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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT ON WORK AND OPERATION OF THE AGENCY IN 2012

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PRESENTATION OF PERFORMANCE OF THE TASKS DEFINED IN CHAPTERS OF THE AGENCY'S WORK PLAN FOR 2012

A) ACCREDITATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND STUDY PROGRAMMES AND EVALUATION OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES

Accreditations of higher educational institutions and study programmes and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges are the Agency's fundamental activity. It involves external quality assurance system for reasons of constant improvement of higher education and assurance of quality, internationally comparable and acknowledged education.

Accreditations in higher education

Procedures completed from 1 January 2012 till 31 December 2012

The Agency concluded **212** accreditation or evaluation procedures of which it has, as follows:

- granted accreditation to **93** study programmes (of the first, second and third Bologna cycle);
- re-accredited **68** study programmes;
- granted accreditation to **6** higher education institutions;
- re-accredited **1** higher education institution;
- accredited changes of **44** study programmes.

Incomplete procedures (situation on 31 December 2012)

At the end of 2012, the accreditation procedures of 93 study programmes and 22 higher education institutions have been conducted within the prescribed time-limits. Also, by the end of the year, the Agency has performed the site visits of two universities, i.e. the University of Ljubljana and the University of Primorska, and of 17 higher education institutions.

External evaluation of higher vocational colleges

Procedures completed from 1 January 2012 till 31 December 2012

The Agency has adopted **7** opinions on the achievement of standards prescribed by the law.

Incomplete procedures (situation on 31 December 2012)

In addition, the Agency has performed 13 site visits of higher vocational colleges by the end of the year.

Extraordinary external evaluations

In 2012, the extraordinary external evaluations of 5 study programmes at three different public and private higher education institutions in accordance with Article 51š of the

Higher Education Act (hereinafter: ZViS) and the fourth and fifth paragraphs of Article 37 and the second paragraph of Article 49 of the Accreditation Criteria have been performed for the first time. All programmes have been from the field of medicine, i.e. three of them from the field of regulated professions in accordance with the directives of the European Union.

The extraordinary evaluation procedures have been introduced ex officio in 2011. Namely, already for a longer period of time, the Agency has been receiving several incentives and proposals from diverse higher education stakeholders (the Nurses and Midwives Association of Slovenia, the Ministry of Health, hospitals at which student were carrying out their practice, students, ministry responsible for higher education, etc.) to improve the situation at these higher educational institutions. After reviewing the documentation and documentary evidence produced in support thereof, the Agency Council assessed that there are clear grounds to believe the implementation of the accredited study programmes does not comply with the criteria, in particular regarding the staff composition, lack of adequate positions for practical training of students, education or qualifications of mentors, procedure and content of monitoring the study programmes, exercising the rights of students, etc. and thus adopted a decision on initiating the procedure for extraordinary evaluation.

Within the extraordinary evaluation procedure, the groups of experts at site visits have been examining the alleged inconsistencies with the law and criteria. According to the findings of experts, the poor conditions have been established at one institution, at which the implementation of two study programmes (of the first and second cycle) has been assessed, while at the other two institutions the conditions were better. Thus, the Agency Council instructed the institution to remedy the weaknesses in a year and half; for the other two institutions, the remedy period has been set to two years. Thereafter, the Agency Council will be establishing, within the procedure of a new external evaluation, whether to re-accredit the institution for seven years or not.

Negative decisions

Since the beginning of its operation, the Agency Council has not granted accreditation to 28 study programmes and 5 higher education institutions (initial accreditations of study programmes and institutions) because they did not comply with the conditions laid down by ZViS and the Accreditation Criteria. In total, there were 33 "negative accreditations"; ten of them fall in the period from 1 January 2012 till 21 March 2012 (of which one was for a change of study programme) as follows:

Table 1: NEGATIVE ACCREDITATION DECISIONS OF THE COUNCIL IN THE PERIOD FROM 1 JANUARY 2012 TILL 21 MARCH 2013		
Accreditations in higher education		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Number of the negative Councils' decisions
Study programmes		
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality Department/ Agency Council	6
Re-accreditation of study programmes		0
STUDY PROGRAMMES IN TOTAL		6
Higher education institutions		

Initial accreditation of higher education institutions		2
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		0
Transformation of higher education institutions		1
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN TOTAL		3

Note: The negative decisions on changes of study programmes are not considered in the table.

