SELF-EVALUATION REPORT OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION for 2013
Self-evaluation report was written by: Klemen Šubic, Tatjana Debevec and Jernej Širok, M.Sc.

Survey analysis for 2013 was prepared by: Alenka Braček Lalić, Ph.D. and Aleksandra Hanc.

All of the Agency staff, members of the Agency Council and the Director of the Agency participated in the preparation of the self-evaluation report.

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1. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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

**CeQuInt** – This Project intends to develop a methodology to assess the quality of internationalisation

**CHERS** – Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia

**ECA** – European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education

**ECApedia** – Web application which aims to bring together the knowledge helpful in multiple higher education issues and with a specific focus on quality assurance.

**EEEP** – ECA Expert Exchange Platform

**ENQA** – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

**EQAR** – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

**ESF** – European Social Fund

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

**ESU** – European Students’ Union

**eVŠ** – Register and Analysis Information System for Higher Education in the Republic of Slovenia

**HEA** – Higher Education Act (not to confuse with Higher Education Area)

**HEI** - Higher Educational Institution

**HVC** - Higher Vocational College

**IS-NAKVIS** – Information system of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

**JOQAR** – Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded.

**MULTRA** – Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes

**PVEA** - Post-Secondary Vocational Education Act

**R&D** – Research and development

**SER** – Agency's Self-Evaluation Report

**SQAA** – Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

**SSU** – Slovenian Students Union

**TNHE** – Transnational Higher Education
2. MISSION, VISION, VALUES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE AGENCY

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

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

Values

![Values Diagram]

Strategic objectives of the Agency for 2011-2016 are:

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

Priority objectives for 2011-2013 are:

- transformation of the quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education;
- establishment and development of the quality assurance system of the Agency;
- participation in the development of higher education and higher vocational education in Slovenia.
For achieving the strategic objectives and their evaluation, the Agency's self-evaluation is highly important because it allows self-reflection and provides opportunities to specify recommendations and measures for the improvement of the internal as well as the external quality assurance system.

3. AGENCY'S DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION

3.1. Overview of Slovenian Higher Education System

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.

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.

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.

(The above text of 3.1 was taken mainly from Eurypedia - Eurydice)

3.2. 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.

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 (June 2014), a total of 924 study programmes are accredited and entered in the register of higher education institutions, 457 of which are of the University of Ljubljana, 211 of the University of Maribor, 100 of the University of Primorska and 19 of the University of Nova Gorica.

3.3. Students in the academic year 2012/2013

There were 90,622 students enrolled in all higher education courses at universities and at independent private higher education institutions in Slovenia in the academic year 2013/14 in tertiary education, which is 7,084 fewer than in the academic year 2012/13 and almost 6,300 students fewer than in the academic year 2011/12, as well as over 25,084 fewer than in the academic year 2006/07. In previous years, the decline was mainly due to the decrease in the number of part-time students. In 2013/14, 13,251 students were enrolled in higher vocational colleges, which is very comparable to the enrolment in 2012/13 and 1,000 fewer than in the academic year 2011/2012.

The data are obtained from Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (June 2014).

3.4. Historical development of the Agency (NCQHE, OHE, CHERS, SQAA)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>In 1996, the National Commission for the Quality of Higher Education (hereinafter: NCQHE) 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
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functioned through three senates (for accreditation, evaluation and habilitation).

2007

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.

2010

Based on 2009 HEA amendment, the 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 (hereinafter: ESG standards):
- 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.
3.5. Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures

This chapter gives a schematic presentation of the procedure of initial accreditation and the procedure of re-accreditation / external evaluation of a higher vocational college:

![Diagram of the initial accreditation procedure]

Figure: Overview of the initial accreditation procedure
Accreditations and external evaluations are part of the external system of quality assurance in higher education and higher vocational education. They are the fundamental...
activity of the Agency on which quality assessment of a higher education institution as a whole, an individual study programme or a higher vocational college is based.

**Initial Accreditation or Re-Accreditation** is granted for the maximum period of seven years. The accreditation procedure includes self-evaluation, an assessment and a report prepared by the expert group, and the decision of the Agency Council on granting the accreditation. Before the adoption of the founding charter, the founder must obtain a decision on accreditation of a higher education institution, while study programmes become certified upon being granted accreditation.

**Self-evaluation**, carried out by a higher education institution or a higher vocational college is based on systematic collection, analysis and assessment of data on educational, scientific-research or artistic and professional activities; provision of study programmes; students and graduates; international cooperation; and other activities of an institution or a college. On the basis of these findings, institutions and colleges adopt measures for further development and improvement of the quality of study programme provision and their overall performance. The self-evaluation report must be made public.

**External Evaluation** means overall assessment of quality of a higher education institution, a study programme or a higher vocational college. It is characterised by a mandatory site visit of an expert group which establishes progress and development achieved since the latest accreditation or evaluation. In higher education it is a part of the re-accreditation procedure, while in vocational higher education it is an independent procedure.

**Extraordinary Evaluation** is a procedure initiated by the Agency Council in cases of clear grounds for believing that major breaches occurred in the operation of a higher education institution or a higher vocational college or in the provision of a study programme. Extraordinary evaluation is carried out by the same procedure as external evaluation and ends with a decision by the Agency Council on re-accreditation or with an opinion on the achievement of statutory standards.

The full details of the above procedures are elaborated in the Manual for Experts of the Agency (75 pp). The protocol of the visit is given as Site Visit Protocol.

### 4. ABOUT THE AGENCY'S SELF-EVALUATION IN 2013

The Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency) was evaluated for the first time in the beginning of 2013 by the international group of evaluators composed of renowned foreign experts (hereinafter: review panel). With the external evaluation, another important set of ESG standards was met, namely that from the second and the third part which trustworthy agencies have to comply with. The findings of the international review panel and, above all, the opportunities for improvement of the Agency’s operation were of valuable assistance in developing and assessing its quality in 2013, and will also be in the future.

For the first time, this self-evaluation report is prepared for one calendar year only, which is in line with the commitment of the Agency to prepare reports regularly every year.

#### 4.1. The Purpose and Objective of Self-evaluation
The Agency strives for continuous improvement of its operation and thereby for constant development and improvement of the quality assurance system of higher education and higher vocational education in Slovenia as well as for strengthening of quality culture.

The main purpose of self-evaluation is:

1. to check the level of overall performance and efficiency of the Agency’s operation;
2. to evaluate the achievement of the Agency's priority strategic objectives specified for 2013, particularly in comparison to 2012;
3. to improve the Agency's operation according to the second and third part of ESG standards in compliance with the findings and recommendations of the international review panel.
4. to identify opportunities for the improvement of work.

The objective of self-evaluation is to improve the Agency's internal quality assurance system. Namely, the pursuit of this objective is also improving the external quality assurance system, which leads to closing the quality loop and raising the awareness of quality culture. On the basis of self-evaluation results, measures for improvements will be prepared and adopted, (and included in the Action plan) which will be taken into account in the Agency’s work plan for 2014.

4.2. Self-evaluation Implementation

Self-evaluation is based on the annual action plan prepared on the basis of findings in the previous self-evaluation. For the year 2013, it was prepared later (in the second half of 2013) than the year earlier (in February 2012) by the self-evaluation working group composed of five Agency’s staff (appointed in November 2011 and extended in 2013). Such a decision was made due to the external evaluation of the Agency – the international review panel carried it out in the end of April 2013 – because the Agency also wanted the recommendations for improvement of its operation according to ESG standards to be taken into account in its action plan. They mostly related to the first and the fourth thematic field.

The action plan for 2013 specifies the tasks according to the following thematic fields:

1. revision of internal acts (finalisation of the revision of the Criteria for accreditation and external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 95/2010, 17/2011, 51/2012, 6/2013 and 88/2013; hereinafter: accreditation criteria) and revision of the Quality Manual;

2. training of experts (preparation of uniform templates for drafting reports by groups of experts and of the site visit protocol for groups of experts as a supplement to the Manual for Experts revised in 2013, finalisation of the revision of trainings of candidates for experts as well as their organisation and provision);

3. information system (preparation of tender documents for the selection of the IS-NAKVIS provider, implementation of public procurement procedures and selection of the provider, a list of the Agency's procedures and activities ...);

4. internal quality assurance system (preparation of the Agency’s meta-analysis for the period 2010–2013, publication of final evaluation reports of groups of experts, preparation for the application for membership in the European
Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), harmonisation of the staff);

5. external quality assurance system (the plan and implementation of measures or tasks in order to apply for full ENQA membership, substantive analysis of accreditations and external evaluations ...).

A useful tool for assessing the Agency’s operation are questionnaires used for obtaining opinions and measuring the satisfaction of all stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education (higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, experts, the Agency staff, the Agency Council members, external stakeholders). The questions are associated with accreditation and evaluation procedures and criteria, site visits and the work of groups of experts, as well as the quality of work of the staff, the Agency management and the Agency Council members. Compared to 2012, the contents of questionnaires remained unchanged.

The analysis of questionnaires (Annex 1) was of great assistance in drafting this self-evaluation report and in comparing the results of the analysis with those obtained in the previous self-evaluation. The analysis of the answers to the questions provided a wider perspective on the quality and efficiency of the Agency’s operation; our aim was to create a feedback loop in monitoring the satisfaction of stakeholders with the Agency’s operation.

In preparing the self-evaluation report, findings from the Report on Work and Operation of the Agency for 2012 and the first three months of 2013, information on the operation of the Agency obtained at meetings with various stakeholders, monthly Agency Council sessions, conferences and through participation in national and international projects and inter-sectoral groups, etc. were taken into account.

The implementation of activities defined in the action plan indicates that the Agency successfully accomplishes the priority strategic objective set by 2013, i.e. the establishment and development of the quality assurance system. Great progress in this field was made in a very short period of time, i.e. in the last two years, since the Agency began to carry out tasks for the accomplishment of this strategic objective only in 2012.

Since this strategic objective does not only require the establishment of the Agency's quality assurance system but also its continuous development, it was already pointed out in the previous self-evaluation report that the Agency's operation should be evaluated at the annual level while every year's findings and recommendations for the improvement of the Agency's operation need to be taken into consideration and on this basis, annual action plans need to be prepared, deadlines for implementation set, responsible holders appointed and development and progress promptly monitored.

4.3. Structure of the Self-evaluation Report

The self-evaluation report contains:

1. evaluation of the Agency's internal quality assurance system or fundamental areas of its operation;
2. evaluation according to parts two and three of ESG standards, taking into account findings from the previous self-evaluation and recommendations from the report of the international review panel;
3. assessment of the achievement of priority strategic objectives of the Agency set by 2013.
Aside from the introductory parts presenting the vision, mission and strategic objectives of the Agency as well as the overview of Slovenian higher education system, the historical development of the Agency, the brief overview of accreditation and evaluation procedures, and the purpose, objective and implementation of self-evaluation, the self-evaluation report consists of the following chapters:

- Chapter 5 briefly presents the development and operation of the Agency in 2013.
- Chapter 6 is devoted to evaluation according to ESG standards, particularly pointing out the areas where the Agency's operation has improved and taking into account the recommendations of the international review panel and findings from the previous self-evaluation report (2010–2012).
- Chapter 7 contains the assessments of the achievement of the Agency’s strategic objectives set by 2016 with an emphasis on priority strategic objectives in 2013 or performed tasks from the action plan, and recommendations for the improvement of the Agency's operation.
- Chapter 8 contains the SWOT analysis.

In the annexes to the report, the following is presented: the analysis of opinions (of all stakeholders on the Agency's operation), legal framework, internal and external acts of the Agency, annual and other reports.

5. DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF THE AGENCY in 2013

5.1. Membership and active participation in international organisations

The Agency inherited from the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia (CHERS) full membership in the European Consortium for Accreditation; hereinafter: ECA (consortium), and full membership in the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – CEENQA. The Director of the Agency was elected as the Vice-President of CEENQA and as a member of the Board of ECA in 2014.

In 2013, the Agency accomplished an important strategic objective, i.e. entry in the European register of trustworthy agencies (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education – EQAR). Besides, it also signed the accession statement to join the MULTRA project (Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes) within the ECA Consortium and successfully renewed its membership in ECA. The most important events leading to the accomplishment of these objectives are presented in the table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>February-April 2013</th>
<th>Preparation for external evaluation and the visit of the review panel:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- preparation of all important documents: the self-evaluation report for the period 2010–2012, the Report on Work and Operation of the Agency for 2012, the Business Report for 2012, the presentation brochure of the Agency, and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- translations of the above-mentioned documents into English; apart from that, also the translation of the new Agency's Manual for Experts which was made in autumn 2012; of reports on work and operation of the Agency for every year since the establishment of the Agency, business reports, the Quality Manual, etc.;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- harmonisation of the site visit schedule, selection of interviewees, representatives of all stakeholders;</td>
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informing of external stakeholders on the purpose of external evaluation, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 22, 23, and 24, 2013</td>
<td>A three-day visit of the international review panel consisting of prof. M. Socha (PKA-Poland), R. Heusser, Ph.D. (ECA), M. Frederiks, Ph.D. (NVAO-the Netherlands), and A. Presacariu (ESU).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2013</td>
<td>Renewal of ECA membership</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2013</td>
<td>Report on compliance with ESG standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2013</td>
<td>Report on compliance with the conditions for joining MULTRA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 October 2013</td>
<td>Application of the Agency for entry in EQAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 December 2013</td>
<td>Signature of the accession statement to join the MULTRA project in The Hague, the Netherlands. This is an ECA project participated by 12 agencies or members. All of them agreed with the Agency's accession to the MULTRA project.</td>
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</table>

5.2. Structure of the Agency and a brief overview of bodies and organisational units in 2013

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 tasks of the Agency are defined in Article 51f of the HEA (Official gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No32/2012-UPB7, 40/2012-ZUJF, 57/2012-ZPCP-2D, 109/2012).

In its operation, the Agency is primarily focused on the following areas:

- accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges;
statutory and implementing acts;
experts, trainings, conferences;
cooperation with stakeholders and the general public;
international cooperation.

Five activity areas are included in the action plan for 2013:

1. revision of internal acts (Quality Manual, accreditation criteria);
2. training of experts;
3. information system (IS-NAKVIS);
4. internal quality assurance system;
5. external quality assurance system.

Considering the short period since its approval (September 2013), the implementation of tasks from the action plan has been successful. The Agency:

1. started revising the Quality Manual (field 1);
2. prepared a comprehensive proposal of the revision of accreditation criteria and a proposal of urgent revision in light of modifications of HEA (field 1);
3. revised the training programme for candidates for entry in the Agency’s register of experts (field 2);
4. prepared the site visit protocol for higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges;
5. carried out two trainings for candidates for entry in the Agency’s register of experts in line with the revised programme (field 2);
6. organised and carried out the annual conference for experts (field 2);
7. prepared uniform templates for writing reports of groups of experts and instructions for completing the templates (field 2);
8. reached the final phase in the preparation of tender documents for the selection of information system (IS-NAKVIS) contractor and is about to carry out the public procurement shortly (field 3);
9. carried out its self-evaluation for 2013 (surveys, analyses of questionnaires, analyses of Council sessions, review or records and databases) and prepared draft self-evaluation report (field 4);
10. conducted a system-wide analysis of the state of quality in higher education and higher vocational education which was published on its website (field 4);
11. carried out coordination meetings of staff members in the Quality Department (field 4).

5.2.1. **Agency Council as the first-instance decision-making body**

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 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 9/2011; hereinafter: evaluation criteria), criteria for entry in the register of experts (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 95/2010, 17/2011 and 22/2012); hereinafter: criteria for 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).

In 2013, the Council held 15 sessions in total; 11 were regular, 3 were held by correspondence and one was constitutional due to the expiry of mandates of six Council
members. The Council mostly decided on accreditations in higher education and external evaluations in higher vocational education; together it adopted 476 decisions in 2013.

Decisions in accreditation and evaluation procedures

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

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

The Council adopted 150 accreditation decisions in 2013:

Accreditation was granted to:

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

Initial accreditation was granted to 32 (90 %) assessed study programmes. Most of the study programmes were granted re-accreditation in September 2013 when the initial accreditation expired after 7 years. In case of 13 decisions, the Council granted re-accreditation for the period shorter than seven years (hereinafter: shorter period) and imposed deadlines for the applicants to remedy the stated deficiencies. Four of these matters are undergoing the appeal procedure. After reconsideration based on appeals, 7 decisions of the Council were annulled and 7 programmes were granted re-accreditation for 7 years.

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

• provision of the study programme was not in line with the accredited state of affairs;
• insufficiently developed scientific-research activity in the field of the study programme at the level of the HE institution or at the level of holders;
• unstable personnel structure either in a sense of appropriate staffing or in terms of inadequacy of holders or providers of the study programme;
• learning objectives and competences are not adapted to the level of the study programme;
• outdated contents of the study programme.

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

The Council re-accredited 16 higher education institutions for the full period whereby two instances involved the transformation of a higher education institution (i.e. from professional college into a faculty). Two higher education institutions were re-accredited for a shorter period primarily due to the following deficiencies:

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

Accreditation was not granted to:

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

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

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

Reasons for rejected accreditation of higher education institutions were primarily:

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

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

• inadequate practical training;
• inefficient or formally inadequate internal quality assurance system;
• inconsistency of institution’s organisation (composition of bodies) with regulations;
• inadequate integration with the environment and cooperation with the business sector.

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

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

In 2013, the number of procedures for re-accreditation of study programmes increased considerably in comparison to 2012. The main reason is that accreditation of the
increasing number of study programmes that were among the first to be revised according to the Bologna process was expiring. The Council also adopted its first decisions related to the recording of transnational higher education (2 contracts for transnational higher education –TNHE– were recorded) and decided on a relatively large number of appeals and repeated procedures in comparison to 2012.

**Processing of appeals**

a) Applicants' appeals
In 2012, the Council referred 13 cases in appeal procedures to the Appeal Committee (11 less than in 2012). In line with the recommendations of the Appeal Committee, before the adoption of final decisions in matters where assessment of the actual situation was more demanding, the Council strived for correct and complete assessment of the actual situation also by convening oral hearings, by additional calls to the applicants to supplement their applications, etc. In order to ensure the applicants equal treatment in the procedures, it introduced the following practice in the procedures of initial accreditation in line with the possibilities provided by the General Administrative Procedure Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 80/1999, 70/2000, 52/2002, 73/2004, 22/2005-UPB1, 119/2005, 24/2006-UPB2, 105/2006-ZUS-1, 126/2007, 65/2008, 47/2009 Constitutional Court decision: U-I-54/06-32 (48/2009 corr.), 8/2010):

- sending the reports of groups of experts in the procedures of initial accreditation of a higher education institution in response to applicants;
- sending the reports of groups of experts in programme accreditation procedures for the preparation of a potential additional opinion, which is comparable to the preparation of the final evaluation report in re-accreditation procedures.

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

The number of appeals was relatively large in 2013. Although the Council in its old and new composition was presented the report on the decisions of the Appeal Committee, followed the instructions it wrote in its decisions on appeals in individual accreditation matters, and tried to follow the established practice in accreditation and evaluation procedures, it was often unable to adopt negative decisions in matters where, based on the evidence, the sufficient level of quality was not ascertained, which was mainly due to the accreditation criteria and vague legislative provisions in the **HEA** (regarding human resources, scientific-research work in masters’ study programmes, integration with the environment). On the other hand, vague criteria were precisely the reason for appellants to accuse the Council several times of arbitrariness in adopting decisions.

b) Appeals by stakeholders
Appeals by higher education stakeholders, particularly students and higher education teachers, were associated with violations in higher education institutions. Irregularities were mostly reported with regard to provision of study programmes:

- inadequate execution of practical exercises;
- provision of contact hours contrary to the accredited state;
- inadequate qualification of higher education teachers or irregularities in habilitation procedures.

