and other regulation of the Agency with the implementation of eNakvis. We are certain that a close cooperation of all internal stakeholders in the preparation of the new criteria (staff, members of the Council, experts), in the training of experts and the implementation of eNakvis shall be reflected in a more unified work of the staff, the experts and the Council. The precise provisions in the criteria for the assessment of the standards of quality which we also designed together, along with external stakeholders, shall also contribute to that. The change of the operation of the Agency dictates a reorganization of the work at the Agency which shall be necessary to successfully and efficiently implement the new tasks according to HEA-K (international cooperation in higher education, changes of institutions, introduction of the European approach, up-to-date monitoring of the informed changes of obligatory elements of study programmes, electronic applications, registers and data for eVŠ...).
Calibration of work and training of the staff and the members of the Council	

14.3 External quality assurance system of the Agency

Objectives and assignments	Findings in the self-evaluation
Organization of meeting for the presentation of the revised ESG and the update of the Accreditation Criteria	<p>Within this activity two meetings were organized in 2016, the first for the presentation of the updated ESG for the experts of the Agency and the second for external stakeholders. It was shown that a different interpretation of ESG is possible and a lot of energy in the preparation of the new criteria was therefore put in to the linking of the standards of quality from the new criteria of the Agency with ESG. A link between the criteria and ESG was clearly presented to stakeholders at coordination meetings.</p> <p>The Agency finds that the activities for a more unified understanding of the criteria and ESG should be continued in the future; it is a permanent assignment of its work.</p>

<p>Execution of trainings of candidates for experts</p>	<p>33 new experts were entered in the register in this self-evaluation period (5 of them following an invitation of the Council). We find that the training of candidates for experts, especially of students, was not efficient enough and lasted too long. In the proposal of the new criteria for experts we significantly shortened the process of training new candidates; it is replaced by a previous training programme with an intensive "preparatory meeting", during which the candidates will be acquainted with the legislation and the criteria, the procedure, work in a group of experts and their commitments, and the participation (as a candidate) in the evaluation meeting.</p> <p>The new criteria for the experts of the Agency have not yet been adopted (they are expected to be adopted at the March meeting of the Council). The new training programme and its efficiency and applicability shall be monitored promptly. If we discover that the preparedness of the experts for participation in the procedures to be worse than expected, we shall introduce corrective measures and modify the programme, if necessary.</p>
<p>Execution of workshops for the experts of the Agency</p>	<p>Based on the new criteria, four trainings of the experts of the Agency were organized in November and December 2017. 65 experts participated at all trainings. Additional four trainings shall be organized in 2018.</p> <p>It has been found that close cooperation with the experts is key to establish the trust between them and the Agency and that it has a positive impact on the implementation of accreditation and evaluation procedures.</p>

<p>Enhancement of the Agency's advisory role</p>	<p>The advisory role of the Agency has enhanced in the last self-evaluation period mainly due to close cooperation with stakeholders at various areas of operation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - joint meetings with stakeholders to coordinate the provisions of the new criteria; - cooperation with applicants in the implementation of eNakvis and electronic application forms and the workshops for the improvement of the user experience; - presentation of the new criteria (consultations, meetings); - participation in the amendments to the legislation (HEA and PAA). <p>It should be emphasized that the Agency continuously plays an advisory role in the sense that it advises the institutions/colleges in the use and interpretation of the regulations of the Agency, explaining accreditation and evaluation procedures, as well as in other areas (transfer of good practices at home and abroad). In the enhancement of the advisory role of the Agency in the next self-evaluation period, we see an opportunity to enhance the need among all stakeholders for a qualitative assessment of the standards of quality and the awareness that only such an assessment can enable the development and demonstration of quality of all the basic activities of institutions/colleges.</p> <p>It is a permanent assignment of the Agency which we shall continue to develop, for example, by organizing additional workshops and consultations for different types of stakeholders.</p> <p>Public questions regarding higher education is regularly answered via Agency's e-mail: info@nakvis.si</p>
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14.4 Criteria and other regulations

Objectives and assignments	Findings in the self-evaluation
Strategy of the Agency until 2020	At the end of 2016, the Council adopted a new middle-term strategy of the Agency until 2020. We find this assignment to be achieved.
Proposal of new criteria for accreditation and external evaluation of institutions and study programmes	<p>In 2017, the Council adopted new criteria for accreditation, criteria for international cooperation and discussed the proposals of the criteria for external evaluation and the criteria for experts. We find that the task has been completed and that the criteria with the corresponding application forms precisely specify the standards of quality in individual areas of assessment. It is clearly defined what is being assessed in an individual standard: determined are clear instructions for the filling out of the application forms and in individual cases; help is indicated and examples are provided. The provisions regarding the assessment of the standards of quality which are indicated in the application forms for easier work and understandability at the same time represent the interpretation of the criteria and eliminate a flaw of the previous criteria.</p> <p>The criteria also show an enhanced role of the Agency in the development of the quality of institutions/colleges and self-evaluation, with precise provisions about what should be evident from it. The guidelines for writing self-evaluation reports were denied by the institutions as an interference in their autonomy which is guaranteed to them by the constitution and the law.</p>