The Agency Council did not grant the consents mainly because it had assessed that the conditions and criteria for scientific-research and professional work (the founder without adequate research or applicative projects and programmes) and the human resources criteria (staff composition and stability, connectedness between pedagogical and research work of the anticipated higher education teachers and assistants with the activity – field of study and scientific or artistic discipline – for which the institute should be founded or with the subjects in the study programme they should be lecturers of) were not complied with. Common reasons for the negative decision in granting accreditation to study programmes were also the following: inconsistency of the study programme with anticipated objectives, competences and learning outcomes and inappropriate curricula.

Accreditations of the application in the first three months of 2013 and pending applications

The tables below show the following:

- number of initial accreditations and re-accreditations of study programmes and higher education institutions and number of opinions on higher vocational colleges in the first three months of 2013;
- all accreditation procedures in progress (situation on 31 March 2013).

Table 2: ACCREDITATIONS OF APPLICATIONS FROM 1 JANUARY 2013 TILL 21 MARCH 2013

Accreditations in higher education		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Number of accreditations
Study programmes		
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality Department / Agency Council	13
Re-accreditation of study programmes		16
STUDY PROGRAMMES IN TOTAL		29
Higher education institutions		
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions		0
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		4
Transformation of higher education institutions		1
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN TOTAL		5
Evaluations of higher vocational colleges		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Number of opinions
External evaluation of higher vocational colleges	Quality Department / Agency Council	3



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Table 3: ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES IN PROGRESS (situation on 31 March 2013)

Accreditations in higher education				
Task	Implementation and accountability	Dealing with the applications submitted before 2013 (until 31 December 2012)	Dealing with the applications submitted in 2013 (since 1 January 2013)	Total
Study programmes				
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality Department/ Agency Council	19	12	31
Re-accreditation of study programmes		48	17	65
Accreditation of the fields of study programmes		/	1	1
TOTAL		67	30	97
Higher education institutions				
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions	Quality Department/ Agency Council	6	/	6
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		11	1	12
Transformation of higher education institutions		1	1	2
TOTAL		18	2	20
Higher vocational colleges				
External evaluation of higher vocational colleges	Quality Department/ Agency Council	9	7	16

NOTE: The applications to change study programmes are not shown in the tables.

At the end of 2012, the accreditation procedures of 93 study programmes and 22 higher education institutions have been conducted within the prescribed time-limits; of these, 29 study programmes and 5 higher education institutions have been accredited by the Agency Council by 21 March 2013. In this period, it has also issued opinions on the achievement of the prescribed standards for 3 higher vocational colleges, the site visits of which, carried out by the groups of experts, have been performed by the 31 December 2012 (Table 2).

The second table shows how many accreditation procedures for applications submitted until 31 December 2012 are still in progress, and how many procedures for applications submitted after 1 January 2013 began .

Interesting is the data on re-accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions. If we compare it with the data from the Table 5 which shows dealing with the applications submitted in 2012, and firstly take the data on number of anticipated applications for re-accreditations of study programmes in consideration, it is evident that the Agency planned to receive 27 applications more (90) than they were actually submitted (63), but if we also add the applications received in the first months of 2013 (17), the total number of the received applications (80) is close to the planned number. Considering the ZViS amendment that entered into force on 1 January 2013, all

applications for re-accreditations have been submitted on time. A smaller number of applications than planned is a result of higher education institutions deciding to not re-accredit certain programmes due to discontinuance of the study programmes or creation of new ones.

The opposite applies for the re-accreditations of higher education institutions; the Agency planned to receive 10 applications, but additional 5 have been submitted (Table 5). Such difference was caused by submission and dealing with the applications of all four Slovenian universities (only accreditation of one university was planned); in addition, two private education institutions submitted their application for re-accreditation within the prescribed time limit (after the ZViS amendment).

Assessing success in carrying out tasks

The Agency was more than successful in achieving its objectives despite other demanding tasks under which the systematic assessment of activity in the self-evaluation procedures falls that was performed for the first time precisely in 2012. The total number of the planned accreditations or external evaluations (175) was greatly exceeded.