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

The Council discussed several times the revision of accreditation criteria, criteria for transnational higher education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 18/2012 and 38/2013; hereinafter: TNHE criteria), criteria for experts and the proposals to amend the HEA. In the first half of 2013, draft fundamental revision of accreditation criteria was prepared. However, in June 2013, the ministry responsible for higher education decided to amend the provisions of HEA governing the Agency's operation. The amendments also include the transition to institutional accreditation. Therefore, the Council decided to wait with the fundamental revision of the criteria until the entry into force of amendments to HEA.

Regardless of the announced amendments to HEA, the Council amended the accreditation criteria twice (these were necessary corrections) in 2013, namely:

- in January due to the amendments to HEA from December 2012 (harmonisation with new provisions related to re-accreditation);
- in October due to clearer definition of criteria in procedures of re-accreditation of study programmes.

However, since the announced amendments to HEA do not seem to be adopted any time soon, the Council decided at the end of 2013 to amend the criteria in accordance with some self-evaluation findings, presented in Chapter 4; the amendments were to be made in the beginning of 2014.

In 2013, the Council also harmonised TNHE criteria, the fundamental implementing regulation governing transnational higher education, with the amendments to HEA.

Deciding on Agency's experts and their training programme

a) training programme for candidates for entry in the register of experts

In the autumn of 2013, the Council:

- addressed and approved the revised training programme for candidates for entry in the register of experts. The goals of the revised programme are comparable to the goals in the previous one (candidates acquire competences for working in groups of experts, reviewing documentation (applications with evidence), visiting HEI/HVC and writing reports), but much more emphasis is put on practical education with concrete examples (examples from "real" accreditation procedures). The novelty is the second part where candidates are obliged to participate either in a site visit. On the basis of successful completion of training, the opinion of a staff member and the group of experts, the Council decides on his/her entry in the register;
- confirmed again that the Slovenian Student Union (SSU) continues to train student candidates, which is a condition for their training at the Agency.

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

b) entry in the register of experts

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

c) appointment of expert groups

In 2013, the Council appointed 110 groups of experts for assessments in accreditation and evaluation procedures. Some groups assessed several study programmes at a time due to combined procedures. Most appointments took place in the beginning and in the end of 2013 minding that the students are present at HEI/HVC.

Addressing internal acts and strategic documents

In the beginning of 2013, the Council participated in the preparation for the first external evaluation of the Agency. It approved:

- Agency’s self-evaluation report for the 2010–2012 period;
- Report on Work and Operation of the Agency for 2012;
- the modification of the Agency’s strategy;

and addressed

- Agency’s presentation brochure;
- revised Manual for Experts;

In the second half of 2013, after successful external evaluation of the Agency, the Council considered and approved the Agency’s action plan for 2013 in which recommendations of the international review panel were taken into account along with findings from self-evaluation. In the end of 2013, it approved the meta-analysis of the state of quality in higher education and higher vocational education.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

In satisfaction questionnaires (Annex 1), stakeholders rated the Council’s work variously. External stakeholders see the need for more equal treatment of applicants, independence of the Council members and greater impartiality in decision-making. Relatively low rates were also given to the duration of accreditation procedures, which is comparable to the rates given to the duration of procedures in the analysis of questionnaires from 2012 (Annex 1 to SER 2010–2012).

On the other hand, members of the Council believe that the Council is an independent and professional body. Nevertheless, the statement in the questionnaire that all stakeholders are treated equally was rated lower. The opinion concerning the Council improved in comparison to survey results from 2012; namely, the statement that the Council enjoys trust of all stakeholders was rated even lower in that survey (Annex 1 to SER 2010–2012).

The Council was rated relatively low by the Agency staff. They see opportunities for improvement primarily in the increased efficiency of the Council’s sessions, in more responsible adoption of decisions, in acting within the limits of Council’s competences and in showing greater respect for their work. The staff had already pointed this out in the previous survey (Annex 1 to SER 2010–2012).
Also, work of the Agency’s staff was rated worst by the Council members. They see opportunities for improvement in better reports on applications for accreditation prepared by the staff for the sessions; they believe the Agency staff should prepare relevant reports of groups of experts in time; if required, they should request the reports to be supplemented. Council members believe that tasks, competences and responsibilities of the staff should be defined more clearly in order to ensure uniform, transparent and professional operation in all cases. Nevertheless, they rated the staff slightly higher than in the 2012 survey (Annex 1 to SER 2010–2012).

We also observe that in 2013, the Council strived to provide high quality in dealing with matters in accreditation and evaluation procedures. It tried to maximise the quality of prepared session materials on which its decisions were substantiated, in relation to which it also gave several recommendations and instructions to the staff. It considered all necessary and additional evidence in the procedures in accordance with the principle of unfettered consideration of evidence (Administrative Procedure Act). To achieve improvements, templates for report writing by the staff were amended and certain actions for more transparent deciding on matters were also introduced (more active participation of Council members and the staff in writing substantive reports and establishing the actual situation); however, we observe that certain difficulties still occur in practice, hindering optimal operation of the staff and professional and transparent decision-making by the Council.

Opportunities for improvement: training of the Council members, coordination meetings between the Council members, the Director and the staff, definition of the procedures for professional and transparent decision-making by the Council.

5.2.2. Appeal Committee as the second-instance decision-making body

The Appeal Committee is appointed by the Council on the basis of public call. It is composed of a chair and two members. Every member has an alternate. It works in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Appeal Committee.

In 2013, the Appeal Committee held 4 sessions and decided on eleven matters. Their decisions were as follows:

- in six cases, the Appeal Committee dismissed the appeal (and thus upheld the decision of the first-instance body);
- in nine cases, the appeal was upheld, the challenged decision annulled and the matter returned to the Agency Council for readjudication;
- in one case, the appeal was rejected.

In cases where the Appeal Committee upholds the appeal, it returns the matter to the Council for readjudication in accordance with the provisions of HEA. The decision of the Appeal Committee shall be final; however, an administrative dispute may be initiated against it.

From an overview of cases, it can be established that in the majority of cases the appellants asserted all three grounds for appeal referred to in the first paragraph of Article 237 of the Administrative Procedure Act. The decisions were therefore challenged for the following reasons:

- alleged violations of substantive law rules;
- allegedly incorrect or incomplete finding of facts, and
- alleged violations of procedural rules.

Opportunities for improvement pointed out by the Appeal Committee:
In its decisions, the Appeal Committee emphasised on several occasions the importance of one of the fundamental principles of administrative procedure, i.e. the principle of substantive truth. The Council will be able to adopt its decision only after a thorough examination of each piece of evidence and all evidence as a whole, and on the grounds of success of the overall procedure, and will clearly state its reasoning in the decision. In this respect, it is also important that in case the application is incomplete or unclear, the applicant is required to supplement it. The call to supplement the application must be clear.

5.2.3. Director

The duties of the Director are laid down in Article 51i of the HEA. The Director represents and acts on behalf of the Agency, organises and manages the activities and operations of the Agency and decides on the labour law rights of the employees. He attends to implementation of the Council’s decisions, whereby he may not interfere with accreditation and external evaluation decisions, and carries out other tasks in accordance with law.

On 13 March 2013, the Council appointed the new Director of the Agency, Ivan Leban, Ph.D., who replaced the acting Director Tatjana Debevec at the managing position on 2 April 2013.

The Director is an experienced higher education teacher, full professor, former vice-dean and vice-rector of the largest Slovenian university. He also has several years of experience in external evaluations and accreditations of universities in Slovenia and abroad (in Turkey, Romania, Portugal, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, Montenegro). He carries out this work partially through the EUA IEP (European University Association – Institutional Evaluation Programme).

Apart from attending to regular performance of the fundamental activity of the Agency, which includes a large number of accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions and study programmes, his efforts by the end of 2013 were particularly directed at further integration of the Agency in international education area and cooperation with stakeholders. In his activities, he primarily focused on three areas:

a) International cooperation

The Agency actively participated in CEENQA and ECA projects. He has also been establishing contacts with quality assurance agencies in Poland, Romania, Lithuania and the countries of former Yugoslavia.

He constantly pursued the important strategic objective – full membership in ENQA – by actively striving for improved recognisability of the Agency in Slovenia and abroad, by contributing to various conferences, inter-sectoral groups, workshops and discussions and by actively following the development of higher education quality assurance system at home and abroad, and reporting about it to the Agency staff at regular weekly meetings.

b) Cooperation with higher education stakeholders

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

c) ensuring suitable working conditions in the Agency

Upon the commencement of his term, the Director introduced regular brief weekly working meetings with all staff members. They are intended for brief exchange of information and coordination of future work. In the end of 2013 and in the beginning of 2014, he carried out annual work interviews with all Agency's employees.

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

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

According to the opinion of the Council members (Annex 1), the Director's cooperation with the Council is good; he also competently represents the positions of the staff. He effectively represents the Agency in the public. Through personal visits to higher education institutions he demonstrated a new, fresh approach to cooperation with external stakeholders, which was especially commended by the Agency Council. The success of such an approach to cooperation was confirmed by the results of the analysis of surveys on the satisfaction of stakeholders (Annex 1); according to external stakeholders' opinion, the Agency's management pays close regard to the Agency's reputation and enjoys their trust.

On the other hand, the staff emphasized that more decisive management of the Agency is expected. The findings are also based on the analysis of surveys on the satisfaction of the staff (Annex 1) which show that general organisation of the Agency and organisation of work of the staff were rated slightly lower than other aspects of the Agency's operation. Nevertheless, the given value is higher than in the survey analysis from the self-evaluation report 2010–2012, where the organisation of the Agency and organisation of work of the staff was rated with the average value of 2 (on a scale of 1 to 5).

According to the analysis, some staff members believe their workload is too high in comparison with their colleagues. Organisation of work in the sector they are employed in and involvement in the management of the Agency was also rated low by the staff in the previous survey on the satisfaction of the Agency staff (Annex to SER 2010–2012).

The work at the Agency is also obstructed by the uncertainty in the group employed through the ESF project which adversely affects the motivation of the entire Agency staff and the participation of individual staff members.

Although fundamental work processes at the Agency - conducting of accreditation and evaluation procedures - are well organised, the Council directly intervened several times, bypassing the Director, and imposed obligations on the staff in relation to the preparation of session materials and the conducting of procedures.

Occasionally communication noise, the lack of instructions and insufficient monitoring of progress can be observed in carrying out various activities; as a consequence, efficiency of the staff's work depends on their personal motivation, enthusiasm, loyalty and professionalism.

Opportunities for improvement:

We recommend that more efficient organisation and monitoring of work of the staff is ensured at the Agency. The workload of the staff should be more adequately and evenly
distributed by redistribution of tasks. According to our findings, additional work of the staff was adequately rewarded by the Director regardless of the above-stated rate in the survey analysis; however, we don’t see this as a long-term solution.

We also see opportunities for improvement in more precisely specified instructions, procedures and work methods, more efficient monitoring of progress and adequate training and harmonisation of the staff.

5.2.4. General Affairs Department and Quality Department

a) General Affairs Department

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.

b) Quality Department

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.

Individual staff members prepare minutes of the Council sessions, take care of public relations, reply to various questions by stakeholders about the Agency’s operation, interpretation of criteria, procedures, they substitute the Director during his absence, help distributing accreditation applications, prepare proposals for constituting groups of experts, keep records prescribed by law, attend to the archives, maintain the Agency's web site and participate in working and project groups of the Council. For the Council members, they prepare materials for decision-making and proposals or drafts of the criteria or other Agency acts required to carry out self-evaluation of the Agency, they collect and prepare proposals of candidates for entry in the register of experts. Most of them were also involved in the implementation of the action plan. Some staff members are actively involved in international development projects as representatives of the Agency. Such projects include ECApedia, Crossroads, MULTRA, JOQAR, CeQuInt and EEEP; they also participate in various working and inter-sectoral groups at the national level (e.g. Bologna experts, Slovenian Qualifications Framework).

Apart from conducting accreditation and evaluation procedures, preparation of reports on the procedures for the Council sessions and accreditation decisions and opinions on external evaluations, the most important tasks carried out by the Agency staff include:

- self-evaluation report of the Agency for the period 2010–2012;
- Agency’s presentation brochure;
- tasks related to the visit of the international review panel;
- revision of the training programme for candidates for entry in the register of experts (completed in the autumn of 2013);
- two trainings of candidates for entry in the register of experts according to the new programme (October, November 2013 and January, February 2014);
- annual conference for experts (18 December 2013);
- site visit protocol for groups of experts;
- new uniform templates for writing reports of groups of experts and instructions for completing the templates;
- systematic reviewing of reports of groups of experts on the recommendation of the Council and the external evaluation ECA/ESU;
- meta-analysis titled "Quality in the Slovenian Higher Education and Higher Vocational Education Area in the Period from 2010 to 2013";
- active participation by lectures in training of student experts at SSU, training of internal evaluators at private higher education institutions, at the conference of the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges and other conferences of external stakeholders (strategic conferences, quality assurance conferences), etc.;
- participation in international projects; the most important ones are presented in the table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in projects</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Qrossroads.</strong> The main aim of the project is to present qualifications granted within state-approved or accredited European higher education institutions and study programmes in the form of a register. These qualifications are presented from the perspective of the higher education system which includes the information on national quality assurance and accreditation bodies and bodies for recognition of acquired qualifications.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ECAPedia.</strong> It attempts to combine the useful knowledge from all aspects of quality assurance systems in higher education. It is composed of two modules, the first relating to the training of European quality assurance experts and the other to the quality of joint study programmes. The project is currently being developed.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MULTRA.</strong> Within the JOQAR project, the Agency became a member of the MULTRA project group in December 2013.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>JOQAR (Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded):</strong> the Agency was a coordinator of one of the largest pilot accreditation procedures with a general aim of facilitating of accreditations and recognition of Erasmus - Mundus programmes (and joint study programmes in general). The Agency participated in the steering group and in the working group. In March 2013, it prepared the first accreditation report according to JOQAR methodology; based on this it adopted the decision on accreditation of a joint masters' study programme which was later jointly approved and recognised by other participating quality assurance agencies. Besides, it also participated in a working group which convened in Madrid in February 2013 and in Ljubljana in October 2013.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CeQuInt (Certificate for Quality of Internationalisation):</strong> the purpose of the project, selected in the framework of Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus); Erasmus Multilateral Projects in September 2012, is to improve and promote the internationalisation process in higher education, and to develop a methodology to measure internationalisation at both, programme and institutional levels. Successful evaluation will lead to the European internationalisation certificate. The Agency participates in the steering group; in 2013, it participated in the development of pilot methodology for training of experts in Vienna and carried out all organisational procedures for the evaluation of a study programme which will be carried out in March 2014 at the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana. The evaluation with the international group of experts in the field of higher education internationalisation will not be intended for assessing quality standards aimed at accreditation or re-accreditation, but for assessing the standards of internationalisation quality and awarding the certificate. In March</td>
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2013, it also hosted a steering committee meeting which was convened in Ljubljana.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

The analysis of surveys from 2013 showed that the staff are satisfied with work they perform and that their cooperation with experts is good. They rated lower the Council’s attitude towards them while they also expect clearer organisation and more decisive management of the Agency. They would like to have a clearer understanding of what is expected from them at work. The findings of the analysis are comparable to those from 2012 (Annex 1 to SER 2010–2012).

The quality of work of the Agency staff and their attitude towards the applicants was rated among the highest by external stakeholders (Annex 1). Cooperation with the Agency and with the staff was rated very high by Agency experts. The findings of the analysis are comparable to those from 2012 (Annex 1 to SER 2010–2012). However, in some opinions, stakeholders expressed concern regarding the staff who are allegedly limited in providing applicants with information about the procedures.

Work of the staff was rated worst by the Council. According to the Council’s opinion, they should improve reports on applications or accreditation and evaluation procedures which they prepare for the sessions.

The Council’s remark was already taken into consideration. The Quality Department prepared more transparent templates for writing reports which include short instructions. They were approved by the Council at the first January session in 2014.

Apart from coordination at regular weekly meetings and meetings related to the tasks in the action plan, the staff met several times at coordination meetings where they exchanged practices and opinions on:

- the manner of calling the applicants to supplement applications and write decisions;
- compliance with the criteria for material conditions in higher education institutions;
- proceeding in case of major irregularities in external evaluation of higher vocational colleges;
- assessment of distance learning;
- assessment of branch units; and
- assessment of TNHE.

The staff began to collect all Council decisions in one place in order to enable more efficient overview.

Opportunities for improvement:

The staff should continue with the practice of coordination meetings and refresh and review the coordinated findings. The staff should come to agreement on how to unify the passing of information on the procedures to the applicants, while the Director should publicly inform the stakeholders on behalf of the Council about which information can be provided to the applicants by the staff and in which cases.

Minutes of coordination meetings are available to all staff members. However, since the discussed topics are rather detailed and frequently complex, the Quality Department staff should examine the recorded practices more often.
6. COMPLIANCE OF THE AGENCY’S OPERATION WITH ESG STANDARDS

Full membership in ECA needs to be renewed every five years. The condition for membership renewal is successful external evaluation of the Agency carried out by ECA according to its own evaluation criteria, ECA Code of Good Practice (hereinafter: ECA Code of Good Practice). Therefore, experts in the field of quality assurance and a representative of the European Students’ Union (ESU) were appointed to the international group for external evaluation of the Agency, while the Agency was assessed in accordance with the ECA Code of Good Practice as well as in accordance with the ESG standards. The international review panel visited the Agency between April 22–24 2013. During this time it conducted interviews with all internal and external stakeholders of the Agency, while one day it also observed the implementation of external evaluation of study programmes at the Faculty of Agriculture and Biosystemic Science, University of Maribor. After the assessment, it prepared two reports:

a) the first one in accordance with the ECA Code of Good Practice for the purposes of the renewal of ECA membership and the signature of the accession statement to join the MULTRA project, and

b) the second one in accordance with the ESG standards for the purpose of entry of the Agency in EQAR.

Extension of ECA membership is of crucial importance to the Agency because it participates in various ECA projects as a full partner: Qrossroads, ECApedia , JOQAR, etc. The report on compliance with ESG standards analyses compliance of the Agency’s operation with 16 standards from sections 2 and 3 of ESG standards and is published on the Agency’s website (http://test.nakvis.si/sl-SI/News/Details/163). It is evident from the report that the Agency is fully compliant with seven standards, substantially compliant with eight standards and partially compliant with one standard. Non-compliance in the Agency’s operation was not established by the international review panel.

The result of successful international external evaluation and operation of the Agency in Slovenian as well as in European higher education area was – apart from the renewed ECA membership and the entry in EQAR – signature of the accession statement to join the MULTRA project, which is the synonym for high level of trust among the agencies responsible for the quality in higher education, on 11 December 2013 in the Hague. This trust is based on successful cooperation and the assessment of accreditation procedures of MULTRA signatory agencies. The objective of MULTRA is not to repeat these procedures in different joint study programme partner states, but to monitor the procedures of the agencies included in the MULTRA project in order to avoid larger differences and thus enable mutual recognition of accreditation decisions of these agencies. MULTRA ensures that a single procedure is conducted in accreditation of joint study programmes. The opinion on the inclusion of an individual agency in this project is prepared by at least two agencies which already participate in the project, while the accession is finally approved by all signatories to the project. In our case, the opinion was prepared by PKA (Polish accreditation committee) and NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders).

It is evident from the evaluation report on the accession to the MULTRA project (hereinafter: MULTRA report) that accreditation criteria, procedures and practical experiences in Agency’s operation or the Agency’s method of work do not differ considerably from other agencies participating in the MULTRA project. It is evident that in accordance with legislation in force, the Agency carries out accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions (public as well as private) and study programmes as well as external evaluations of higher vocational colleges. The international review panel observes in the MULTRA report that accreditation procedures
in Slovenia are more oriented towards the assessment of education process and not so much towards the assessment of learning outcomes.