14.5 Information system and communication

Objectives and assignments	Findings in the self-evaluation
Establishment of a user-friendly information system (eNakvis)	<p>Despite our efforts we find that eNakvis is not yet available for the applicants (in the production environment). The final security risks for hosting on MPA servers are being eliminated.</p> <p>Despite the adopted criteria, the applicants still cannot submit accreditation and evaluation applications; therefore, if the submission of the application still would not be possible through eNakvis by the end of February 2018, the Council decided that until the final implementation of the system it shall accept applications with the forms prescribed in the criteria on portable data carriers. The transfer of the data from the applications into the system shall be taken over by the Agency until the implementation.</p> <p>We find that all efforts should be put into a prompt and comprehensive implementation of eNakvis, which shall also include the mechanisms for the monitoring of the satisfaction and the self-evaluation of the Agency. In the initial phase, a working information system should be ensured for the applicants, and in the second phase it will be installed with self-evaluation elements.</p>

From the overview of the achievement of tasks it is evident that the priority actions which were set in the Self-Evaluation Report for 2015 and the Action Plan for 2016 and 2017 (adoption of a new strategy, more clear criteria and application forms with a more detailed arrangement of the procedures) were considered.

In addition to the new Accreditation Criteria, the Criteria for International Cooperation and a template of the Criteria for the Evaluation of Colleges and the Criteria for Experts were created. The criteria consider the new ESG.

The priority action "preparation of the guidelines for SER of institutions/colleges" was achieved differently as anticipated (special guidelines were replaced by detailed provisions for the assessment of quality and the self-evaluation of institutions/colleges in the criteria). The advisory role of the Agency was enhanced; it was linked to the creation of the new criteria and electronic application forms, as well as the analytical and development activity through the systemic analysis.

Not enough was done mainly in the field of the reorganization of the work at the Agency and the training of candidates for experts – the latter was continued in this self-evaluation period for only the candidates who have completed the first part of the training in the previous self-evaluation period. eNakvis is also not yet available in the working environment. Although plenty has been done in this area, it has been developing the entire self-evaluation period in accordance with the creation of the new criteria.

14.6 Preparation of an Action Plan for the following self-evaluation period

Among the key actions that should be considered in the preparation of the Action Plan for 2018 are the following:

- preparation for the external evaluation of the Agency for the renewal of the membership in ENQA and the entry to EQAR, external assessment of the Agency and consideration of the findings of the international group of experts;
- implementation of eNakvis into the production environment of MPA (continuing the cooperation with stakeholders, help in filling out electronic applications or their use in practice, help with potential ambiguities in the interpretation of the provisions about meeting the standards of quality from the criteria, introduction of electronic applications for colleges...);
- preparation and implementation of the initial sample evaluation of study programmes (at least 2% of accredited study programmes annually);
- reorganization of the work at the Agency: determination of competences and accountability of the members of the staff upon taking into consideration of the modified external quality assurance system and the new assignments which were determined for the Agency by HEA-K (also the management of the "register" of institutions/colleges and study programme, other records and providing information for eVŠ, arranging and publishing professional and scientific titles);
- updating of the manual for experts or the preparation of another document with emphasis on the development of conceptual starting points of the quality of the study, pedagogical work and the research and its assessment;
- revising of the protocol for the visits to institutions/colleges;
- training of candidates for experts of the Agency in accordance with the new criteria;
- maintaining and improving the professionalism of the Agency's work: continuing with consultations and workshops in accordance with the assessment and decision-making according to new criteria;
- arrangement of databases and improvement of the notification of stakeholders.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CEENQA – Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

CeQuInt – a project intended to develop the methodology for the assessment of the quality of internationalization

ECA – European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education

eNakvis – information system of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

ENQA – The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ESG – Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

ESU – European Student Union

EIQAS – project Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance System

EQAR – The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

eVŠ – Record-keeping and analytical information system for higher education in the Republic of Slovenia

SER – Self-Evaluation Report of the Agency

SSU – Slovenian Students' Union

TNE – transnational higher education

HEA – Higher Education Act

PAA – Public Agencies Act

ANNEXES

Annex 1	Mapping table ESG (institutional accreditation)
Annex 2	Mappinfg table ESG (programme accreditation)
Acts	
Internal acts of the Agency	
Annex 3	Quality Manual
Annex 4	Report on Work and Operation of the Agency in 2016
Annex 5	Work and financial plan 2017
Annex 6	SQAA Strategic development for the period 2017-2020 (in translation)
External acts of the Agency	
Annex 7	Criteria for accreditation and external evaluation of HEIs and study programmes (2017)
Annex 8	Criteria for international cooperation (2017)
Annex 9	Criteria for SQAA experts (2018) (in translation)
Annual reports	
Annex 10	SAR for 2015
Annex 11	SAR 2016 - 2017 (original, according to SQAA Quality Manual)
Annex 12	Report on the Quality in Slovenian Higher Education and Higher Vocational Education in the Period from 2014 - 2017