Table 4: DEALING WITH THE APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED BEFORE 2012				
Activity 1: Accreditations in higher education				
Task	Implementation and accountability	No of accreditations in 2010 and 2011	No of accreditations in 2012	Incomplete procedures till 21 March 2013
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality Department/ Agency Council	87; of which 59 in 2011	63	3 ¹
Re-accreditation of study programmes		0	68	0
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions		1	5	1 ²
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		0	1	0
Transformation of higher education institutions		2*	0	0
Activity 2: Evaluation of higher vocational colleges				
Task	Implementation and accountability	No of opinions in 2011	No of opinions in 2012	Incomplete procedures till 21 March 2013
External evaluation of higher vocational colleges	Quality Department/ Agency Council	0	6	1 ³

NOTES: The accreditations of changes of study programmes are not shown in the table. Only positive decisions of the Agency Council have been considered. In 2011, the Agency Council could not give any opinions for higher vocational colleges because it had no legal grounds (it adopted the Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges in 2011).

* Data is not precise.

^{1, 2} These procedures are long-term since they were either repeated after appeal or the applications have been constantly supplementing or changing.

³ At one of the higher vocational colleges, the group of experts could not have been appointed (the anticipated closing of the college). The external evaluation procedure is expected to continue in 2013.

Table 5: DEALING WITH THE APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED IN 2012 (from 1 January 2012 till 31 December 2012)

Activity 1: Accreditations in higher education					
Task	Implementation and accountability	Anticipated No of applications	No of received applications	No of accreditations until 31 December 2012	No of accreditations from 1 January 2013 till 21 March 2013
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality Department/ Agency Council	31	35	30	12
Re-accreditation of study programmes		90	63	0*	15
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions		5	8	1	0
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		10	15	0	4
Transformation of higher education institutions		3	1	0	0
Activity 2: Evaluation of higher vocational colleges					
Task	Implementation and accountability	Planned No of applications	No of received applications	No of opinions until 31 December 2012	No of opinions from 1 January 2013 till 21 March 2013
External evaluation of higher vocational colleges	Quality Department/ Agency Council	15	13	1	3

NOTES: The accreditations of changes of study programmes are not considered in the table. Only positive decisions of the Agency Council have been considered.

*Study programmes or higher education institutions could not have been re-accredited yet, since typically the applications have been properly submitted in the second half of

2012 and, in accordance with ZViS, the procedures from the application completion last at least from seven months and a half till eight months.

Accreditations in higher education

In 2012, the Agency managed to get rid of delays in dealing with the applications for accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes; moreover, it carried out some challenging and vast tasks, anticipated for 2015. Among them, in particular the following procedures for re-accreditation of all Slovenian universities:

- a site visit in the procedure for re-accreditation of the University of Ljubljana was carried out, although it has been anticipated for 2013;
- the procedure for re-accreditation of the University of Maribor began, although it has been anticipated for 2014;
- the procedure for re-accreditation of the University of Nova Gorica began, although it has been anticipated for 2015.

Compared to 2011, plenty more higher education institutions and study programme were accredited, among them there were **69** re-accreditations which follow under the most demanding and longest procedures involving mandatory site visits to higher education institutions (situation on 31 December 2012), as follows:

- initial accreditations of study programmes: **59** in 2011; **93** in 2012, meaning that the number of accreditations increased for 58 %;
- re-accreditations of study programmes: **0** in 2011; **68** in 2012;
- initial accreditations of higher education institutions: **1** in 2011; **6** in 2012;
- re-accreditations of higher education institutions: **0** in 2011; **1** in 2012.

In addition, there were 18 site visits to higher education institutions carried out in the re-accreditation procedures (compared to only 3 in 2011),

Following entry into force of the Fiscal Balance Act (hereinafter: ZUJF), the Agency needs not to accredit major changes of the university study programmes, thus there were less accreditations of the study programmes' changes than in 2011. These are mainly less demanding procedures, the conduct of which, as a rule, does not require a group of experts being appointed. They also can be concluded in relatively short period of time.

In 2012, there were 44 major changes of the study programmes and in 2011, 158 (the latter number also includes minor changes which only had to be notified by the institutions, thus the comparison is not accurate).

External evaluations in higher vocational education

In 2012, the Agency performed site visits of all higher vocational colleges anticipated in the plan for 2012 and concluded the procedures it began in 2011, as follows:

- site visits: **1** in 2011; **13** in 2012;
- opinions on the achievement of standards prescribed by the law: **0** in 2011; **7** in 2012.