In the MULTRA report, the international review panel commends the high quality of the Agency's documents, particularly the Manual for Experts which provides thorough guidance in preparation, assessment, execution of external evaluation and writing of joint reports. It sees well-defined obligations and responsibilities of the Agency, involvement of all stakeholders in the procedures of adopting and amending of the Agency's acts, the efficient training programme for candidates for entry in the Agency's register of experts and preparation of meta-reports (meta-analyses) as an advantage. In the report, it emphasises high-quality of the work of groups of experts in external evaluations and equal inclusion of students in the assessments. It sees opportunities for improvement in a larger number of foreign (independent) experts in groups of experts because it believes that conflict of interests in appointing the mentioned groups is difficult to avoid due to the small size of Slovenian higher education area. A larger number of foreign experts would decrease the possibility of conflict of interests in external evaluations. On the basis of monitoring of the work of the group of experts during the site visit to a higher education institution, the international review panel observes that the experts were well prepared for the external evaluation and their questions were goal-oriented. It believes that the Slovenian quality assurance system as well as the practice of the Agency's operation point to certain particularities that reflect national context in which it operates.

The international review panel notes in the ESG report that the Agency is taking into account the functioning of internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges (HEI/HVC) in accreditation procedures and in adopting decisions. They have to demonstrate that their operation is in accordance with the HEA and the Agency's criteria and that they regularly monitor all areas of their operation and the satisfaction of students and other important stakeholders. Nevertheless, groups of experts should devote more attention to assessing the functioning of internal quality assurance systems in HEI/HVC and verify it more thoroughly during the site visits. External evaluations offer many opportunities for the improvement of quality assurance systems. Efficient and compliant internal quality assurance systems are a foundation for less intensive and less restrictive procedures of external monitoring of quality, which will doubtlessly be the basis for the transition to institutional evaluation. The international review panel observes that much effort will

6.1. The Agency and ESG part 2

6.1.1. ESG 2.1: Use of internal quality assurance procedures

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 2.1: substantially compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel notes in the ESG report that the Agency is taking into account the functioning of internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges (HEI/HVC) in accreditation procedures and in adopting decisions. They have to demonstrate that their operation is in accordance with the HEA and the Agency's criteria and that they regularly monitor all areas of their operation and the satisfaction of students and other important stakeholders. Nevertheless, groups of experts should devote more attention to assessing the functioning of internal quality assurance systems in HEI/HVC and verify it more thoroughly during the site visits. External evaluations offer many opportunities for the improvement of quality assurance systems. Efficient and compliant internal quality assurance systems are a foundation for less intensive and less restrictive procedures of external monitoring of quality, which will doubtlessly be the basis for the transition to institutional evaluation. The international review panel observes that much effort will
have to be put into the transition to institutional evaluation if we wish the transition to be natural and efficient. The current quality assurance system is too regulated, it contains too many specific criteria, while the level of responsibility needs to be raised and quality culture needs to be strengthened in HEI/HVC for the transition to institutional evaluation. Internal quality assurance system should become the responsibility of HEI/HVC and it should reflect their characteristics and particularities.

The international review panel believes that standard 2.1 is substantially complied with, however, it sees opportunities for improvement in additional strengthening of cooperation between the Agency (external quality assurance system in Slovenia) and HEI/HVC (internal quality assurance system). After the completed first cycle of programme accreditations (re-accreditation of study programmes), it recommends the Agency to establish a less binding external quality assurance system which will be focused more on good functioning of internal quality assurance systems in HEI/HVC. In order to fulfil the objectives of the National higher education programme 2010–2012 and the Research and Innovation Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia 2011–2012, cooperation of the Agency with stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education needs to be strengthened. According to the group's opinion, the current quality assurance system is overly regulated with extremely detailed criteria. It recommends the Agency to prepare a detailed plan of transition to institutional evaluation, particularly with respect to the phase of development of quality assurance systems in HEI/HVC.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

a) Recommendations from the previous self-evaluation report 2010–2012 were also oriented towards further active participation in amending the legislation.

b) In accordance with the proposed amendments to the HEA which, among other things, anticipate the transition to institutional evaluation, the Agency would also assess the provision of accredited study programmes in the procedure of re-accreditation of higher education institutions; along with re-accreditation of a higher education institution, it would also decide on re-accreditation of its study programmes. In the assessment procedure, if certain inconsistencies would be discovered in the provision of an individual study programme, the Council could also decide to extend accreditation of this study programme for a shorter period or not to extend the accreditation at all. In Slovenia, more than 900 study programmes are currently accredited, which are carried out by 45 higher education institutions. The Agency also carries out external evaluations of higher vocational colleges. Far too many accreditation and evaluation procedures are carried out every year; therefore, the transition to institutional evaluation would not only contribute to efficient work of the Agency and higher education institutions which are in some cases subject to external evaluation several times a year, but also to more comprehensive and more systematic assessment, more efficient follow-up procedure, and the strengthening of quality culture. By all means, the planned transition to institutional evaluation will require considerable effort and mutual cooperation of all stakeholders, the amendment of criteria and the properly planned and defined transition period. At present, transition to institutional evaluation is provided for in the HEA-1 amendment; therefore, this period is already planned in amendments to the HEA.

Opportunities for improvement:

We propose that the Agency introduces regular conferences for stakeholders. At the conferences, guidelines for efficient functioning and development of internal quality assurance systems should be discussed, the importance and strengthening of quality culture in HEI/HVC should be emphasised, and exchange of good practice should be attended to. As regards the expected date of the adoption of the HEA-1 amendment, the Agency, together with higher education institutions, should examine the situation and prepare the plan for the transition to institutional evaluation while taking into
consideration the development level of quality culture and the actual state of internal quality assurance systems of HEI/HVC.

6.1.2. ESG 2.2: Development of External Quality Assurance Processes

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 2.2: fully compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes in the ESG report that the Agency's operation in this field is fully compliant with ESG 2.2. Before they were adopted by the Council, the Agency's criteria or acts were sent to all stakeholders for comments and suggestions; most of the proposals were taken into account in the preparation of the final version of acts. All of the criteria and acts of the Council, the Manual for Experts, forms for submitting applications for accreditation and external evaluation, reports on work and operation of the Agency, the Agency's self-evaluation report and other important strategic documents are published on the Agency's website and are available to all interested parties. Every year, all stakeholders (HEI/HVC, the Agency's experts, the Agency staff) are included in the assessment of criteria, procedures and the overall operation of the Agency through survey questionnaires in the self-evaluation procedure. They are also invited to give suggestions and comments due to constant improvement of the external quality assurance system. In case of uncertainties in the use and interpretation of the criteria or the procedures, the Agency organises or attends consultation meetings as required by the stakeholders.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

a) Based on the previous self-evaluation report of the Agency for the period 2010–2012, the specified opportunities for improvement are recognised in the preparation of interpretation of criteria and in simplification of accreditation or evaluation procedures. According to our findings, the revision of internal acts (amendment of criteria) was defined as one of the tasks in the action plan. Interpretation of criteria is only reasonable after their revision.

b) In 2013:

b.1 accreditation criteria were amended twice, as follows:

- the first amendment (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 6/2013) was made due to harmonisation with the HEA 109/12 (with new provisions related to re-accreditation procedure);
- with the second amendment (published in October, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 88/2013), criteria related to organisation and provision of study programmes were emphasised in assessment of study programmes, since in the past, the experts were too focused on the assessment of an institution as a whole and not enough on study programmes in re-accreditation procedures. Annexes (in the case of study programme accreditation) related exclusively to accreditation of the institution were removed from the list of annexes to the accreditation form.

b.2 TNHE criteria were amended once: With the HEA amendment 109/12, the Agency lost a considerable part of its competences in the assessment of quality in TNHE. Upon the amendments to the TNHE criteria, it no longer needs to issue consents to TNHE contracts in all cases, but it now only keeps record of TNHE abroad.

We observe that accreditation criteria were partially amended but the action plan objective was not fully accomplished. The reason for this is that amendments to HEA were planned but were not adopted by the end of 2013. Nevertheless, the activities for
amending the accreditation criteria continue (in accordance with the recommendations of the international review panel, draft amendments are prepared which simplify the criteria).

In 2013, the Agency staff participated in various events organised by HEI (quality days, trainings of internal experts for quality assurance, etc.), HVC and students (SSU, student councils of individual higher education institutions). During his visits to higher education institutions in November and December 2013, The Agency's Director discussed with their managements the problems they are experiencing in accreditation and external evaluation procedures.

Opportunities for improvement:

We recommend that guidelines for writing self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges are prepared in cooperation with stakeholders. In the future, we recommend the continuation of the usual practice of active participation of the Agency staff and the Council members in various events related to the improvement of quality assurance systems, exchange of good practice and the intensification of efforts to foster relations and strengthen the counselling role of the Agency, and to equally involve all stakeholders in the system of the Agency's operation. We recommend that guidelines for clearer interpretation of accreditation criteria are prepared or that interpretation of criteria is prepared urgently, which would contribute to quicker and more transparent decision-making of the Council and would also be of great help to HEI/HVC in their preparation of accreditation applications and understanding of the Council's decisions.

6.1.3. ESG 2.3: Criteria for Decisions

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 2.3: substantially compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes that appeals are permitted against all decisions of the Agency Council; the appeals are considered by the Appeal Committee as the body of second instance or the appellate body.

The Agency uses several measures for ensuring consistency in decision-making procedures. Such measures are:

- training of experts (training of candidates for entry in the register of experts, conferences for experts), the Council members and the staff;
- Quality Manual which defines the processes of the Agency's internal quality assurance mechanisms;
- Manual for Experts which precisely defines the work of groups of experts and the use and interpretation of accreditation criteria and evaluation criteria;
- cooperation of the staff with experts and their assistance during the site visits to HEI/HVC;
- the well-functioning appeal system;
- the surveys that are used by the Agency to measure satisfaction of stakeholders and to obtain information about the quality of operation and services provided by the Agency as a whole (also about the work of the staff and the work of groups of experts). This ensures the closed quality loop. The purpose of such information gathering is permanent improvement of accreditation and evaluation tools.
The international review panel observes in the ESG report that in the past, there were some difficulties particularly in harmonisation of the interpretation and the use of criteria in the Agency's accreditation and evaluation procedures. However, in recent years the Agency has been putting much effort into ensuring objective and transparent decision-making procedures. The move in a positive direction in this area is also shown by the introduction of various mechanisms, such as the revised and more goal-oriented system of training of candidates for entry in the register of experts and organisation and implementation of conferences for experts. Here, the Manual for Experts can be a useful tool. The international review panel observes the general satisfaction of stakeholders with the Agency's performance and with the use of criteria and procedures in accreditations and external evaluations. It observes that lately, the Agency has been devoting great attention to the development of measurable and useful criteria. The Agency's quality assurance system is relatively new, so the group recommends further strengthening of efforts to make the Council's decision-making procedures more transparent. In the interviews conducted with the staff, it observed the need for immediate establishment of an efficient information system which would enable optimisation of work processes from assigning applications all the way to decision-making of the Council in accreditation or external evaluation procedures. If the Agency wants to preserve and improve its conducting of procedures and decision-making, such information system is urgently required considering the number of procedures and the extent of operation.

The international review panel believes that the Agency's operation is substantially compliant with standard 2.3, while it sees the opportunity for improvement in detailed specification and publication of all decision-making steps and in organisation of seminars or similar meetings with stakeholders where this issue could be discussed. Databases and the corresponding high-quality information support are urgently required in decision-making procedures.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

a) In accordance with opportunities for improvement from the SER 2010–2012, revision of the training programme for candidates for entry in the register of experts, interpretation of criteria and the establishment of IS-NAKVIS were foreseen in the action plan.

We observe that the establishment of IS-NAKVIS in 2013 was not carried out because the preparation of tender documents was prolonged into 2014. This was also due to harmonisation of the project content with stakeholders. We would like the users to have a high-quality user experience and optimised connection with existing information systems in the field of higher education (eVŠ and information systems of individual higher education institutions). Execution of the public procurement for the selection of the provider for the establishment of the integrated information system of the Agency (IS-NAKVIS) will make the Agency's operation and decision-making more transparent, orderly and operable. It will also be useful to all stakeholders; cooperation with the Agency in the procedures of accreditation and external evaluation of HEI and study programmes and in the procedures of external evaluation of HVC will be less complicated and submission of application will be easier. IS-NAKVIS will also enable easier surveying, obtaining of information on the satisfaction with the Agency's operation, and analysing of data.

Opportunities for improvement:
Public procurement and selection of a provider for the establishment of the integrated information system IS-NAKVIS have to be carried out as soon as possible.

6.1.4. ESG 2.4: Processes Fit for Purpose

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 2.4: substantially compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

In the ESG report, the international review panel supports the efforts of the Agency to ensure professionalism, effectiveness and efficiency of the work of groups of experts. The Agency addresses/calls candidates for entry in the register of experts through a public call or through invitations by the Agency Council. Applications of candidates are first considered by the Council committee in accordance with the criteria. Upon approval, the candidates are listed for the training of candidates for entry in the register of experts. Student candidates are proposed by the Slovenian Student Union (SSU) on the basis of the completed SSU training which was also approved by the Council (and also complete the Agency's training). The international review panel observes that the Agency provides no special training for foreign experts; however, it has appropriate mechanisms for their careful selection.

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. Apart from that, contractual provisions oblige them to act in accordance with the principles of ethics, professionalism, good management and legality.

However, while monitoring a group of experts during an external evaluation, the international review panel established that the Agency failed to eliminate some deficiencies despite training of experts. It established that during the site visit interviews, experts sometimes assumed the position of the employees of higher education institutions rather than the position of Agency experts. When specifying measures the assessed institution was to carry out, they used examples from their institutions or universities. In the ESG report, the international group of experts also points to a slightly less active work of the student expert and to the fact that not enough attention was given to the assessment of internal quality assurance system. It proposes to the Agency that it should devote more attention to this topic in trainings of candidates for entry in the register of experts and examine the possibilities for more active participation of students in assessments (site visits) together with SSU.

The international review panel also expresses concern about actual independence of the Agency's experts, particularly due to the smallness of the Slovenian higher education area. The concern is based on the assumption that the experts may also be assessed themselves in various procedures. In the previous self-evaluation report of the Agency, a form of pressure exerted on experts was also mentioned; therefore, the international review panel proposes to include several foreign experts in groups, which could eliminate the suspicions of partiality of assessments. Besides, domestic experts are relatively few, particularly in certain study areas or assessment areas.

Besides the assessment of the actual state of affairs, the current system also expects from experts to give recommendations for quality assurance system improvement; the Manual for Experts which provides guidelines for shaping their reports, can prove to be a useful tool. The international review panel observes that in re-accreditation procedures for a shorter period, recommendations that were based on the fulfilment of minimal criteria for accreditation were primarily given by experts in the reports; therefore, it proposes that recommendations be broader than the criteria.

The Agency's operation is substantially compliant with standard 2.4. There is an opportunity for improvement in putting more effort in acquiring well-qualified domestic
and foreign experts capable of participating as independent members of groups of experts in various procedures of assessing quality assurance systems (institutional experts, experts from the business sector, students, international experts, etc.). Situations where experts from universities constantly visit one another should be avoided; therefore, it is recommendable to appoint more foreign experts in their groups. The challenge seen by the international review panel could be the use of language in accreditation procedures because HEI/HVC have a legal right to use Slovenian (in practice, this means that interpreters must be provided during the site visits if foreign experts don’t understand Slovenian). According to its opinion, a higher level of internationalisation is obstructed by the HEA provision according to which the learning language is Slovenian, although study programmes may be carried out in other languages if they are simultaneously carried out in Slovenian. However, due to international ambitions of the Agency, greater internalisation of both, the quality assurance system and the higher education system needs to be pursued by elimination of barriers in the national legislation. Greater involvement of foreign experts in the procedures of assessment of quality assurance systems would contribute to that.

Findings of the self-evaluation group:

Opportunities for improvement identified in SER 2010–2012 were permanent harmonisation of the staff, the Council members and the experts due to the strengthening of the Agency’s autonomy and reputation; preparation of periodic (1-2 times per year) substantive analyses of granted accreditations, external evaluations by various indicators (in Slovenian and English) and publication of news on the Agency’s operation; active involvement of the Council members as observers in site visits to HEI or HVC (at least three times per year). The objective of the 2010–2012 self-evaluation report of the Agency, which was based on the results of surveys on the satisfaction with trainings of experts and the analyses of external evaluation reports, was to revise the training programme for candidates for entry in the register of experts in order to enable more professional and unified work of groups of experts. In this way, analysis and comparability of reports would also be enabled.

We observe that the Agency prepared the meta-analytic document “Quality in the Slovenian Higher Education and Higher Vocational Education Area in the Period from 2010 to 2013” which contains the analysis of self-evaluation reports of HEI and HVC, the analysis of reports of groups of experts in the procedures of accreditation of HEI and study programmes and external evaluation of HVC. We observe that meetings for harmonisation of the staff, a conference for experts and trainings of candidates for entry in the register of experts in accordance with the revised programme were organised. The recommendation to more actively include the Council members (as external observers) in external evaluations was not realised. Since the response of the Council to the content of prepared reports of groups of experts is important, particularly due to its decision-making and publication of reports, cooperation must further be strengthened in the next self-evaluation period.

The procedures conducted by the Agency (accreditations, evaluations) follow the pre-set objectives of monitoring, promoting and improving the quality of HEI, HVC and study programmes in order to ensure objectivity of assessments. Examination and assessment of the application, appointment of a group of independent experts, site visit to a HEI or a HVC (except in cases of initial accreditation and accreditation of modifications of study programmes where site visits are rare), preparation of the joint report of a group of experts, the response of the applicant to the joint report (except in cases of initial accreditation or transformation of a higher education institution), and assessing and decision-making by the Agency Council are characteristic of all types of accreditations and external evaluations. In the procedures of re-accreditation and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, the emphasis lies on constant progress and improvement of quality.
The Agency has established a register of independent experts. The basis for the register is set out in Article 51u of HEA. Individuals who wish to be entered in the register of experts should respond to the public call or the Agency Council invitation. The Agency collects applications and promptly establishes whether the candidates fulfil the conditions listed in the criteria for experts.

Training of experts

The Agency devotes particular attention to training of experts, which enables assessments of a very high quality. Applications of candidates for experts are first considered by the Committee for examination of applications of candidates for entry in the register of experts, composed of Council members. After the examination of applications by the Committee, the candidates who fulfil the conditions from the criteria for experts may participate in training.

In accordance with recommendations from the previous self-evaluation report and in accordance with the identified opportunities for improvement, the revised training programme was prepared which was considered and approved by the Council in September 2013. It was drawn up on the basis of the analysis of surveys involving the participants of previous trainings, and the experience and findings of the staff and the Council. It was established that it needs in particular to include more practical exercises and less training for the acquisition of personal skills; that greater emphasis needs to be given to the interpretation of criteria and exchange of good practice. Even more than the previous one, the training programme is oriented towards acquisition of competences by the candidates for participation in groups of experts, examination of documents (applications with evidence), site visits to HEI/HVC and writing of reports. The novelty is the second part in which the candidates are obliged to participate either in a site visit within the procedure of initial accreditation of a higher education institution or a study programme or in an evaluation site visit. On the basis of concluded training, the opinion of respective staff member and group of experts, the Council decides on the entry of the candidate in the register.

In training student experts, the Agency also cooperates with the Slovenian Student Union (SSU). The Council approved the SSU training programme according to which the candidates for student experts are trained, which is a condition for the participation in training organised by the Agency. An exception are employed doctoral students, for whom the Agency puts out a special call and acquires them through the managements of HEI/HVC. These candidates are trained exclusively by the Agency.

In the end of October and in the beginning of November 2013, the first training in accordance with the revised programme was carried out, while in the end of January and in the beginning of February 2014, the second one took place. In total, more than 60 candidates participated and successfully concluded the first part of training. Half of the candidates who participated in the training in the autumn of 2013 have already completed the second part of the training or have been invited to take part in it. The staff coordinate the participation of candidates for entry in the register of experts in site visits with applicants and groups of experts. By the end of 2013, the first two candidates have successfully completed the training and were already entered in the register of experts by the Council.