Such increase in the number of both site visits and decisions adopted by the Council in 2012 is also a result of the Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges being adopted in 2011, meaning that the procedures could have only begun as late as in the December of that year.

Table 6: AN AVERAGE DURATION OF PROCEDURES (all procedures until 21 March 2013 included)

Accreditations in higher education		
Initial accreditation		
Applications submitted in the following years:	Implementation and accountability	An average durations of procedure in months
2009	Quality Department / Agency Council	14
2010		11
2011		7
2012		6
Re-accreditation		
Applications submitted in the following two years:	Implementation and accountability	An average durations of procedure in months
2011	Quality Department / Agency Council	11
2012		10

NOTE: The duration of procedure in the study programmes' changes is not considered in the table.

The table shows that the duration of procedures is constantly shortening. In case of applications submitted in 2012, the initial accreditation procedures lasted 6 months in average, while the reaccreditation procedures 10 months. The time from submission of the application to the final decision has been considered. Given that typically the applicants need to supplement their applications, the time limits are actually shorter than the ones set out in ZViS.

Table 7: RE-ACCREDITATION PERIOD

Accreditations in higher education		
No of accredited programmes	Percentage	No of years for which the accreditation was awarded:
55	61 %	7
28	31 %	3
5	6 %	2
2	2 %	1.5
No of accredited higher education institutions		
4	80 %	7
1	20 %	2

NOTE: All Agency Council decisions for re-accreditation have been considered (until 21 March 2013).

Until 21 March 2013, the Agency Council re-accredited **90** study programmes and **5** higher education institutions, including the University of Ljubljana. The table below shows that as much as **39 %** of study programmes and **20 %** of higher education institutions were re-accredited for less than seven years. The main reasons for such decisions were unsystematic performance of self-evaluations or not sufficiently developed system of internal quality assessment at higher education institutions and, in case of study programmes, also certain weaknesses in implementation and organisation of the studies,

inadequate participation of all stakeholders in quality assurance, in particular, the students, etc.

Table 8: NUMBER OF ACCREDITED STUDY PROGRAMMES ACCORDING TO ISCED

Initial accreditations			
ISCED	Implementation and accountability	No of accredited programmes	% of accredited programmes
(14) Teacher training and education science	Quality Department / Agency Council	66	34.4 %
(21) Arts		10	5.2 %
(22) Humanities		33	17.2 %
(31) Social and behavioural science		18	9.4 %
(32) Journalism and information		3	1.6 %
(34) Business and administration		7	3.6 %
(38) Law		5	2.6 %
(44) Physical sciences		2	1 %
(46) Mathematics and statistics		3	1.6 %
(48) Computing		1	0.5 %
(52) Engineering and engineering trades		13	6.8%
(54) Manufacturing and processing		2	1%
(58) Architecture and building		2	1%
(64) Veterinary		5	2.6%
(72) Health		7	3.6%
(81) Personal services		9	4.7%
(84) Transport services		2	1%
(85) Environmental protection		3	1.6%
(86) Security services		1	0.5%
Total			192

B) PREPARATION FOR THE AGENCY'S MEMBERSHIP IN ENQA AND ENTRY IN EQAR

Executive objective 1: Self-evaluation of the Agency

Activity: Preparation of the self-evaluation report

Self-evaluation of the Agency was conducted in accordance with the action plan prepared by the group for self-evaluation of the Agency in the beginning of 2012; the plan has been updated twice due to the staff changes. The tasks were set according to the following thematic areas:

- revision of the acts of the Agency (review of stakeholders' opinions, analysis of the applicable criteria, preparation of new criteria and harmonisation with stakeholders);
- training of experts (amendments to the manual for experts, preparation of the protocol for the site visit of the group of experts, preparation of the protocol for

- conducting procedures (the staff – experts – the Agency Council),), training upgrades);
- c. external quality assurance system (analyses of the performed external evaluations and surveys on the performed site visits, analysis of the reports of groups of experts, analysis of the self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, prompt reporting on the accredited study programmes and institutions, surveys among all stakeholders, etc.);
 - d. internal quality assurance system (plan for the preparation for external evaluation of the Agency (beginning of 2013), analysis of financial and human resources at the Agency, training of the staff in Slovenia and abroad, coordination of work, conduct of procedures, etc.).

In this chapter, the accomplishment of certain tasks specified in the work plan is described, since the revision of the training for experts, which took the results of analyses of the groups of experts' reports and of other forms of monitoring quality of their work into consideration, and the issuing of the new manual related thereof are specifically described in Chapter D, the reorganisation of the work at the Agency in Chapter E, and revision of the Accreditation Criteria and other act of the Agency mainly in Chapter F.

In June 2012, the group for self-evaluation sent out the survey questionnaires with an intention to obtain opinions of diverse stakeholders on the work and acts of the Agency, procedures and external evaluations. The questionnaires were sent to higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges (applicants), the Slovenian Student Union, the ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education and the Agency Council. The questionnaires on satisfaction with the external evaluations or site visit of the group of experts were, in particular, sent to the groups of experts, the assessed higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges (management, employees and students) and the Agency staff that conduct the accreditation and evaluation procedures. By September, the analysis has been performed, and the results used in revision of the manual for experts and in conduct of accreditation and evaluation procedures, etc. For management of the Agency, the results of the employees' survey in February 2012 on the first Agency management were extremely important. On their grounds, also the measures to improve working conditions at the Agency, its internal organisation and management have been adopted. All this has been successfully performed, and is also shown in the relation towards external stakeholders.

At the end of November 2012, the first rough draft of the self-evaluation report was prepared that has been corrected and supplemented. The structure of the report has been presented to the Agency Council for the first time in December 2012. The Council dealt with the report on two successive sessions, and then granted it the consent on 13 March 2013. In the report, the entire period of the Agency's operation is covered, more particularly its operation in 2012. A specific chapter is dedicated to assessment of compliance with ESG, in particular the standards and guidelines in the second and third chapter of ESG.

Executive objective 2: External evaluation of the Agency

Activity: Preparation for external evaluation of the Agency

In the work plan, it has been anticipated for the Agency to establish a contact with the ENQA Secretariat in January 2013 due to the application for external-evaluation and to begin preparing for the visit of the group of experts of ENQA or of other acknowledged agency that is the ENQA and EQAR member. The plan was partially modified, namely the Agency decided that the external evaluation will be first performed by the group of experts appointed by the European Consortium for Accreditation (hereinafter: the ECA Consortium) which is a prerequisite for the membership in MULTRA – Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes. At the same time, it will also be a thorough preparation for the external evaluation of ENQA.

In February 2013, the EQAR President visited the Agency. The President presented conditions for entry in EQAR and emphasised that the self-evaluation report must be prepared according to ESG. In the procedure for membership in EQAR, the latter can consider evaluation report of an acknowledged foreign quality agency or association if, in addition to the correct structure of the report, also the group of experts to assess the Agency is properly composed. The Agency has notified the ECA Consortium thereof, and assured that both the composition of the group of experts and the structure of the evaluation report will be in accordance with the EQAR requirements.

Assessing success in achieving objectives and performing tasks

EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 1: SELF-EVALUATION OF THE AGENCY		
Activity: Preparation of the self-evaluation report		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES /NO / PARTLY
Action plan for the preparation on external evaluation of the Agency, and carrying out activities that are determined for 2012 according to the plan.	Agency staff / Self-Evaluation Group/ Director	yes
Preparation and sending out the questionnaires for: – Agency staff; – experts of the Agency; – evaluated higher educational institutions and higher vocational colleges; – Agency Council and other stakeholders.		yes
Analysis of survey questionnaires.	Agency staff	yes
Preparation of the self-evaluation report structure and determining appendices.	Agency staff / Director	yes
Dealing with the first draft of the self-valuation report and appendices at the Agency Council session.		yes
EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 2: EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE AGENCY		



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Activity: Preparation for external evaluation of the Agency		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES /NO / PARTLY
Agency's notification to ENQA on its application for membership, i.e. establishment of contact with the ENQA Secretariat about the application for external evaluation.	Specialist Service / Director	yes; instead of ENQA, meeting with the EQAR Director
Preparation for a visit of the group of experts of ENQA or of another acknowledged agency that is the ENQA and EQAR member for reasons of implementing the external evaluation of the Agency.		