We observe that with the revision of the training programme, the Agency successfully responded to the opportunities for improvement indicated by the participants of previous trainings, the staff and the Council. 19 out of 33 participants of the training which was carried out in the autumn of 2013 filled out the online questionnaire on the satisfaction. Suitability of the training programme and lecturers, cooperation with the staff and suitability of topics covered, the approach and the examples of good practice were rated
with a very high average value of 4.7 on the 1-5 scale. The participants proposed the following recommendations for improvement:

- more time (at least three days) between the first and the second day of training due to extensiveness of the first task;
- better harmonisation of the presented contents to prevent overlapping.

The training programme was revised accordingly in December 2013, so that the contents of the lectures do not overlap and the performance of the first task is more adapted to available time and based on an actual example of the procedure of initial accreditation of a HEI.

Based on the successful first part of training, the analyses of surveys conducted with the candidates for entry in the register of experts and the participation of candidates (as external observers in external evaluations), we establish that the revised training programme for the candidates for entry in the register of experts is of high quality. It took into account important comments of the Council members (Annex 1) who emphasised the need to improve the reports of experts on which the Council’s decision-making is based. The Council members established that the reports are frequently repetitive and sometimes also incomplete; therefore, the staff should assist in their improvement by checking the consistency of statements in the reports with the criteria and the relevant legislation, and should request the experts to complement them as required. In the training programme, great emphasis was given precisely to substantive assessment and the writing of reports (practical exercises), while the Council members were also actively involved as lecturers presenting to the candidates Council’s expectations regarding the content of the reports and the assessment. In the first part of training, the candidates were assigned two practical exercises where they assessed an application for initial accreditation of a higher education institution and an application for initial accreditation of a study programme. In assessing the applications and writing the reports, the staff also provided all relevant explanations, guiding the candidates through their work and providing legal and technical assistance.

**Opportunities for improvement:**

We propose that the Agency continues to monitor the satisfaction of participants in trainings and to improve the training programme. The criteria for experts should be amended as soon as possible and in such a way that, apart from taking into account the changes in the procedure for entry in the register (compulsory participation of a candidate in the site visit to a HEI/HVC), experts relevant for specific types of accreditation and the procedure of application and entry of candidates who are doctoral students and are already employed would be specified in more detail. In the criteria for experts, the procedure for the first entry in the register and particularly for its extension and the withdrawal from the register of experts should be defined more clearly.

**Conferences**

In December 2013, the Agency held the third annual conference for experts entered in the register of experts. The central theme of the conference was the presentation of the issue of the blind and partially sighted students and the disabled students in higher education. In the presentations prepared by students and representatives of the Union of Associations of Blind and Visually Impaired of Slovenia and students and representatives of the Organisation of the Disabled Students of Slovenia, the lecturers drew attention to the position of the disabled students and pointed out the difficulties and obstacles they have to cope with on daily bases during their studies. They also presented the solutions and opportunities for the improvement of the situation to all participants.
In the second part of the conference, participants were presented the most recent amendments to the accreditation criteria, draft site visit protocol, and in the end, substantive expectations of the Agency Council in writing reports of the groups of experts. The site visit protocol (Annex 13: Site visit protocol) is a document specifying in detail the course of work of a group of experts during the preparation for the site visit to a HEI/HVC, during the site visit as well as relevant tasks of every stakeholder. It is harmonised with the Manual for Experts. Among other things, it also specifies the role and the tasks of the so-called external observers; in 2014, they will mostly include the candidates for entry in the register of experts who will attend the second part of training. The comments of experts from the conference have already been taken into account in the final version of site visit protocol. It will be published shortly.

At the conference, the experts expressed a wish for the Agency to inform them promptly on the adequacy of their work. They would also like to receive information on the decisions adopted by the Council in procedures they participated in. They proposed to the Agency to modify its monitoring of effectiveness of the work of groups of experts: it should also monitor individuals, mostly for the sake of their progress.

We observe that the Agency also monitors the satisfaction of stakeholders with external evaluation by gathering and analysing the opportunities for improvement. Experts, assessed HEI/HVC (the management, the employees) and the Agency staff conducting the procedures are involved in monitoring. Since every group of experts functions as a whole and prepares joint reports on assessments and not individual expert opinions, monitoring of the quality of individual experts is rather difficult. Nevertheless, the Agency promptly took into account the proposal from the conference and started informing the experts on the decisions made by the Agency Council on accreditations or external evaluation they participated in.

Opportunities for improvement:

According to the positive response of experts to the first part of the conference in December 2013 (presentation of the issue of blind and partially sighted students, deaf students and students with disabilities), we propose that the Agency encourages higher education stakeholders to organise an inter-sectoral group which would prepare guidelines for the elimination of architectural barriers, preparation of tactile maps, adaptation of websites, enabling access of study materials and other solutions that would enable unhindered study to the disabled (students, teachers), the blind and partially sighted, and others.

We propose that the Agency organises and formalises notification of groups of experts on Council’s decisions and also develops a system of notification on the quality of expert assessments, all important events, examples of good practice, amendments to legislation, modification of criteria and other events important for permanent improvement of the work of groups of experts.

Register and appointment of groups of experts

By the end of 2013, 153 Slovenian experts, among which 15 were students, were entered in the register of experts.

The largest number of Slovenian experts comes from the fields of business and administrative sciences. Social sciences, computer sciences, humanities, health sciences and education sciences are well represented in the register. Shortage areas include life sciences, agriculture, forestry, fishery, veterinary medicine, social work and personal services. Therefore, in the beginning of 2013, permanent call for application to candidates for entry in the register of experts was changed to invite primarily full and associate professors from the following areas: performing arts, design, humanities
(languages), journalism and information, law, life sciences, physics, manufacturing, architecture, urban planning and construction, building and civil engineering, agriculture, forestry, fishery, social work, personal services, physiotherapy, kinesiology, transport services, environmental protection and security services. Besides, more effort is required to increase the number of experts – especially the number of doctoral students and experts from the business and public sectors.

In 2013, the Agency council appointed 110 groups of experts for assessments in accreditation and evaluation procedures. Some of the groups assessed several study programmes at a time due to combined procedures. Foreign experts come from the following countries: Croatia, Austria, Germany, United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Spain. Most of them (91% or 112 out of 123) come from Croatia, which means that 11 come from other countries. In our opinion, the reason is that among the foreigners, Croatian experts have the least difficulties with understanding Slovenian. For most of the foreign experts who don't understand Slovenian and have participated in evaluation procedures, the Agency has provided interpreters.

In order to acquire foreign experts of high quality, the Agency should better use international connections and advantages brought by the entry in EQAR and participation in the MULTRA project. In ECA, it also actively participates in planning and setting up of the expert exchange platform (ECA Expert Exchange Platform – EEEP), so Slovenian experts must be encouraged to participate in EEEP. In this way, they will acquire valuable international experience and attend to the transfer of good practices to the Slovenian higher education area, while at the same time the Agency will be able to choose among many experienced international experts from various areas.

We observe that in practice, problems occur frequently as the result of the use of Slovenian in external evaluation procedures. Since every group of experts is international (foreign experts usually represent one third of the group), language difficulties should be eliminated in the future. Pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act, all administrative procedures (and all actions in these procedures) have to be conducted in Slovenian, which in practice means that the Agency must provide interpretation for interviews and sometimes also translation of the documents required for the assessment. In the surveys, opinions of stakeholders regarding the use of language differ widely. While some of them wish that more foreigners were included in groups of experts and that assessments were entirely carried out in a foreign language, others are in favour of the exclusive use of Slovenian language. In the future, it needs to be considered how to carry on, and above all, it needs to be clarified who carries the cost of interpretation, since financial resources of the Agency are very limited.

On the basis of the analysis of surveys carried out in 2013 (Annex 1), we establish that the managing staff of the surveyed HEI/HVC, the employees and students are generally satisfied with external evaluations and with the work of groups of experts. Among other things, they commended their efforts to identify current problems, to summarise findings and analyse the situation as well as to formulate recommendations for improvement.

On the basis of individual substantive opinions (Annex 1), we would particularly like to point out that stakeholders expressed more positive opinions regarding professionalism, quality and usefulness of the assessments by groups of experts and that they also attributed an important role in the assessments to foreign experts. Nonetheless, they gave several important recommendations for improvement:

- to improve qualifications for assessing the functioning of internal quality assurance systems;
- in some cases the experts could have been better prepared for the assessment;
- in some cases the experts could have known better the area of the assessment;
- in several cases stakeholders pointed out insufficient knowledge about the particularities and issues related to higher vocational colleges;
- in rare cases stakeholders complained about partiality of experts.

The staff (Annex 1) believe that groups of experts prepare themselves adequately for the assessments, that they carry out the site visits professionally, efficiently and with quality, and that they correctly establish and analyse the actual situation.

The self-evaluation of experts (Annex 1) reveals that the experts estimate their contribution and the contribution of foreign experts to the assessments as good. They pointed out to the Agency that it should be more careful not to appoint experts from competitive institutions to the same groups. They particularly expressed the following expectations:

- additional training of experts for the assessment of internal quality assurance systems;
- quicker delivery of materials for external evaluations.

We observe that the level of general satisfaction with external evaluations is greater compared to the previous self-evaluation report (2010–2012) and the surveys carried out in that period. The work of groups of experts is more unified; their reports are better in terms of the contents and enable comparability, while all of them also include opportunities for improvement. The reasons for the improved satisfaction lie in the Manual for Experts, in the successfully amended content and programme of training for experts, in updated report templates and in clearer instructions for their writing.

**Opportunities for improvement:**

In the second half of 2013, when mandates of five Council members expired, new members were appointed. No special training for new members was organised. Since familiarity with all phases of procedures is necessary for the proper functioning and decision-making of the Agency Council, the opportunity for improvement from the previous Agency's self-evaluation report, according to which the Council members should also participate in the visits to HEI/HVC as external observers, should be considered. However, training for new members of the Agency Council has to be carried out first.

In our opinion, the employment of interpreters at the Agency would improve communication of groups of experts during the site visits to HEI/HVC.

### 6.1.5. ESG 2.5: Reporting

**Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 2.5: partially compliant**

**Findings of the international review panel:**

During the visit, the international review panel also carried out interviews with stakeholders and established that the Agency staff have a lot of knowledge and experience; therefore, it proposes in the ESG report that the Agency should consider whether the staff who conduct the procedures during the site visits should perform secretary work for groups of experts; according to the group's opinion, this would ensure compliance of the reports of groups of experts and facilitate their work. In this way, they could focus more on conducting the interviews.

The international review panel sees the opportunity for improvement particularly in publication of entire reports of groups of experts on the Agency website. In order to
improve the compliance of the reports of groups of experts, it recommends that the staff participate more actively in writing the reports.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

In the SER 2010–2012, publication of the reports of groups of experts was pointed out as an opportunity for improvement. The recommendation was taken into account and the Agency started to publish them in the end of 2013.

In all procedures conducted by the Agency, groups of experts prepare joint reports which are an important basis for decision-making by the Agency Council. All Council decisions are published on the Agency website; however, the first final evaluation reports of groups of experts were published only in October 2013. Main reasons are the adjustment of personal data in the reports intended for publication to the requirements of the Information Commissioner of the Republic of Slovenia and various interpretations of the Administrative Procedure Act, due to which certain reports did not include opportunities for improvement in the past. With the revised Manual for Experts, the revised training programme and the preparation of new templates for writing reports and corresponding instructions, the stated reasons were eliminated. New report templates are drawn up by areas of assessment from accreditation criteria or evaluation criteria; for each area of the assessment, they require from the experts to:

- ascertain compliance with the criteria;
- analyse and ascertain the actual state of affairs;
- specify and substantiate the advantages, opportunities for improvement and inconsistencies.

Report templates are also designed to include a report summary and a short translation into English, which is important from the perspective of informing the domestic as well as the foreign public.

During the visit of the international review panel, some of the reasons that had been preventing the publication of reports have not been eliminated yet; hence, only partial compliance with the 2.5 standard was established in the ESG report.

Regarding the recommendation of the international review panel that the staff should participate more actively in writing reports, we observe that stakeholders, particularly the experts, have been giving similar proposals in the past. In our view, the main reason that these proposals were not accepted is that groups of experts must be entirely independent in the assessment, which means that joint report is prepared exclusively on the basis of their own findings. This is extremely important due to the small size of the Slovenian higher education area, which was also observed by the international review panel. Therefore, the role of the Agency staff during the site visit is not to assist in writing the reports but to provide legal and professional assistance in the interpretation of procedures, criteria and legislative provisions, in organising and conducting the site visit, in communicating with the applicant and in providing assistance in changing the visit schedule and requesting the examination of additional documents. At least three experts (one domestic, one foreign and one student) are always appointed to a group of experts; in accreditation and external evaluation procedures, they are treated as experts in certain fields of assessment, which a staff member is not. As stipulated in the HEA, a group of experts has to prepare a joint assessment report on the basis of factual findings on the state of affairs, while the Agency staff conduct accreditation and evaluation procedures and take account of their legality. Therefore, independence of the reports of groups of experts is also emphasised in the HEA. If the Agency staff actively participated in the assessments (by conducting interviews, writing reports, etc.), it would be impossible to ensure independence; besides, it could constitute grounds for a request to exclude experts from the assessment or a request to exclude a member of the staff (grounds for appeal).
Opportunities for improvement:

Based on the above findings, we establish that opportunities for improvement could particularly be sought in permanent improvement of the training programme for candidates for entry in the register of experts, regular consultations with experts and thematic workshops, clear templates and instructions for writing reports, prompt informing of experts about amended legislation and criteria and about other current developments, all of which would improve their efficiency and raise the quality of work.

6.1.6. ESG 2.6: Follow-up Procedures

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 2.6: fully compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes in the ESG report that the Agency's operation is fully compliant with standard 2.6.

The Agency urges closer cooperation with HEI and HVC, particularly in the area of exchange of good practice and their operation. The international review panel proposes further strengthening of cooperation with stakeholders and counselling, particularly in the direction of elimination of deficiencies in quality assurance procedures and strengthening of quality culture in HEI/HVC. Counselling could contribute to a more prominent role of the Agency in the Slovenian higher education area. Here, clear distinction needs to be drawn between counselling and accreditation and external evaluation procedures in order to avoid a conflict of interests. This can be achieved in a way that a member of the staff who conducts a certain accreditation or external evaluation procedure does not counsel in this procedure.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

Recommendations from SER 2010–2012 relate to the encouraging of HEI and HVC to introduce action plans after the completed external evaluations in order to take recommendations of groups of experts into account and to improve the operation of HEI/HVC. We observe that the Agency started calling upon applicants in the second half of 2013 to prepare action plans in accordance with recommendations from the reports of groups of experts.

We observe that follow-up procedures are an essential part of all re-accreditation procedures, since the progress made by a higher education institution from the initial or the last accreditation of a study programme or a higher education institution (as a rule, every seven years) is monitored. Precisely for this reason the evaluation report also contains the experts’ recommendations for improvement.

In accreditation and external evaluation procedures it is expected from HEI/HVC to take into consideration opportunities for improvement written by groups of experts in the reports and recommendations given by the Agency Council in its decisions. Accreditation or re-accreditation is usually granted for the period no longer than seven years; however, the Council may initiate the procedure of extraordinary evaluation in cases of clear grounds for believing that major breaches occurred in the operation of higher education institutions or in the provision of study programmes. Extraordinary evaluation (articles 7, 37, and 49 of accreditation criteria) is (with the exception of procedure initiation) carried out by the same procedure as external evaluation, and concluded with a decision on re-accreditation.
Follow-up procedures in higher vocational education are similar, and are carried out at least every five years.

Opportunities for improvement:

We see the same opportunities for improvement as the international group of experts while we also refer to the findings from the assessment of other ESG standards, namely: closer cooperation with stakeholders in improving internal quality assurance systems and amending Agency's acts and other documents important for external evaluation, constant monitoring of the satisfaction with the Agency's operation and the development of an efficient system of feedback information and planned measures for permanent quality improvement. We see the strengthening of the Agency's role primarily in the field of exchange of good practices, which can be obtained by the staff and the experts through participation in international and inter-sectoral projects and through participation in quality assessment procedures abroad. An important emphasis must also be given to the establishment or strengthening of quality culture.

6.1.7. ESG 2.7: Periodic Reviews

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 2.7: fully compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes that the Agency's operation is fully compliant with the 2.7 standard and that a seven-year accreditation period is among the longer periods in Europe. Therefore, it proposes in the ESG report that the reduction of validity of decisions in initial accreditations from seven to five years is considered.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

The current legislation stipulates that regular assessments in accreditation procedures are conducted every seven years, while they are conducted every five years in the procedures of external evaluation of HVC. The Council may grant accreditation (or re-accreditation) to a HEI or a HVC for a period of seven years, while in the procedures of external evaluation of higher vocational colleges it adopts an opinion on compliance with legally prescribed standards every five years.

If the Council establishes major deficiencies in the operation of an institution or in the provision of a study programme, it grants accreditation for a shorter period (up to three years) and defines the deadline for their elimination; one year in cases of deviations from standards relating to pedagogical and scientific and research qualification of the employees, and no more than six months for other identified errors and deficiencies.

According to the proposed amendments to higher education legislation (HEA-1), the re-accreditation period would be reduced from seven to no more than five years, which would be comparable to the period of validity of accreditation decisions in the majority of European countries.

We observe that the Agency also monitors and analyses the improvement of quality assurance systems in HEI/HVC by collecting and analysing self-evaluation reports of HEI and HVC, and that it attends to the transfer of good practices by publication of the analyses. HEA and the criteria also enable extraordinary evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes before the expiration of the seven-year period, any time during the period of the granted accreditation.
6.1.8. **ESG 2.8: System-wide Analyses**

*Compliance of the Agency’s operation with ESG 2.8: substantially compliant*

**Findings of the international review panel:**

The international review panel estimates that the reports on monitoring, assessing and assuring quality in the Slovenian higher education area in 2007 and 2008 ([Meta-report for 2007 and 2008](#)) and for year 2009 ([Report on the Work of the Senate 2009](#)) offer a good insight into the external quality assurance system and examples of good practice in quality assurance systems, thus stimulating HEI/HVC to develop and improve their internal quality assurance systems and strive for strengthening of quality culture. Besides, they also provide guidelines for further development of higher education in the Republic of Slovenia. Due to frequent amendments to [HEA](#), the lack of personnel in the first year of the Agency's operation, organisational changes, delays in the processing of applications and late adoption of [accreditation criteria](#), the preparation of meta-analysis for the period of last three years (2010–2013) is planned for the second half of 2013.

The international review panel observes that the Agency's operation is substantially compliant with ESG 2.8; however, it recommends the Agency to carry out the analysis of the Slovenian higher education quality assurance system in the period 2010–2013. The Agency should analyse the development of internal quality assurance systems and recognition of good practices. According to the group's opinion, this is also very important in view of the planned transition to (proposed amendments to the HEA) institutional evaluation. Such a report should be prepared and published on the Agency website until the end of 2013. The group also recommends that such reports are prepared and published regularly (every one or two years).

**Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:**

Preparation of a meta-analysis following the example of the reports in 2007, 2008, and 2009 was already mentioned among the opportunities in the [SER 2010–2012](#).

As a result, the [meta-analysis of the Agency was prepared in the end of 2013](#). It is published on the Agency’s website. This is the first report on accreditations, external evaluations and self-evaluations in the Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education area after the establishment of the Agency in 2010. The report covers the state of higher education and higher vocational education in the period 2010–2013; it is based on findings in external assessments in the procedures of re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes, external evaluations of higher vocational colleges and on analyses of self-evaluation reports of HEI/HVC.

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6.2. **The Agency and ESG Part 3**

6.2.1. **ESG 3.1: Use of External Quality Assurance Procedures for Higher Education**

*Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 3.1: substantially compliant*

**Findings of the international review panel:**
The international review panel assessed compliance with ESG 2.1–2.8 in chapter 6.1. It observes that the Agency's operation is substantially compliant with ESG 2.1, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.8, and partially compliant with ESG 2.5, which makes it substantially compliant with the second section of ESG standards.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

Similarly as the findings of the international review panel, the findings from self-evaluation relate to the already established state in the second part of ESG standards.

6.2.2. ESG 3.2: Official Status

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 3.2: fully compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes in the ESG report that the Agency is fully compliant with the 3.2 standard.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

The Agency was founded by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia with the Resolution on the Founding of the Agency under Article 51e of the HEA. It began to operate in March 2010, after CHERS ceased to exist on 28 February 2010.

The Agency is a legal person under public law, and a direct non-governmental budget user in accordance with the regulations from the area of public finance. The founder of the Agency is the Republic of Slovenia, and the founder's rights and obligations are exercised by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia.

The HEA stipulates that the Agency is autonomous and independent in its operation. It is bound by the principles of professionalism, impartiality, legality and political neutrality.

The tasks and competences of the Agency are set out in Article 51f of the HEA and Article 8 of the Resolution on the Founding of the Agency. These are expert and development tasks in higher education and tasks related to external quality assurance in higher education and higher vocational education. Accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes, and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges are part of external quality assurance. Study programmes become state-approved when granted accreditation. The Agency carries out statutory tasks in the public interest, with the aim to provide continuous, professional and independent assistance in constant improvement of quality in higher education.

The Agency is a full member of ECA and CEENQA (it took over both memberships from the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia) and has been entered in EQAR.

6.2.3. ESG 3.3: Activities

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 3.3: fully compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes in the ESG report that the Agency succeeded in completing its mission and achieving the set objectives. In 2012, a considerable increase in the number of accreditation procedures or decisions was observed (from 60 to 168).
The Agency was also actively involved in various international projects. These projects and such efforts influence the development of the Agency’s activities (e.g. in the area of accreditation of joint study programmes) and permanent improvement of quality; therefore, the Agency should further strengthen them.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

Recommendations in SER 2010–2012 included strengthening of international cooperation, organisation and cooperation in various events in the field of quality, and periodical meetings with all stakeholders. We observe that participation of staff and Council members in various events related to quality, as well as international cooperation of the Agency, was strengthened in 2013, while the objective of periodical meetings with stakeholders was not entirely accomplished. Most of the meetings with stakeholders were intended for presentations and harmonisation of project documents for the public call for tenders for the selection of IS-NAKVIS provider, while several meetings were convened upon the initiative of applicants. They were intended for dealing with individual open issues related to accreditation and evaluation procedures.

In accordance with the action plan, two external evaluations of the Agency were to be carried out in 2013; one of them was the ECA external evaluation for the purposes of the accession to the MULTRA project and the extension of ECA membership for another five years, while the other one was external evaluation in accordance with ESG standards for the purposes of joining EQAR. After the successful external evaluation which included the assessment of the Agency in accordance with the ECA Code of Good Practice and the assessment in accordance with ESG standards, we establish that the objective was accomplished. The course of development of higher education quality assurance system proved to be efficient and successful, the Agency's full membership in ECA was extended for another five years, while it was entered in EQAR on 23 October 2013. Besides, the Agency signed the accession statement to join the MULTRA project in the framework of ECA on 11 December 2013 in the Hague, the Netherlands.

We observe that the Agency staff actively participate in various inter-sectoral groups (Bologna experts, JOQAR, CeQuint, Qrossroads). In November and December, the Director visited nine higher education institutions, while he also actively participates in the managing bodies of CEENQA and in the inter-sectoral group for amending the HEA. Staff members as well as the Director and the Council members participated in various domestic and international conferences as invited lecturers where they presented the Agency’s operation, good practice examples and promoted the strengthening of quality culture.

Opportunities for improvement:

In 2014, activities should be planned for the Agency to become a member of ENQA.

6.2.4. ESG 3.4: Resources

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 3.4: substantially compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes in the ESG report that as a direct budget user, the Agency has a special status in the national budget and is funded similarly as the Constitutional Court, the Ombudsman, etc. Pursuant to the provisions of the HEA, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia is obliged to provide funds for the Agency's operation because it is not part of the ministry responsible for higher education. The Agency's position could protect it from additional cuts into the budget imposed by the
Government in the future due to the financial crisis. A question arises on how will adequate funding of the Agency be provided after the expiry of the ESF project, particularly if the ESF funds (for the period 2014–2020) together with budgetary funds will not be sufficient to cover all expenses of its operation. Although the Agency strives to acquire additional resources for its operation, the possibilities are thin. One of the possibilities to provide adequate funding for the Agency, presented in the ESG report, is to charge for the services in accreditation and external evaluation procedures, while the other is to compete internationally and to offer services on foreign markets, but all of the (legal) conditions to do that are not fulfilled yet. The third possibility is to charge for counselling services. The international review panel observes that current human, financial and other resources enable undisturbed operation of the Agency in accordance with its mission, vision and strategic objectives; however, the future is rather uncertain, particularly due to the high dependence on ESF funds, the expected cuts into the Agency's budget and legal barriers to charging for the services in accreditation and external evaluation procedures.

The international review panel observes that the Agency's operation is substantially compliant with standard 3.4. It points to assuring the stability of funding in the future. It establishes that it is in the interest of Slovenia to promote further development of the quality assurance system into which the Agency is putting effort in cooperation with all other stakeholders; the Agency's reputation at home and abroad is growing from year to year. The group believes that adequate funds should also be provided for the planned transition to institutional evaluation which is planned to be carried out by the Government after the completed first accreditation cycle. Since it is highly probable that additional funding from the ESF project will cease, the panel proposes to the Agency to examine alternative possibilities of funding and that it also consults with the Government about it. This is the only way to provide more stable funding after 2014.

**Findings of the self-evaluation group:**

**Opportunities for improvement pointed out in the SER 2010–2012 were oriented towards ensuring material, financial and human resources after 2014.** We establish that recommendations were partially followed; the Agency employed three new staff members in 2013 (one as a substitute for an employee during her maternity leave), modernised its computer equipment and redesigned its website, while it also managed to extend the ESF project until the end of 2015.

**Financial resources**

Although the Agency is a direct budget user, its operation will be partially funded from the EU funds (ESF) until October 2015. The financial resources of the Agency for the planned activities are integral resources and project resources:

- the former come from the national budget and include the budgetary part of the funding and a 15 per cent participation of budgetary resources in the activation of project resources;
- the latter come from ESF (85%) and are intended solely for the reimbursement of costs related to accreditations and external evaluations.

It should be emphasised that all costs of accreditations and external evaluations are wholly borne by the Agency (salaries of employees, session fees for the Council members and the Appeal Committee members, material costs, costs of groups of experts and training of the candidates for entry in the Agency's register of experts, cooperation and participation in the meetings of working groups, inter-sectoral groups, international working groups, and participation in international conferences, workshops, etc.).
Compared to 2012, the resources for funding the Agency's activities were significantly reduced in April 2013, i.e. both the budgetary and ESF resources. The outturn of available budgetary funds (a total of € 466,448.70 – salaries, material costs, investments, quality of higher education) of the adopted Agency's budget in 2013 amounted to 100%.

In the first half of 2013, funds from the ESF were reduced in accordance with the proposed revised budget. However, this didn't affect the achievement of the set objectives, because in the middle of the year, drawing of funds from the ESF was extended until 2015. The outturn of the resources available from the ESF amounted to 87.7% in 2013. The difference to 100% occurred due to the unaccomplished launch of the call for tenders and selection of the IS-NAKVIS provider. Unused funds will be allocated to the next budget period, to the years of 2014 and 2015.

In addition, the Agency doesn't have funds for covering the costs in cases where the Council members participate in national conferences and events in the area of quality assurance in higher education and higher vocational education. For their participation in trainings of candidates for entry in the register of experts or conferences for experts, they are neither reimbursed for their expenses nor do they receive any fees.

**Opportunities for improvement:**

We observe that on the short-term basis (until expiry of the ESF project in October 2015), the funds for the Agency's operation are entirely provided; however, efforts for stable funding in the future or after expiry of the ESF project need to be intensified. Although the HEA stipulates in the second paragraph of article 51m that the funds for the Agency's operation are provided in the budget, we observe that they are insufficient and that they need to be increased for undisturbed operation and development of the Agency. We propose the preparation of a financial plan which should define alternative possibilities for the provision of financial resources for at least mid-term full-scale operation of the Agency and foresee the further urgent measures (presentation of the financial plan to the founder, proposal and alignment of funding with the ministry responsible for funding, etc.) as well as examine the possibilities for applying to a project for drawing funds from the newly adopted quality of higher education perspective 2014–2020. In relation to the latter, we are pointing out that funds for basic operation of the Agency need to be provided on a long-term basis (in the Agency's budget).

**Human resources**

We establish that in the end of 2013, there were 24 people employed at the Agency, of which less than half are financed directly from the budget (10 employees including the Director), while others are financed from the ESF (14 employees). Although in the second half of 2013, drawing of funds from the ESF was extended until October 2015, (previously October 2014), uncertain funding in the future is reflected in dissatisfaction of the part of the staff employed under the ESF project (with permanent employment and planned further career development at the Agency), which is also evident from the analysis of survey questionnaires (Annex 1). Stable funding of the Agency after expiry of ESF funding was also pointed out by the international review panel. All of the employees are public servants; therefore, their salary system, promotion system and further career development are affected by the policy of constant reduction of funds and government cuts into the budgets of direct budget users due to the economic crisis. Due to the cuts, Agency's funds for activities related to quality assurance, investments and material costs are also reduced.

Proper qualifications and professional competence of employees for professional and efficient work is the fundamental guiding principle of human resources policy.
Systematization of jobs with specified requirements to fill a vacancy and the description of tasks referred to the individual posts is provided by the Act on Internal Organisation and Classification of Posts.

Annual staff interviews with the Director are defined in more detail in the Agency’s Quality Manual (Annex 10). The objective is to assess and review the work done in the previous year (including the method of work and relationships between members of the staff), and to draw up the work plan for the next year including anticipated results.

In 2013, the staff have been actively involved in the management, particularly by means of the following:

- recommendations and comments at regular meetings;
- participation in debates on the proposed amendments to the HEA;
- active participation in the preparation of important documents and legal acts of the Agency;
- active participation in the Agency’s self-evaluation.

After the adoption of the action plan for 2013, all of the employees were given the opportunity to take a position with regard to participation in individual activities within the plan. In this way, they were stimulated for motivated participation because their selected way of participation or tasks for the achievement of the objectives from the action plan were based on their own priorities.

For the employees, the Code of Ethics for Civil Servants applies (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 8/2001), the aim of which is to develop and preserve high professional and ethical standards of the employees, strengthen their loyalty to the Agency, transparency and accountability of the Agency’s operation and social standing.

Information and communication resources

The plans for the future are associated with the financial situation of the Agency and are primarily related to the purchase of hardware and the replacement of work stations, which has partially already been carried out in 2013.

The Agency already uses a standardised electronic form for the submission and processing of applications for accreditation and external evaluation procedures. Although this form enables monitoring of the state (status) of individual applications and communication between the staff and applicants regarding possible weaknesses in applications, some difficulties still occur. Both applicants and the staff are pointing out the weaknesses of the electronic form or electronic submission and processing of applications in the procedures. The current concept of the electronic operation does not enable a considerable system upgrade. For higher quality, more transparent and safer operation and a thoroughly modified electronic form are required to eliminate weaknesses and enable continuous development and updating in accordance with the requirements and nature of the work performed by Agency. Therefore, the following was carried out in 2013:

- procedures related to the processing of applications for accreditation and external evaluation and for providing information to other stakeholders (applicant – Agency – ministry responsible for education (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport)) were drawn up;
- presentation of the structure and the advantages of the future information system to higher education stakeholders and collecting of proposals;
- several working meetings with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport because the information system will be based on the eVŠ platform which already functions efficiently and enables keeping records of students that applied for
subsidised accommodation as well as keeping eVŠ records of higher education institutions, eVŠ records of study programmes, eVŠ records of students and graduates, eVŠ records of applicants for enrolment, eVŠ records of higher education provider, eVŠ records of private higher education teachers. Because the HEA stipulates in article 82 that certain data obtained by the ministry responsible for higher education from the Agency or higher education institutions and vice versa shall be free of charge, it is very important that the Agency’s information system and eVŠ are compatible so that they enable mutual exchange of common data, while it also needs to be ensured that the work of HEI/HVC (applicants) is not duplicated or obstructed.

The further course of the development of IS-NAKVIS has been set:

- the public procurement procedure is planned to be implemented by the end of 2014 (preparation of the tender documentation, production of the study and selection of the provider).
- The electronic form should be prepared by the beginning of 2015.

The Agency redesigned its website in March 2013. It publishes all information on its operation and public records, which are updated regularly. The website is constantly being improved. An archive in which all publications on the website are saved has been introduced for better transparency. In the end of 2013 it also started publishing the external evaluation reports of groups of experts with summaries in English. To this end, a user-friendly browser through study programmes and higher education institutions will be developed and designed in 2014.

Opportunities for improvement:

The Agency should put out a public tender for the selection of a provider and carry out all measures for the establishment of IS-NAKVIS as soon as possible.

6.2.5. ESG 3.5: Mission Statement

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 3.5: fully compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes in the ESG report that the Agency's operation is fully compliant with ESG 3.5.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

The Agency has adopted all key strategic documents, its mission, its vision and its strategy of operation until 2016. In accordance with the priorities, the Council adopted short-term strategic objectives set by 2013, which were the basis for the preparation of the Agency’s action plan for 2013. In view of the challenges the Agency has been facing in the recent period (reduced financial resources, amended legislation, strengthening of the counselling role of the Agency), deviations from the planned strategy should be examined and priority objectives for the years 2014 and 2015 should be prepared. All internal stakeholders must participate in the preparation or modification of the strategy.

6.2.6. ESG 3.6: Independence

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 3.6: fully compliant
Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes that the Agency's operation is entirely independent from the Government, higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and all other interest groupings, organisations and individuals. In their work, the Council members are not responsible to the institution they come from or the Government; they may be dismissed from their position if they are proven not to be independent in their work. If there is a risk of a conflict of interests in dealing with and deciding on the applications, they are excluded from discussion and voting. Independence of groups of experts is guaranteed as well. Rights and responsibilities of experts are presented in detail in the Manual for Experts. Before being appointed to the group, every proposed expert needs to give a statement regarding a potential conflict of interests in relation to the individual application he/she deals with. Also, in case the expert has already been appointed but a conflict of interests is proven later, the Agency Council appoints another expert or may replace the entire group of experts.

Members of the Appeal Committee (and their substitute members) are independent in their work as well; in accordance with the HEA, the conditions for them are very specific. In their operation, the Council as well as the Appeal Committee are independent and bound by the principles of legality, independence, professionalism and political neutrality; therefore, no disturbances in operation occur between them. The international review panel observes that in the end of 2012, the Government attempted to influence the composition or the appointment of members of the Agency Council, which would have limited the Agency's independence. The proposal included the provision according to which all members would be appointed by the Government. The Agency and stakeholders adamantly opposed the proposal which was later withdrawn. By acting in this way, the Agency shows its determination to protect its independence.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

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.

During the sessions, the Council members have excluded themselves from voting on matters in which they were associated with applicants. The total number of exclusions in adopting decisions on accreditation and evaluation procedures is 34, which on average means 2 exclusions per session. While certain Council members have never excluded themselves from discussion or voting, some of them have excluded themselves several times. The reason is they were more associated with applicants in the procedures.
The independence of Agency is also evident from the method of its funding; namely, it is a direct non-governmental budget user.

Based on survey results (Annex 1), there is good cooperation of the staff with stakeholders (stakeholders rated it with the average value of above 4.1) and the Agency experts (experts rated it with the value of above 4.6), while the satisfaction with the Director's work has also improved. In comparison with the previous year, the satisfaction of stakeholders with external evaluations and groups of experts improved (average value of 3.5), while the satisfaction with the functioning of the Agency Council is slightly lower (average value of 3.1). Also, the analysis of questionnaires filled out by the Council members shows a lower level of satisfaction with the functioning of the Council, equal treatment of applicants and proficiency of the decisions.

On average, the Council members neither agree nor disagree (3.3) that operational realisation of the adopted decisions is verified at the Council sessions. Also, they averagely neither agree nor disagree (3.4) that all members carefully protect information they come in contact with and that expert opinions prepared by the staff help them in decision-making.

Based on the above stated findings, we invited the Council members to participate in the revision of the training programme and the conference for experts; the members presented to the candidates the expectations of the Council regarding the reports of groups of experts in order to make decision-making at the Council as much substantively and professionally founded as possible.

Opportunities for improvement:
We see the opportunity in closer cooperation of the staff with the Council members in trainings of the candidates for entry in the register of experts as well as in various conferences and workshops in the area of quality in higher education and higher vocational education. Besides, the Council members should occasionally monitor (as external observers) the experts during site visits within external evaluation procedures. We recommend that the Rules of Procedure of the Council are supplemented with the provision according to which the Council members leave the session during the discussion and voting in the event that a conflict of interests is established.

6.2.7. ESG 3.7: External Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes Used by the Agencies

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 3.7: substantially compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes in the ESG report that the Agency has a complete set of formal and legal tools that define its operations. Most of the documents were created in 2012.

Accreditation criteria and evaluation criteria were developed in consultation with external stakeholders. The criteria are a comprehensive and integral document which also refers to the ESG standards. They define procedures and requirements which need to be fulfilled for accreditations and external evaluations, as well as the work of groups of experts. Accreditation criteria are divided into the programme and the institutional part; there is also a distinction between initial accreditation and re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes. The criteria are set for assessing the changes of study programmes, branch units in the Republic of Slovenia, joint study programmes, supplementary study programmes and extraordinary evaluation. In accreditation of study programmes, first- and second-cycle programmes are dealt with separately from third-cycle programmes. Besides, the Agency has also adopted and
published the **TNHE criteria**. The international review panel observes that certain criteria are being repeated, such as regular collecting and analysing of data on learning outcomes of the students and the operation of a HEI/HVC as a whole. Since the number of criteria in individual areas of the assessment is large, there is a risk of different interpretations. The Agency organises intensive trainings for candidates for entry in the register of experts, annual conferences for experts and education for the Council members. The response of stakeholders with respect to clarity of accreditation criteria and procedures was relatively critical; therefore, the Agency initiated the fundamental revision of this regulation in 2013. The international review panel also established that the Agency has difficulties in interpretation or creation of more specific criteria related to pedagogical work and research of higher education teachers and researchers, as well as the criteria associated with presenting scientific-research work; therefore, it proposed the relevant ministry to amend the legislation. It also thinks that learning outcomes are somewhat "narrowly" defined. A study programme must be in accordance with educational objectives and learning outcomes; however, it didn't detect any particular attention to be given to monitoring and establishing of learning outcomes in the Agency's development strategy. In its view, this is probably a consequence of the fact that national qualification framework has not yet been adopted in Slovenia.

The international review panel observes that guidelines for writing self-evaluation reports are not clearly defined in the criteria. Self-evaluation reports are rather extensive, while on the other hand, they could contain more analyses of proofs required for the assessment of compliance with individual criteria. The appeal procedure is transparent, appeals to the body of second instance (Appeal Committee) are permitted against all decisions of the Council. Administrative dispute may also be initiated (Administrative Court) against the decisions of the Council or the Appeal Committee.

The international review panel observes that the Agency's operation is substantially compliant with standard 3.7. It sees the key opportunities for improvement in critical assessment of accreditation criteria and evaluation criteria, reduction of the number criteria, particularly those not essential for the improvement of the quality assurance system. At the same time, the criteria related to actual monitoring and assessment of learning outcomes need to be emphasised more. It also recommends the preparation of guidelines for writing self-evaluation reports of HEI/HVC which should be less extensive and more goal-oriented, while they should also be more uniform. In this way, they will be easier to compare and analyse.

**Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:**

Based on the findings of the international review panel and based on the meta-analysis, we observe that guidelines for writing self-evaluation reports of HEI/HVC need to be prepared as soon as possible in cooperation with stakeholders, whereby autonomy, internal quality assurance system and particularities of every HEI/HVC should be taken into account.

The Agency has been finding for quite a while that amendments to accreditation criteria need to be prepared because certain criteria are overlapping, some of them define the area of assessment in too much detail and some of them are too vague. Draft fundamental revision of criteria was completed in the spring of 2013, but was not adopted due to anticipated amendments to the **HEA** and the transition to institutional accreditation.

**Draft fundamental revision of accreditation criteria mainly includes the following:**

- reduction of the number of criteria and elimination of overlapping;
Accreditation criteria were partially amended in October 2013. The fundamental guiding principle of their amendment was clearer distinction between re-accreditation and external evaluation of higher education institutions on one hand and study programmes on the other. Although the assessment procedures in external evaluation are described and argued in detail in the Manual for Experts, the distinction between institutional and programme evaluation was not sufficiently clear in accreditation criteria.

In 2013, TNHE criteria were also amended or supplemented in accordance with the amendments to the HEA. Amendments to these criteria primarily relate to broader explanation and treatment of applications in TNHE. The latter can be organised and provided in two ways - on the basis of contract or without it. In the latter case, the Agency no longer keeps record of the issued consents to TNHE contracts. We observe that the area of TNHE is very loosely regulated and does not enable the Agency to verify the actual quality of the provision of TNHE in Slovenia as well as abroad; therefore, proposals of amendments to HEA, which the Agency several times submitted to the ministry responsible for higher education, were focused on clearer definition of TNHE, equal treatment of Slovenian as well as foreign providers of TNHE, and on the definition of clearer role of the Agency in monitoring and developing of quality of TNHE. We are pointing out that, according to most recent draft amendments to the HEA accessible to the Agency, our comments were not taken into consideration, while the Agency’s role in TNHE remains unspecified and unclear.

Since the planned amendments to the HEA still have not been adopted, the Agency prepared minor amendments to the currently valid accreditation criteria in the beginning of 2014 in order to eliminate difficulties in day-to-day work as soon as possible; the amendments include reduced number of criteria, elimination of overlapping, more exact regulation of assessment of transformation of institutions and correction of certain procedural provisions.

Opportunities for improvement:

For easier interpretation of the criteria and more transparent operation and decision-making by the Council, mandatory explanation of the criteria or guidelines which would facilitate interpretation of individual articles should be adopted.

6.2.8. ESG 3.8: Accountability Procedures

Compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG 3.8: substantially compliant

Findings of the international review panel:

The international review panel observes that the Agency in its operation follows the principle of transparency and accessibility by publishing all Council's decisions, reports on work and operation of the Agency, business reports, self-evaluation and external evaluation reports, all criteria and other important documents. Due to the development and improvement of internal quality assurance system, the higher education and higher
vocational education stakeholders' perspective on the Agency's operation was also taken into account in the previous self-evaluation report of the Agency (2010–2012). After every external evaluation, the satisfaction of HEI/HVC (their management, students and the employees) is surveyed by an anonymous questionnaire. The Agency staff which conducted the procedure and the group of experts which carried out external evaluation also give their opinion. Information on the satisfaction of stakeholders with the Agency's operation and on the suitability of criteria and procedures is collected once a year. According to the opinion of the international review panel, the next good example of procedural responsibility are the already mentioned annual reports on the work and operation of the Agency which also include critical reflection on why certain objectives failed to be accomplished.

The international review panel sees the opportunity for improvement in the more coherent internal quality assurance system of the Agency which connects the above-stated separate activities carried out by the Agency in the procedure of internal quality assessment. The Agency's Quality Manual provides basic information on the Agency, defines stakeholders and describes their involvement in the Agency's operation, describes the tasks of the Agency's bodies and staff, the procedures, provides information on documentation, communication channels, work plans and information on material and financial matters. However, the manual does not provide any insight into how the Agency ensures its quality, into the actual characteristics of its internal quality assurance system, the objectives and quality indicators, the gathering of information for meeting quality indicators or objectives, the involvement of stakeholders in the internal quality assurance system (separately from their involvement in the procedures), the procedures for monitoring internal responsiveness, as well as competences and responsibilities. The international review panel recommends the creation of a document that would take into account all of the above listed observations and further ensure the responsibility of the Agency's operation.

The international review panel observes that the Agency's operation is substantially compliant with standard 3.8 and recommends the adoption of a quality manual which would define objectives, indicators and tools for data collection, ensure monitoring and improvement of internal quality assurance system, reporting on results, mechanisms for providing feedback information and define responsibilities.

Findings pertaining to self-evaluation:

Recommendations in SER 2010–2012 were also oriented towards the improvement of the Agency's Quality Manual; therefore, revision of the Manual was foreseen in the Agency's action plan for 2013. The task was not carried out completely. Changes are still being prepared on the basis of the used methodology or the self-evaluation until 2012.

Opportunities for improvement:

One of the priorities in 2014 is the adoption and publication of the revised Quality Manual which will be based on the methodology of conducting self-evaluations of the Agency and will include in the assessment all stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education. It will take into account the recommendations of the international review panel (clear procedures and methodology for collecting and processing of collected data, defined objectives and quality indicators, involvement of all stakeholders, defined procedures for monitoring of internal responsiveness and clear competences and responsibilities within the Agency).

7. FINAL ASSESSMENT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT
On the basis of the self-evaluation report (2010–2012), findings of the international review panel and the report on work and operation of the Agency for 2012, the action plan was adopted in the autumn of 2013. The priorities were also set in accordance with the Agency's strategic objectives, particularly the priority objectives set by 2013:

1. **revision of internal acts** (finalisation of the revision of accreditation criteria and evaluation criteria and the revision of the Agency's Quality Manual);

2. **training of experts** (preparation of uniform templates for drafting reports by groups of experts and of the site visit protocol for groups of experts as a supplement to the Manual for Experts revised in 2013, finalisation of the revision of training of candidates for experts as well as organisation and provision of trainings);

3. **information system** (preparation of tender documents for the selection of the IS-NAKVIS provider, implementation of public procurement and selection of the provider, list of the Agency's procedures and activities ...);

4. **internal quality assurance system** (preparation of the meta-analysis for the period 2010–2013, publication of final evaluation reports of groups of experts, preparation of application for ENQA membership, harmonisation of the staff ...);

5. **external quality assurance system** (the plan and implementation of measures or tasks for joining ENQA, substantive analysis of accreditations and external evaluations ...).

We observe that the majority of tasks were carried out successfully; an overview of these tasks is briefly presented in the fifth chapter. Partially accomplished are the following tasks which will need to be given priority in 2014:

- fundamental revision of accreditation criteria;
- finalisation of the revision of the Agency's Quality Manual;
- establishment of IS-NAKVIS;
- provision of long-term, integral and stable funding of the Agency.

In comparison with the previous self-evaluation period, the Agency achieved great progress in the improvement of its internal quality assurance system and moved along a successful path in the development and improvement of the external quality assurance system, particularly thanks to more active and fruitful cooperation with stakeholders in higher education as well as in higher vocational education. It successfully underwent external evaluation which enabled it the extension of ECA membership, accession to the MULTRA project and entry in EQAR.

Apart from the priorities which the Agency failed to fully accomplish in 2013, it is faced with new challenges and opportunities for improvement in 2014, which were presented in detail in chapters 5 and 6. At the end, we will summarise them by presenting them according to the Agency's strategic objectives set until 2016.

For each strategic objective, activities carried out for their achievement are indicated briefly; they are presented in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6 of this Report. Finally, opportunities for improvement that could contribute to improved Agency's operation and more successful achievement of each strategic objective are indicated.

Opportunities for improvement are based on the findings from the reports on work and operation of the Agency and on opinions of different stakeholders thereon. The overview of the implementation of tasks defined in the action plan also constitutes an important
basis for the recommendations. On this basis, the Agency gained an opportunity for critical self-reflection.

It should be noted that all strategic objectives of the Agency are closely interrelated; namely, the activities carried out to achieve a particular strategic objective had a(n) (in)direct impact on other activities and on the achievement of other strategic objectives.

### 7.1. Integration of the Agency in international associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES IN 2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entry in EQAR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tasks performed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ preparation of the action plan with specified activities according to priority strategic objectives set by 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ appointment and organisation of the self-evaluation group and conduction of self-evaluation for 2013 in which internal and external stakeholders participated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ preparation of the application for external evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ successful external evaluation of the Agency carried out by ECA in cooperation with ESU (the result: renewal of ECA membership, accession to the MULTRA project and entry in EQAR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ application for membership in the association of quality assurance agencies INQAAHE</td>
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**ASSESSMENT OF MEETING THE FIRST STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE**

The Agency achieved great progress in this strategic objective, but an important goal from the 2013 action plan has not been accomplished yet, namely the Agency's membership in ENQA; membership application will be submitted in 2014.

On the other hand, activities for joining the international association of quality assurance agencies – INQAAHE are coming to the conclusion although it was not particularly planned.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

▪ strengthening participation in all associations which the Agency is a member of (organisation of international conferences, workshops)
▪ more active participation of the staff, experts and Council members in international projects with due consideration of available human and financial resources

### 7.2. Development and functioning of the quality assurance system in the national environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES IN 2013</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development and improvement of the quality assurance system in the national environment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tasks performed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ active involvement of stakeholders in amending the Agency’s acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ active involvement of all stakeholders in the Agency's self-evaluation (higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, students, experts, the ministry responsible for higher education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ appointment of the group for setting up the new information system of the Agency (IS-NAKVIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ coordination with stakeholders in the preparation of draft project for the public procurement of new IS-NAKVIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ procedures and preparation of tender documents for the implementation of public tender procurement for the selection of IS-NAKVIS provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ preparation of templates for writing reports of groups of experts and instructions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tasks performed

- collecting and analysing self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges
- preparation of the meta-analysis for the period 2010–2013 – "Quality in the
ASSESSMENT OF MEETING THE THIRD STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

In the end of 2013, the Agency published the meta-analysis of the quality assurance system in Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education. In line with recommendations from the ESG report, opportunities for improvement were also identified.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- the Agency should organise regular conferences with stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education with the purpose of discussing guidelines for efficient functioning and development of internal quality assurance systems, and stressing the importance of quality culture exchange of good practice
- transition to institutional evaluation (in re-accreditation procedures) needs to be planned in detail in cooperation with stakeholders while taking into account quality culture and the actual state of internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions; active participation in the establishment of EEEP (ECA Expert Exchange Portfolio) and encouragement of Agency experts to participate in international assessments

7.4. Positioning and recognition of the role, significance and quality of the Agency’s operation in the public

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES IN 2013

Tasks performed

- successful external evaluation of the Agency
- publication of evaluation reports of groups of experts on the Agency website
- cooperation of the staff, Council members and Director with stakeholders (at conferences, workshops and trainings organised by stakeholders)
- participation in inter-sectoral (group of Bologna experts, group for the preparation of amendments to the HEA) and international projects (JOQAR, ECApedia, EEEP, CeQuint, Qrossroads, MULTRA)
- Director's visits to higher education institutions
- activities of the Director as an expert in the European association EUA and a member of the CEENQA executive board

ASSESSMENT OF MEETING THE FOURTH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Accomplishment of the fourth strategic objective is associated with the successful fulfilment of all strategic objectives of the Agency. Considerable progress can be observed in 2013, particularly in the improved recognisability, importance and quality of the Agency's operation since it successfully underwent the external evaluation and was entered in EQAR. Besides, the staff actively participated in various already mentioned inter-sectoral and international projects, while the Director, some Council members and some of the staff participated in the inter-sectoral group for the amendments to the HEA.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- more active participation of the Agency (Director and Council members) in public discussions on the future development of external quality assurance system (of the Agency) and higher education and higher vocational education as a whole
- strengthening of internal sense of belonging and motivation of the Agency's staff and Council members
- uniform representation of the Agency's interests in the public (all internal stakeholders)
permanent improvement of internal organisation and management of the Agency
striving to secure long-term integral and stable funding of the Agency

7.5. Co-creation and development of higher education and higher vocational policy in the area of quality

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES IN 2013
Participation in shaping higher education policies

Tasks performed
- participation of stakeholders in amending the Agency's acts
- taking into account the opinions of all stakeholders and their participation in the Agency's self-evaluation (higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, students, experts, the staff, the Council members)
- cooperation of the staff, the Council members and the Director with stakeholders (at conferences, workshops and trainings organised by stakeholders)
- participation in inter-sectoral (group of Bologna experts, group for the preparation of amendments to the HEA) and international projects (JOQAR, ECApedia, EEEP, CeQuint, Crossroads, MULTRA)
- The Director's visits to higher education institutions
- activities of the Director as an expert in the European association EUA and a member of the CEENQA executive board

ASSESSMENT OF MEETING THE FIFTH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE
In accordance with this strategic objective, the Agency pursues its activities in two directions:
1. participation in amending the legislation and inclusion of all stakeholders in the preparation and amending of its acts
2. with transparent operation and lectures at various conferences, workshops, participation in inter-sectoral and international bodies and publication of important documents (Council's decisions, final external evaluation reports of groups of experts, Council's acts, reports on work and operation of the Agency, meta-reports or meta-analyses, Agency's self-evaluation reports, etc.)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT
- strengthening participation in all associations, inter-sectoral groups and international projects where the Agency is a member or where this is necessary for further quality assurance system development
- more active participation in international projects with due consideration of available human and financial resources

7.6. Promoting the quality of transnational education

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES IN 2013
Amended TNHE criteria and proposed amendments to the HEA-1

Tasks performed
- amended TNHE criteria
- active participation in discussions related to TNHE and submitting amendments to the HEA-1 to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

ASSESSMENT OF MEETING THE SIXTH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE
TNHE criteria were amended in 2013 in line with the amendments to the HEA (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 109/2012). Several initiatives were submitted to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport to regulate competences of the Agency in assessing the quality of TNHE by the amendments to the new HEA-1, but since the proposed HEA-1 is still under public discussion it is still unclear to what extent will our remarks be taken into account.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT
- intensifying efforts to participate in the preparation of amendments to HEA (in the area of TNHE) and forwarding initiatives to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport
- participating in public discussions on TNHE
- raising public awareness on the importance of equal treatment of TNHE in Slovenia as well as abroad

7.7. Provision of high-quality counselling services of the Agency by its professionally qualified staff

**IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES IN 2013**

**Providing quality services**

**Tasks performed**

- revision of the training programme for candidates for entry in the register of experts
- preparation of the [site visit protocol](#)
- organisation and implementation of the conference for experts
- organisation and implementation of several meetings for harmonisation of the staff
- participation in domestic and international conferences

**ASSESSMENT OF MEETING THE SEVENTH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE**

Providing quality services of the Agency is also closely associated with further training and education of all internal stakeholders of the Agency (the staff, the Council members, the Director) and their participation in inter-sectoral and international projects in the field of quality in higher education. Excellent knowledge of quality assurance systems in Slovenia and elsewhere in the world and active work in various projects in this field are an opportunity to strengthen the counselling function and transfer good practices to stakeholders in Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

- encouraging the staff and the members of the Council to participate more actively in various inter-sectoral and international projects in the field of quality in higher education
- organisation and provision of training for new members of the Council
- harmonisation of work of the Agency staff and Council members as well as the president of the Council and the Director, and organisation of harmonisation meetings
- encouraging the staff towards further education and training in the field of the Agency's work
- meetings for harmonisation of the staff need to be continued
- encouraging higher education stakeholders to organise an inter-sectoral group which would prepare guidelines for the elimination of architectural barriers, preparation of tactile maps, adaptation of websites, ensuring accessibility of study materials and other solutions that would enable unhindered study to the disabled (students, teachers), the blind and partially sighted, and others.

Based on the analysis of the Agency's operation, the assessment of the priority strategic objectives and the assessment of compliance with the first and the second section of ESG standards, a considerable progress and development in the Agency's operation can be observed.

8. SWOT ANALYSIS
## Strengths

- National and international acknowledgement of the Agency (successful external evaluation of the Agency - EQAR)
- Publication of full evaluation reports on the Agency’s website
- Active involvement of all stakeholders in the Agency’s self-evaluation and in amending the Agency’s acts
- International composition of the groups of experts and their independence
- Continuously updating the content of the training for candidates for entry in the register of experts
- Constant harmonisation of the Agency staff and Council members regarding the Agency’s operations and decision-making
- Annual collecting and analysis self-evaluation reports of HEI/HVC;
- Organisation and implementation of annual conference for experts

## Weaknesses

- Delay in the procurement of the public tender and selection of the provider for the information system (IS-NAKVIS)
- The Agency is preoccupied with accreditation procedures, which has a negative impact on its other important activities, such as regular, profiled and in-depth counselling, policy development and system analyses
- Inadequate determination of accreditation procedures and external evaluations and regulation of procedures in accordance with the General Administrative Procedure Act
- Agency has not yet fully established the internal QA at HEI and HVC

## Opportunities

- Revision of internal acts and of Quality manual
- Strengthening participation in all associations, which the Agency is a member of
- More active participation of the staff, experts and Council members in international projects
- Preparation of guidelines for writing self-evaluation reports and harmonisation of the contents with all stakeholders
- Informing (newsletters) needs to be organised in a way that experts and other stakeholders are properly informed in time
- Well planned transition to institutional re-accreditation
- Organisation of training for new Council members
- Develop better legal bases for accreditation procedures both at the national level (as partners) and at the level of Agency’s regulations

## Threats

- Unstable long-term financing of Agency’s operations
- Incompatibility of the QA and QE (quality enhancement) system with the procedural provisions of the General Administrative Procedure Act
- Bureaucratisation of QA and its possible reduction to litigation
9. LIST OF ANNEXES (clickable)

Annex 0   The Agency Presentation Brochure
Annex 1   Analysis of Surveys 2013
Annex 2   Self-evaluation Process and Application

Acts
Annex 3   HEA (Higher Education Act)
Annex 4   PVEA (Post-Secondary Vocational Education Act - in Slovene only)

Internal acts of the Agency
Annex 5   Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes
Annex 6   Other Acts of the Agency
Annex 7   Work and Financial Plan for 2013
Annex 8   Report on Work and Operation of the Agency for 2013
Annex 9   Quality Manual

External acts of the Agency
Annex 10  Manual for experts
Annex 11  Site visit protocol

Annual and other reports
           External Observation Report of the Agency for MULTRA 2013
9.1. ANNEX 1. ANALYSIS OF SURVEYS 2013

This Annex provides a detailed analysis of surveys performed in 2013 as one of the methods to assess the satisfaction of all stakeholders with the Agency’s operation.

The analysis of the Agency's operation was performed at two levels. The first one included 'internal stakeholders' such as: the Council, the experts entered in the register of experts, and the Agency staff. The second level included 'external stakeholders' such as: higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, professional associations and MESCS.

In addition to gaining insight into the assessment of the Agency's operation as a whole, we also wanted to obtain the assessment of stakeholders related to external evaluation, which constitutes an important element in the procedure of re-accreditation of study programmes, as well as in the procedure of re-accreditation of HEI and HVC.

We decided to carry out a quantitative analysis in order to obtain as many respondents as possible. According to the above levels of stakeholders and differences between them, four types of questionnaires adapted to each stakeholder type were prepared.

The questionnaires were sent to e-mail addresses of all stakeholders in higher education. Since four types of questionnaire had been prepared, the methodology associated with the number of respondents is described in more detail in the following chapters.

The findings of the analysis of the Agency's operation are presented below. The first subsection describes the assessment of the Agency's operation from the perspective of the Council. The second subsection relates to the assessment of the Agency's operation provided by the experts entered in the register. The third subsection includes the assessment by the Agency staff.

The assessment of the satisfaction with the Agency's operation from the perspective of external stakeholders is given in the fourth subsection, which also includes the assessment of the satisfaction with external evaluation both by stakeholders and the Agency staff.

SATISFACTION OF THE COUNCIL, EXPERTS AND THE AGENCY'S STAFF

Survey among the Council members

The purpose of the survey questionnaire was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about the Agency's performance in 2013. The respondents were the Council members.

The questionnaire comprised the following thematic areas:

- assessment of satisfaction with the Council's performance;
- assessment of satisfaction with the Council sessions;
- assessment of the contribution of individual members of the Council;
- assessment of mutual cooperation with the Agency.

Each thematic area included statements with which the Council could either agree or disagree. Each statement could be rated as follows: 5 - I entirely agree, 4 - I agree, 3 - I neither agree nor disagree, 2 - I disagree, 1 - I entirely disagree.
The survey was completed by eight out of eleven Council members, which constitutes a 73% response with respect to the Council structure.

Chart 1: Survey among the Agency Council members by thematic areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey among the Agency Council members by thematic areas</th>
<th>Average Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of mutual cooperation with the Agency</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of the contribution of individual members of the Agency Council</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of satisfaction with the Agency Council sessions</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of satisfaction with the Agency Council performance</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the data analysis, it can be observed that the highest average values (4.0) were given to the thematic area relating to the assessment of the contribution of individual members of the Council. The lowest average value (3.6) was given to the thematic area relating to the assessment of satisfaction with the Council performance.

The assessment of the contribution of individual members of the Council is composed of the following statements: I actively participate in discussions at the Council sessions; I believe that my opinion is taken into account; I am not bound by any decisions, positions or instructions of others in decision-making at the sessions; I am satisfied with the management and work of the project group I participate in; I actively participate in decision justifications and preparation of specific contents resulting from the Agency Council decisions; I prepare intensely for the sessions and I know exactly what will be discussed and decided upon.

The assessment of satisfaction with the Council performance is composed of the following statements: the Agency Council is a professional body; the Agency Council adopts decisions exclusively in the long-term interest of the Slovenian higher vocational education and higher education; the Agency Council follows the set strategy and work plans; the Agency Council acts professionally, autonomously and independently; in its actions, the Agency Council is not bound by decisions, positions statements and instructions of other institutions, organisations or individuals; in decision-making, the Agency Council follows the principles of preventing the conflicts of interests and impartiality; all stakeholders are treated equally; all stakeholders in higher education find the Agency Council trustworthy; the members of the Agency Council are motivated by the importance of work and by the opportunity to learn; payment for performing the function is suitable.
Chart 2: Assessment of satisfaction with the Agency Council performance

In the thematic area "assessment of satisfaction with the Council performance", the Council members gave the highest average value (4.0) to the statements 'the Agency Council adopts decisions exclusively in the long-term interest of the Slovenian higher vocational education and higher education' and 'the Agency Council is a professional body'. The statement 'payment for performing the function is suitable' was rated with the lowest average value (2.8). The members of the Council thus neither agreed nor disagreed with the above statement.
In the thematic area "assessment of satisfaction with the Council sessions", the Council members agreed with the following statements (they rated them with the highest value (4.3)): 'adding of new points based on a pertinent justification is allowed'; 'the agendas are well-prepared'; and 'the sessions are conducted in a way allowing for effective discussion and encouraging of new ideas and proposals'. At the same time, the Council members averagely agree that there is enough time at the Council sessions for all to discuss and decide on all points of the agenda (4.1) and that all are actively encouraged to participate and express their views at the Council sessions (4.1). On average, the Council members neither agree nor disagree (3.3) that operational implementation of the adopted decisions is being checked at the Council sessions. They also neither agree nor disagree (3.4) that all members prudently protect the information they come into contact with, and that expert opinions prepared by the staff are useful for decision-making.

Under the opportunities for improvement within the thematic area "assessment of satisfaction with the Council sessions", the Council members noted that expert opinions ensuring suitable dealing are often repetitive, even incomplete, and that the Agency staff should improve expert groundwork for the Council's decision-making with preliminary checking of compliance of statements in reports with the criteria and the legal basis, and ask for additional information to complete the reports, if necessary.
Chart 4: Assessment of the contribution of individual members of the Agency Council

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment of the contribution of individual members of the Agency Council (average values)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. I prepare intensely for the sessions and I know exactly what will be discussed and decided upon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I actively participate in decision justifications and preparation of specific contents resulting from the Agency Council decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am satisfied with the management and work of the project group I participate in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am not bound by any decisions, positions or instructions of others in decision-making at the sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I believe that my opinion is taken into account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I actively participate in discussions at the Council sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three statements under the thematic area "assessment of the contribution of individual members of the Council" were given the highest value (4.1), i.e. that they actively participate in the decision justifications and preparation of specific contents resulting from the Council decisions, that they believe that their opinion expressed at the session is taken into account and that they actively participate in discussion at the Council sessions. They gave the lowest average value (3.7) to the statement saying that they are satisfied with the management and work of the project group they participate in.
In the thematic area 'assessment of mutual cooperation with the Agency', the Council members on average agreed (they rated it with the highest average value (4.1)) with the statement saying that the Director and the Council have a good cooperation. Two statements from this area were also given high value (4.0), i.e. that in cooperation with the Director, the Council assesses the accomplishment of the Agency's strategy and proposes modifications of the strategy, work and action plans, and that the Director at the Council sessions competently presents the positions of the staff and provides relevant explanations regarding the operation and external representation of the Agency. The statement that the Agency's strategy is a product of cooperation between the Council and the Agency was given the lowest value (3.6) in this area.

Under the opportunities for improvement within the thematic area "assessment of mutual cooperation with the Agency", the Council members noted that considering that the Agency is often caught up in deficient legislation (with loopholes), it needs more accurate and thorough acts/criteria containing provisions preventing appeals by applicants. The appeals are too common and the Appeal Committee often upholds them. Duties, competences and responsibilities of the staff should be defined in more detail to assure uniform, transparent and professional operation in all cases. For the Council to be fully unbiased and have a clear mode of operation, it needs more detailed instructions and explanations provided by the legal service.

Under the heading Additional notes, the Council members noted that the Agency finally directed its work towards a decision-making method which is still not entirely satisfactory, but it is getting closer to good evaluation, and that the Agency staff should receive as much professional training as possible in order to provide high-quality support to all stakeholders and contribute to better quality of the Agency's operation.
Survey for the Agency experts

The purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about the Agency’s performance in 2013. The respondents were the experts entered in the register.

The questionnaire comprised the following thematic areas:

- general satisfaction with the Agency’s performance;¹
- assessment of procedures and criteria for initial accreditation and cooperation with the Agency;²
- assessment of procedures and criteria for re-accreditation and cooperation with the Agency;³

Individual thematic areas contained certain statements in relation to which the experts could express their agreement or disagreement. Each statement could be rated as follows: 5 - I entirely agree, 4 - I agree, 3 - I neither agree nor disagree, 2 - I disagree, 1 - I entirely disagree.

The questionnaire was completed by 44 experts.

In the first thematic area named "general satisfaction with the Agency’s performance", experts rated appropriate structure of groups of experts (by areas of assessment as well as in terms of experience and competences and the contribution of foreign experts who contributed to better assessment with international experience), practice and a general overview of the application with the average value of 4.5. Only slightly higher (the average value of 4.6) was their assessment of the usefulness of the training of experts from the perspective of conducting the assessment which means that the experts fully agree with this statement.

**Chart 6: General satisfaction with the Agency’s performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Average Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The structure of the group of experts was appropriate (by areas of assessment as well as in terms of experience and competences)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Appointing a foreign expert to the group of experts contributed to better assessment (international experience and practice, meta-insight into the role, etc.)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The training of experts was useful from the perspective of conducting the assessment</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The area was assessed by all experts.
² The area was only assessed by experts participating in initial accreditations.
³ The area was only assessed by experts participating in re-accreditations.
In the first thematic area, "general satisfaction with the Agency's performance", experts provided the following proposals to improve the efficiency of the group of experts:

- to insist on a two-day visit if several programmes or an institution with practical training are being assessed;
- the group for this assessment was really good, as well as the Agency's support;
- I believe that Nova Gorica (and Ljubljana) sets a good example of how the work should be done (or is it being done?);
- maybe the experts should be provided an additional day to observe the educational process, e.g. listen to some lectures or seminar, possibly an exam, in order to distinguish between the standardised and the actual (including hidden) curriculum. I am not sure whether this is feasible or in line with the provisions of the Agency with respect to the (re-)accreditation of a study;
- being a physical chemist, I was not very familiar with the assessed branch, so I was more focused on general issues. Someone closer to the textile profession would have been more appropriate;
- it might be better if English were used for external evaluation in order to obtain a wider range of experts;
- a foreign expert would have to pass an additional exam on Slovenian legislation, accreditation criteria ... - knowledge is insufficient;
- the members of the group examined the materials which they had received and were prepared to survey and evaluate the college. I believe that everyone was good, particularly the chair who is largely responsible for the success of the evaluation. It is also important that the college be prepared for the evaluation, as it directly appoints people relevant for surveys and other activities performed at a site visit;
- if possible, at least one expert from a specific (primary) area of work (of programmes) of the college;
- care must be taken to ensure that members of the committee do not come from competitive institutions;
- members of the group of experts complemented each other and acted in concert. I believe that the group of experts acted efficiently, so I have no proposal to improve their work;
- the applicant should submit all the requested documents on a CD; if anything is missing, the experts can invite them to complete the CD when they prepare for the visit;
- additional training of experts in quality assurance system management. If possible, teams should prepare themselves by role-playing;
- efficiency depends on the members of the group and not on the Agency's activity; all the Agency can do is to select experts appropriately.

In the second thematic area of the questionnaire where the assessment of procedures and initial accreditation criteria was evaluated, the following statements were rated with the average value of 4.4: 1) assessment procedures in initial accreditation are appropriately prescribed and unambiguous; 2) initial accreditation criteria are clear and useful; 3) guidance for the preparation of reports on the assessment of HEI or study programmes is clear. These average values indicate that the experts agree that initial accreditation procedures and criteria as well as the guidance for the preparation of reports are clear and useful.
Experts assessed the cooperation with the Agency staff as very good. They entirely agreed (average value 4.8) that materials for the assessment of applications were delivered in time, prepared professionally and transparent enough, that the Agency staff were professional and objective in carrying out their tasks (average value 4.9), that they were always available for explanations and questions during assessments and provided useful assistance to the group of experts and, last but not least, that the group of experts successfully cooperated with the Agency staff (average value 4.9).

Chart 8: Assessment of cooperation with the Agency

Forty one experts who participated in the site visits within initial accreditation procedures assessed site visits to HEI. They agreed that the quality of site visits to HEI was of high level (average value 4.0) and that they were carried out in accordance with the expectations of HEI.

Proposals provided by experts in the thematic area "Assessment of cooperation with the Agency":

- too much time elapses between the appointment of a group of experts and the reception of materials. As a result, experts find it difficult to agree on the date of the visit, leading to the prolongation of procedures;
• prompt submission of the material after the Council has appointed the group, as the deadline for submission is linked to the appointment and not to the reception of the material;
• to adjust the time schedule to the actual abilities of the group to work together and to plan time slots for coordinating meetings during the day;
• a written application in which the management of the college states they do not have or do not know about some of the key elements of the college's operation should be considered incomplete, or a fully completed application should count more towards the final outcome of the evaluation;
• cooperation with the Agency staff has always been excellent, the staff provides complete support both during the preparation and during the visit. They are professionally qualified and provide a real support to our work;
• in case of our group, the member of the staff did his job flawlessly.

Chart 9: Assessment of the site visit to the HEI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment of the site visit to the HEI (average values)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Experts were well-prepared for the site visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The quality of site visits to HEI was of high level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Site visits were carried out in accordance with the expectations of HEI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the framework of the questionnaire, experts provided the following proposals to improve the efficiency of work of the group of experts:

• the application was not examined well, it contained a list of teachers employed, with no names. Experts should not receive such an application;
• the member of the staff did an excellent job;
• I believe the group was well-managed by the chair, but it should be noted that this is a highly arduous job if it is to be well-done;
• the contents of the accreditation form should follow the criteria as closely as possible. (If doing the work according to the criteria, chapters in the application should follow the same order. E.g. practical training appears under the sections of the cooperation with the environment, of the operation of the institution and of students);
• orientations are clear and so are the expected results. However, there are probably no mechanisms to check how the roles of the expert group members were completed. For example, a part of the report or groundwork has not been prepared according to instructions - the chair may return it for completion, but in a certain moment, they must do the task by themselves, as they are responsible for the whole. This applies both to Slovenian and foreign representatives; the latter are even more likely not to write what was agreed upon and submit texts as they wish to understand;
• when selecting experts for the Agency, a part of the test for their qualification should include correct usage of written Slovenian; poorly compiled texts are corrected by the chair as much as he or she is able to do it;
• the criteria should provide a better definition of "progress" at the institutions, i.e. what is an improvement compared to the previous accreditation and what is only fulfilment of standards;
• the date for the preparatory meeting and the site visit should be coordinated when a group for experts is being composed, before its appointment, when experts are contacted regarding their consent to participate. This would prevent subsequent long-lasting coordination arising from the fact that there is always someone in the group who is not satisfied with a specific date. This time would be much better spent for the assessment itself;
• good knowledge of Slovenian regulation;
• I still believe that particularities of HVC should be taken into account more in the criteria and in the formation of the groups for evaluation;
• deadlines could be shorter by a week and expressed as the number of days, e.g. 12 work days, but this would make everything more complicated. The existing deadlines - 1 month, are more straight-forward, but maybe provide too much time;
• more detailed instructions provided by the Agency, aligned with the international ones and simplified;
• some criteria for assessment are unrealistic, but experts should observe them, even though they know they make no sense, so they consciously modify them slightly. There is some redundancy (interviews in particular) in the procedures which could be avoided.

Survey on satisfaction of the Agency staff

The purpose of the analysis of the questionnaire was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about the Agency’s performance in 2013. The respondents were the Agency staff.

The questionnaire comprised the following thematic areas:

• assessment of satisfaction at work and cooperation among the staff;
• attitude towards quality, motivation and enthusiasm;
• career development;
• assessment of Agency’s organisation;
• assessment of the attitude towards the Council;
• assessment of the quality and adequacy of information received by the Agency.

Individual thematic areas contained certain statements in relation to which the Agency staff could express their agreement or disagreement. Each statement could be rated as follows: 5 - I entirely agree, 4 - I agree, 3 - I neither agree nor disagree, 2 - I disagree, 1 - I entirely disagree.

The questionnaire was completed in January 2014 by 19 staff members, which was 79 % of all staff at that time (including the Director).

In the first area called "assessment of satisfaction at work and cooperation among employees", the staff rated the statement 'I am satisfied with work I carry out' with the average value of 4.1 (I agree).
Chart 10: Assessment of satisfaction at work and cooperation among the Agency staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Average Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am satisfied with the permanent nature / security of my job</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am satisfied with the working hours</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>My work is interesting</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am satisfied with the work I carry out</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I am autonomous in doing my job</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I have a lot of opportunities to receive professional education and training</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The wishes of the staff are considered regarding the professional education and training</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I am satisfied with my personal development</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I am satisfied with the payment for my work</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I have good cooperation with the rest of the staff</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Superiors appreciate my work</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Our superiors share our idea of doing our job</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Employees dare to express opinions</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Employees have a clear idea about the expectations in our job</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Agency employs people qualified for their job</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I am satisfied with the way the Agency is managed</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The management considers the proposals and comments of the employees</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Relationships at the Agency are good</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>The Agency’s performance is transparent</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I have good cooperation with external experts</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Generally, I am satisfied with the work at the Agency</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second area called "attitude towards quality, motivation and enthusiasm", the staff rated the statement that those who have more workload are also suitably compensated, with the average value of 2.9 (I neither agree nor disagree). With the average value of 4.7 (I entirely agree), they expressed their willingness to get more workload when necessary and that they feel responsible for the quality of their work.
In the third thematic area called "career development", the staff expressed their opinion on statements related to evaluation of conditions for training, upgrading knowledge, criteria, the system and possibilities for promotion. Most members of the staff rated the work organisation at their position with the average value of 4.0.

Chart 12: Career development

The fourth thematic area referred to the "evaluation of the Agency's organisation", where the staff expressed their opinion as to statements related to the organisation of work in the sector they are employed in, the working conditions at the Agency in terms of space, equipment, information technology, involvement in the Agency management, organisation of the Agency, etc. The staff rated statements related to the organisation of work and involvement in the management and governance of the Agency with the average value of 3.6.
In the thematic area called "attitude towards the Council", the staff disagreed with the statement that the Council appreciates their professional work (average value of 2.2).

The staff provided the following proposals and comments:

- working meetings are regular but not highly effective. The Council sessions are only effective when terminated quickly. The actual effect of decisions is very poor;
- the web site must be improved – more useful, more interactive contents, updated information;
- drafting of (at least provisional) agenda for working meetings.

Under the opportunities for improvement, the staff noted the following:

- the Council must be familiar with its competences; arbitrary decision-making must be overcome; the Council must act more responsibly when making decisions;
• more professional attitude both in members and the staff, more responsible decision-making with regard to the mission and the strategy of the Agency; less bias;
• It is essential to monitor and direct work; priorities must be set and our potentials carefully managed; the Agency could reduce its workload regarding accreditation procedures and focus on the advisory role;
• to improve quality by planning in advance, setting deadlines and appointing persons responsible and defining all steps for the achievement of objectives, and to inform all staff on the main projects;
• to improve relationships between the staff; more mutual assistance and support; improved steering of initiatives to make progress;
• more project groups working more effectively, clearer definition of operational guidelines, prompt and more precise acquisition of information and analysis.

SURVEY ON SATISFACTION OF STAKEHOLDERS WITH THE AGENCY’S PERFORMANCE

The purpose of the analysis of the questionnaire was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about the Agency's performance in 2013. The respondents were external stakeholders. The questionnaire comprised the following thematic areas:

• assessment of Agency's operation;
• assessment of professional performance of groups of experts;
• assessment of satisfaction with the Council’s performance;
• assessment of satisfaction with the management performance.

Individual thematic areas contained certain statements in relation to which the stakeholders could express their agreement or disagreement. Each statement could be rated as follows: 5 - I entirely agree, 4 - I agree, 3 - I neither agree nor disagree, 2 - I disagree, 1 - I entirely disagree.

Based on the analysis of replies within the first area, "evaluation of the Agency's performance", we observe that stakeholders (N=15) neither agree nor disagree with the statement that the duration of the Agency's procedures is appropriate (average value 2.9). Stakeholders neither disagree nor agree with the statement that "the Agency takes into account opinions and proposals of stakeholders in the process of creating and amending its acts" (average value 3.3).
Chart 15: Assessment of the Agency’s performance - stakeholders

The respondents completely agree with the statement that "the Agency staff are kind" (average value 4.7).

The statements in the thematic area "assessment of professional competence of groups of experts" were rated with the average value between 3 and 4, which means that they neither agree nor disagree with the following statements: structure of groups of experts is appropriate; groups of experts carry out their work independently and professionally; groups of experts are trustworthy and, last but not least, final reports are objective and summarise the actual situation and findings of the groups of experts are useful for the institutions in the further development of their quality assurance systems.

Chart 16: Assessment of experts’ work by stakeholders
In the area "assessment of satisfaction with the Council's performance", the average value given by stakeholders as to the work of the Council was 3 (I neither agree nor disagree).

Chart 17: Assessment of the Agency Council's performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment of the Agency Council's performance (average values)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Council members act independently; they are not bound by decisions, positions, statements and instructions of the institutions that appointed them or of other institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In decision-making, the members of the Agency Council follow the principles of preventing the conflicts of interests and impartiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. All applicants are treated equally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The members of the Agency Council are trustworthy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chart below shows that stakeholders agree with the statement that "the Agency management takes care of good reputation of the Agency".

Chart 18: Assessment of the management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment of the Agency management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Direct and indirect communication of the Agency management with stakeholders in higher vocational education and higher education is professional and competent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Agency management takes care of good reputation of the Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Agency management is trustworthy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stakeholders provided the following proposals or explanations:

- unfortunately, the Agency provided us with different answers relating to a single issue, depending on the member of the staff we spoke to that day;
- our application for the accreditation of a master study was filed on 21 June 2012, but has not been resolved (the most recent information I have received was that the Appeal Committee would deal with our appeal, but they have not convened yet). Until this year, the staff were responsive and provided objective and accurate information. It seems, however, that they were recently given new
instructions not to provide information via telephone. As previously mentioned, the appeal to the decision was sent on 30 August 2013, today is 20 November 2013, and 14 days ago I found out that the Appeal Committee would deal with it. I am not informed of the exact date of it and I am afraid to ask the staff member about it because I know she received instructions not to respond. I suggest that the management allows the staff to communicate normally (as it used to be up to some months ago) and to speed up procedures. Probably, there are reasons why the staff are not allowed to give information, but the current course of events makes normal work very difficult and I believe that this should not be happening in a democratic country;

- apart from supervision, the Agency should assume an advisory role and assist higher education institutions in setting up internal quality control (organisation of trainings, professional counselling);
- unfortunately, almost none of the items can be rated as good. The group assessing our application for the accreditation of the master study includes an individual from a competitive organisation whose assessment is biased. Our appeal lists 16 items for which the opinion was not based on professional work but on incorrectly established situation. Such a group cannot have our trust and does not contribute to the development of quality assurance system;
- groups of experts should only include foreign experts, who should be familiar with Slovenian legislation and criteria before performing external evaluation;
- as far as programme accreditations are concerned, the structure of groups only rarely meets professional competence;
- in our case, the Agency’s decisions were based entirely on the opinion of experts, among whom was an individual from a competitive college. Therefore, it cannot be said that the Agency Council provides professional and justified decisions and acts independently, that it follows the principles of preventing the conflicts of interests, that it treats private HVC equally or that it has our trust;
- the criteria adopted by the Council should be better designed, more universal, professionally justified and much more simple. The criteria should allow for the identification of quality and encourage it, not only regulate quality assurance procedures in a matter-of-fact way;
- procedures of appointing Council members should guarantee autonomy and high level of expertise of the members;
- we cannot answer because we lack an insight into the course of sessions, and the minutes do not show this clearly;
- I do not have any experience, so I have not answered;
- I like it because now I get messages from the Agency management more often (like this survey, for example). Considering the obtained accreditation, the management must take care of the Agency’s reputation. Seeing that the staff are afraid to say a single word, I have my opinion on the manner of communication (rating it with 1). With respect to the new HEA, in the drafting of which the Agency management presumably took part, I can hardly say the management has our trust. However, I will be pleased to change my opinion if further course of events shows that the management supports more than just the monopoly of public higher vocational colleges;
- the Director has not been on the position long enough to allow us to know his work and assess him with objectivity.

EXTERNAL EVALUATION SURVEY

The management of HEI/HVC, and students

The purpose of the analysis of the questionnaire was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about the external evaluation performed. The respondents were HEI
and HVC. Each statement could be rated by the value from 1 to 5: 5 - very satisfied / I entirely agree and 1 - extremely dissatisfied / I entirely disagree.

From the replies to the questions regarding general satisfaction with the execution of external evaluation and with the work of the group of experts, it can be assumed that the representatives of the surveyed HEI/HVC and students are generally satisfied with external evaluations, the planning of site visits and the preparation of schedules, the information provided to HEI/HVC about the purpose of evaluation at introductory meetings, the suitability of site visit schedules, the implementation and duration of interviews, the selection of interviewees, the selection, intelligibility, order and adaptation of questions posed to all interviewees (including students), the equality and opportunities for objective expression of opinions by all interviewees, the efficiency, equal cooperation and efforts of the group of experts to identify relevant problems, the summarising of findings and the analysis of the situation, the manner of the presentation of final findings at the final meeting and expressing recommendations for improvement.
Chart 19: General satisfaction with the completed external evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Site visit planning and schedule preparation</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Informing HEI/HVC with the purpose of external evaluation at the introductory meeting</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Appropriate site visit schedule</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The method and manner of asking questions</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The duration of interviews</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Appropriate selection of interviewees</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The selection and order of questions</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The questions asked were suitable for interviewees</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The questions asked were understandable to interviewees</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The interviewees had the opportunity to objectively express their opinions</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Effectiveness of the group of experts</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Efforts made by the group of experts to objectively determine the actual situation</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Equal treatment of all interviewees</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The members of the group of experts were familiar with the particularities of HEI/HVC or the study programme under assessment</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Equal involvement of all members of the group of experts</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The method of presenting findings at the final meeting</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Appropriate analysis of the situation and findings at the final meeting, their justification</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Drafting recommendations for improvement</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The groups of experts met the expectations regarding external evaluation</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive replies provided by HEI/HVC that had been subject to external evaluation include:

- the evaluation was carried out according to schedule and the purpose of evaluation of study programmes;
- precise, appropriate and professional;
- appropriate and straight-forward communication;
- the evaluation was appropriately performed;
- professional and useful;
- the experts did their job appropriately. Some elements were stressed which are usually underlined by the faculty quality committee;
cooperation with the experts was appropriate. The group of experts prepared proposals that we will be pleased to observe; however, many of them are not realistic for the operation of our HVC and result from insufficient knowledge of operational particularities of HVC and real-life setting in which we act. The proposals follow a set pattern (international cooperation, connections with the economy, etc.) and provide no added value for the HVC. Cooperation with the Agency’s representative was appropriate and professional;

- they are OK. I do not have any comments;
- the experts were not sufficiently prepared in terms of the operation of HVC, its bodies, appointment of lecturers and similar. In principle, experts are expected to know the area they assess;
- the external evaluation was performed according to the usual schedule. The assessment referred to all five areas of assessment. It took two days, but it could have been easily done in a single day. The experts received the material prior to the assessment, so they could have been better prepared and could have known the processes and organisation of the HVC. Because this was the first assessment, comparison with other experts is not possible;
- they failed to meet my expectations;
- the site visit was of no use, the experts came unprepared;
- the experts asked different questions and provided their expert opinion based on the answers and interviews;
- the group was ill-prepared, especially the chair. (In my opinion), distinguishing between HVC on the one side and HEI on the other side is essential to make a successful assessment, since methods of operation (and funding mechanisms) are not identical;
- considering the long period between the submission of documentation by the HVC and the evaluation, the experts would have been expected to have read (not just skimmed) the material and be prepared for the assessment. This applies mainly for both Slovenian experts;
- the Slovenian expert, who was supposed to be familiar with the operation of HVC, should have been able to distinguish between public and private institutions, which was not the case. Public institutions are often more limited in what they can do, and the headmaster (or director) needs to obtain a consent by the council of the institution;
- there is no point in asking the interviewees about issues they are not competent for. I understand that the obtained information must be cross-checked, but only by taking into account the areas of competence and decision-making power of an individual;
- I felt a positive attitude during interviews;
- active dialogue, intense work in a single day and many questions asked referring to many topics;
- they were satisfied with our higher vocational education, apart from the web site of the HVC which must be improved;
- expertise, good communication with all stakeholders, appropriate attitude;
- the group followed the schedule, acted appropriately and wanted to get a comprehensive insight into the operation of the HVC. All stakeholders (management, lecturers, students, graduates, employers) were treated equally;
- the situation at the HVC is good; they provided some guidelines;
- evaluation should take place more often and should last several days. Otherwise, I think it was carried out very appropriately;
- very appropriate, friendly and open. They deserve praise;
- considering the diverse study programmes subject to evaluation and the amount of material, the group of experts had a lot of work to do and performed the evaluation highly appropriately;
- communication – appropriate, site visit – efficient;
- interesting and useful;
very appropriate and very professional questions. When necessary, they went into depths and required details;

- generally, the idea of evaluation is useful, notably from the aspect of quality, because both students' and teachers' viewpoints are analysed, and an "external" perspective is welcome;

- the meeting took place in a relaxed atmosphere, many topics from many areas were opened. There was not quite enough time;

- cooperation was fine;

- the evaluators were well prepared for carrying out the re-accreditation. The questions they raised were competent and up to the point as a rule. The critical remarks they made were not numerous but concerned important problems of the organization, curricula, personal responsibilities, etc.;

- both foreign experts, from Croatia, were highly professional, as well as the male Slovenian expert, the female Slovenian expert and a representative of students had a rather symbolical role;

- they had an appropriate attitude, they were understandable and ready to listen to our experience;

- there was not enough time for all comments. The experts did not know to which programme individual students belonged to, so not all study programmes were equally represented;

- contrary to expectations, the questions were very general. They asked about problems and possible solutions, which is better than asking people for their names and functions. I liked the fact that everyone could speak for themselves, although the alienation of departments in different buildings could be felt. (Indeed every one for themselves);

- questions were objective, critical, focused on the subject matter, precise and made sense. They were polite and considerate to different lines of expertise of their partners in dialogue;

- external evaluation provides an external appearance and assessment of the educational institution and supports the quality of the programme and study at the institution. Regarding experts performing the evaluation, it should be said that their attitude exceeded all expectations and that they got a complete insight;

- considering that this was the first evaluation carried out in such form - OK;

- the evaluation was useful, the group provided useful and sound proposals;

- it came as a positive surprise, because I did not expect such a method of asking questions. The experts were ready to listen to us. I have not seen the report and I am not sure if I will. It would be excellent if some minor issues at the faculty that we mentioned indeed changed;

- I was very satisfied with the site visit and the expertise of the experts was a positive surprise. I liked the friendly attitude of the experts;

- the experts provided proposals for improvement and found no major deviations;

- external institutional evaluation is a highly demanding and extensive procedure requiring hard work both from evaluators and the institution subject to procedure. The group of experts did their job professionally, and were friendly to all groups at the institution;

- the evaluators were very friendly and relaxed, which contributed to the relaxed atmosphere of the interviews. The interview with non-teaching staff which did not take place in the room planned for interviews but in the premises in which the employees did their job can be assessed as very positive;

- the experts were very friendly and relaxed, which contributed to the relaxed atmosphere of the interviews. The interview with non-teaching staff which did not take place in the room planned for interviews but in the premises in which the employees did their job can be assessed as very positive;

- professional implementation;

- I believe that an unannounced visit were better because this is how the real situation could be assessed. If you come announced, the institution is ready and only the desired information reaches you, while the real situation might be overlooked. Most of what you can see was prepared and trained for the current
evaluation. You should choose your partners in dialogue and not leave this task to the institution, as it finds individuals "suitable" for its purpose;
- general findings regarding re-accreditation of the university are relatively favourable and absolutely to the point;
- the group of evaluators was familiar with the facts relating to the university. Therefore, the questions were reasonable and compelling. The university was acquainted with the purpose and details of university re-accreditation, allowing us to prepare for the site visit;
- the foreign expert prepared two A4 pages full of highly appropriate and focused questions regarding informatics at the university. He has a thorough knowledge of this field because he used to manage informatics at a university and was rector there. We provided answers first orally at two meetings and later in writing. He fully approved of our directions and provided several useful pieces of information;
- highly professional and consistent;
- the external evaluation took place according to the schedule, in an appropriate and concise way;
- the evaluation was done appropriately, effectively and favourable for both parties;
- in my opinion, the entire procedure was appropriate.

Descriptive replies provided by HEI/HVC that had been subject to external evaluation include the following recommendations to improve the work of groups of experts:

- they should let us know in time if additional documentation must be submitted for assessment;
- the members of the group should be more equal to provide several opinions and aspects;
- the experts who are familiar with particularities of higher vocational education, organisation and system of operation of HVC within education centres should be included; they should not give the impression of being in a learning process;
- I have no recommendations;
- as they are experts in the field, they should be prepared accordingly.
- better preparation for external evaluation – the committee members had enough time to examine the material;
- they should know the rules applicable for HVC and specifics of their operation, they should be prepared for the interviews with HVC employees, the members of all committees should have uniform criteria - we have information that assessments carried out at other HVC were completely different;
- choosing the experts who are familiar with the operation of HVC. Questioners should be trained to ask questions of those responsible and not ask employees about things that are not within their competence and their sphere of work;
- because I am not familiar with the details of their work, I cannot give any recommendations;
- some recommendations are absolutely unreasonable and show a lack of knowledge about the current trend in Slovenian educational area. For example – development of new programmes with regard to the needs of the region. It is common knowledge and published in the media that new programmes, at least for the moment, are not approved according to the needs of the region, economy or job possibilities, but for political reasons. It would thus make more sense to put it down like this: be in the right political party. Individual educational institution might as well prepare good programmes, receive letters of support and intents on cooperation, suitable premises and staff, but all this provides no guarantee that the ministry will approve the programme, as it lacks in-depth analyses for now (unfortunately);
- more time to perform the evaluation;
- I have no recommendations because the group of experts did an excellent job regarding the assessment;
- the problem with foreigners is language-related, as young people do not understand Croatian well – an interpreter would be in order;
- the procedure should last for several days; the questioned groups should be smaller.
- not all sites planned were visited when examining the premises because there was a delay at previous sites. This is our fault, but the evaluators themselves could have cautioned us to have shorter presentations;
- I have no comments regarding the work of the group of experts; as previously mentioned, everything was appropriate and professional. The representative of the ministry could have been more active;
- not enough attention dedicated to individual interviews, not enough time;
- I do not have any recommendations because I do not know what exactly is expected of experts. I guess they asked questions to assess everything necessary.
- they should inquire first about the programme and later focus on what is of interest. First positive and then negative sides of programmes;
- generally good work, keep going. I like it the way you are; your way of examination and questioning was appropriate, my only remark is that questions should not always be asked by the same persons - two members were very quiet.
- out of four members of the group of experts, only one was from the area of industrial design, which is a branch of one of the department chairs;
- the site visit at the faculty head office lasted one day. In order to improve the work, it might have been better to prolong it to two days;
- less theory, more practice and understanding of practice. They should be familiar with all areas for the employment of graduates and show interest in non-existing solutions, opportunities, innovations;
- the starting point for the group of experts is an ideal situation. I suggest they start with the current state of reference, notably regarding spatial situation. E.g.: If I were to bring a visitor at the college, I would be proud to show them the exemplary, neat, well-organised and functional library, which has access to many databases, and its reading room. In my experience, foreign students who lack such possibilities highly appreciate this. However, the group had a comment regarding this, recommending that the library and the reading room be separated. In spatial conditions we operate in, this is virtually impossible; moreover, the existing situation forces the students in the reading room to be serious and behave appropriately;
- about 10 to 15 minutes more to answer questions would be in order;
- I have no proposals for improvement, the experts were very good;
- individual interviews were limited to half an hour, which is not enough for the area in question, i.e. half an hour to discuss the regulation of quality at the institution and the activity of the career centre is not enough (it is understandable, though, that the visit schedule was rather tight);
- I think the schedule was too full and that three hours are not enough; each faculty should be given a day;
- unannounced evaluations; individual interviews, not in groups (higher chance of learning the truth); more in-depth checking of statements given by unsatisfied individuals - dissatisfaction might seem like a deviation, but is often more than that, it is just that only few people are ready to tell the truth; check the recorded presence of employees at the institution and the actual presence (notably teaching staff during summer); the quality of study programmes can also be checked with the employers who provide jobs to the graduates of the institution subject to assessment, and others - comparison the competences obtained; interview with staff union representatives ...;
- interviews within the evaluation visit should start on time (delays);
- the schedule was very tight and some questions could not be completely answered or discussed in depth;
- the time frame was limited and did not enable all individuals present (concretely, 12 interviewees in an hour) to provide objective and comprehensive answers to all
questions. Providing provisional questions in advance would have made the work a lot easier and more complete;

- concrete questions could be provided in advance (for all areas; I am aware that this has been done for many areas). Otherwise, the evaluation seemed appropriate, and reasonable in terms of contents (questions, emphasising problems, etc.).

**The Agency staff**

The purpose of the analysis of the questionnaire was to obtain replies with regard to certain statements about the external evaluation. The respondents were the staff in charge of procedures. Each statement could be rated by the value from 1 to 5: 5 - very satisfied / I entirely agree and 1 - extremely dissatisfied / I entirely disagree.

During the drafting of the self-evaluation report, the staff in charge of procedures at higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges subject to external evaluation returned three questionnaires.

Like the representatives of the management of higher education institutions or higher vocational colleges and their students, the staff were satisfied with the evaluations which were carried out. Most questions were rated with the average value of 4.6.

On the basis of values with which the statements were rated, it can be assumed that the Agency staff are satisfied with the level of preparation of the groups of experts, schedules and planning of site visits, the information provided to HEI/HVC at introductory meetings, the selection and order of questions asked, the manner of conducting interviews, the selection of interviewees, the selection, order, intelligibility and adaptation of questions asked, the opportunities for objective expression of opinions, the efficiency of the group of experts, the efforts of the group of experts to identify current problems, the equal treatment of all interviewees, the familiarity of members of the group of experts with particularities of a HEI/HVC or a study programme under assessment, the correct perception and analysis of the situation, the manner of presentation of final findings at the final meeting, the consideration of opinions of all members of the group of experts during the preparation of the final findings and the joint report, the correct summarising of findings at the final meeting, their justification and taking into account recommendations of the Agency staff.

As good practice examples, the staff noted that groups were well-prepared in terms of contents, they asked concrete and connected questions, they efficiently detected problems, conducted coherent interviews based on the answers provided by previous interviewees, and had appropriate attitude towards applicants. All experts were equal in conducting interviews, drafting final findings and other activities.
9.2. ANNEX 2. THE SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND APPLICATION

The main steps of self-evaluation process in the application of the Agency as a full member of ENQA are as follows:

The whole process was initiated in accordance with the key goals of the Higher Education Master Plan from 2011 to 2020 that the Slovenian Parliament adopted in May 2011. It was claimed then that "the Agency will become a member of EQAR and ENQA by 2014."

Citing from the Master Plan:

"Measure 21: The agency is externally evaluated and applies its candidacy for the inclusion in EQAR and the membership in ENQA

- Preparation for external evaluation: in 2011 and 2012.
- External evaluation: in 2012 (or 2013).
- Candidacy for the inclusion in EQAR and the membership in ENQA: in 2012 or 2013.
- Explanatory note: When it is established with the external evaluation that the Agency does not fulfil the European standards and guidelines for quality in higher education or the criteria for the membership of the ENQA, all required measures are adopted immediately (in the case of problems with legislation, the HEA is amended; in the case of problems with operation, the operation of the Agency is immediately modified)."

The same key goals of the Agency therefore appeared also in the Strategic Objectives of the Agency (as specified in the Agency Development Strategy for the Period 2011–2016, adopted by the Agency Council in November 2011):

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

In 2013, the Agency’s operation was for the first time assessed by an independent international group of experts. In 2012, the Agency decided to first ask for an independent external international evaluation by ECA Consortium and then to be entered in EQAR. The evaluation group also included a representative from the European Students’ Union (hereinafter ESU). The chair of the group was Dr R. Heusser (ECA), and the other members were Prof M. Socha (PKA – Poland), Dr M. Frederiks (NVAO – the Netherlands) and A. Presacariu (ESU). The Agency prepared a comprehensive self-evaluation report for 2010–2012. At the 2012 December session, the Agency Council was acquainted in more detail with the draft report and provided recommendations in terms of contents. In January 2013, it processed the proposal for the self-evaluation report and provided additional comments. Consent to the report was given at the 62nd session on 13 March 2013.

External evaluation of the Agency in April 2013 was suitable, and the Agency was entered in EQAR in October 2013. At that time, in accordance with the action plan, self-evaluation for 2013 was already underway (analyses of surveys, data collection, surveying of relevant stakeholders ...), while at the end of the year 2013, the drafting of
the self-evaluation report for 2013 was initiated. The request for the full membership in ENQA was planned for 2014.

The whole process involved the Agency Council members, Agency staff, and information was exchanged with all stakeholders which are involved in the development of the Slovenian Higher Education Area.

The initial application for full membership was submitted to ENQA secretariat in February 2014.

The self-evaluation report was approved by the Director of the Agency on 10 April 2014.

The Council of the Agency granted consent to the self-evaluation report on its 78th session on 14 April 2014.

In July 2014, Chapter 3 was added to the Self Evaluation Report and the list of Annexes was amended.