Despite many unplanned tasks that Agency has performed, mainly in the second half of 2012 (external evaluation of the University of Ljubljana in the re-accreditation procedure, negotiations regarding amendments to ZViS, necessary work for the Court of Audit of the Republic of Slovenia reviewing the Agency's operation in autumn 2012, etc.), the self-evaluation has been completed within the deadline. The majority of tasks referred to in the action plan were performed, among them the following most successfully:

- a. thorough revision of the manual for experts of the Agency;
- b. analyses of surveys and opinions of all higher education stakeholders, and adopted measures for improvement of quality on the basis of results thereof;
- c. thorough revision of the Accreditation Criteria (regulation is in its final phase);
- d. reorganisation of the work of the Agency, increasing its efficiency, and establishment of good relationships both between employees of the Agency and between the Agency and external stakeholders.

The self-evaluation report is prepared; in the report, the Agency was assessing its internal quality system or achievement of the following priority strategic objectives by 2013:

- transformation of the quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education;
- establishment and development of the quality assurance system of the Agency;
- participating in development of higher education in Slovenia, and

achieving European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG. The report was translated into English, and on 25 March 2013, sent together with other documents to the ECA Consortium which will perform the assessment of the Agency. The three-day long site visit of the group of experts at the Agency is set for 22, 23 and 24 April 2013. The group will be composed of experts of the ECA Consortium and the European Students' Union (ESU). According to the planned schedule of the visit, on the first day, the group of experts will conduct interviews with the representatives of universities, higher educational institutions and higher vocational colleges, with the representatives of the ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education, members of the Agency Council and the Agency management (current Acting Director and the new Director); on the second day, it will participate in site visit of one of the higher education institutions in the re-accreditation

procedure; and on the third day, it will conduct interviews with the student representatives and present its findings at the closing meeting.

Two external evaluations of the Agency are planned for 2013; the first is going to be performed by the ECA Consortium due to participation in the MULTRA project, while at the end of the year, the external evaluation of the ENQA Association due to assessment of compliance with ESG and membership in ENQA, is planned.

C) ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

As per 2012 Work Plan, the establishment of a comprehensive information system was planned for the beginning of 2013. In June 2012, the Agency prepared tender documentation for the establishment of an independent licensed system to be later connected to the e-VŠ system. The tender was planned to be published in July 2012, the provider selected in August 2012, and connection of the system to the e-VŠ established in the beginning of 2013.

However, after a thorough examination of such system design and after several meetings with the representatives of the ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education and of other ministries and with other experts, the decision was adopted to change the information system design in such a way to make it compatible with the e-VŠ system, to be more user-friendly (both externally and internally) and to enable system upgrade and development. The Acting Director changed the original decision also **due to the concern for efficient management or use of financial resources.**

The development was precisely outlined by the end of 2012 as follows:

- a. in the light on the experience gained, the procedures related to processing of the applications for accreditations and external evaluations and for reporting information to other stakeholders (applicant – Agency – Ministry) were drawn up in detail. The provider was selected (under the legislation defining public procurement) to transform the requirements of the Agency into an elaborate study and estimate the value of works, which will be the basis for the implementation of a public procurement procedure;
- b. the public procurement procedure is planned to be implemented by the end of 2013 (preparation of the tender documentation, production of elaborate study and selection of provider). The web form is expected to be prepared by the beginning of 2014.

Assessment of success in performing duties

Activity: Establishment of a comprehensive information system		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/NO/PARTLY
Preparation of tender documentation	staff/ Director	yes
Publication of the tender, and selection of the contractor		partly; tenderer selected
Participation in forming and application of support information system		a new tender for provider selection is being prepared
Connection with the e-VŠ system		no

The objective was not fully implemented. The implementation of tasks regarding the establishment of the information system was initially slowed down due to the reduction in financial resources (both integral and from European funds) in the first half of 2012, and later due to the examination of different solutions or possibilities, i.e. from an independent system to a system relying on e-VŠ (the Ministry's information system) and to the final decision which was assessed as the best in terms of content, performance and finances. The best tenderer for the preparation of tender documentation and the selection of the provider has been selected and the timetable has been set, therefore the information system is expected to be prepared for testing in the second half of 2013 and finalised in the beginning of 2014.

The aim of establishing a renewed comprehensive information system is more efficient and rational work of higher quality, and simplification of accreditation and evaluation procedures and other work processes at the Agency. Despite the fact that the aim has not been attained, the following can be noted:

- postponing the final establishment of a comprehensive information system of the Agency to the beginning of 2014 will not have a negative impact on the work process, since the electronic form for submitting the applications for accreditations and external evaluations, and other web applications have been updated. Thus, there are no major difficulties occurring in the work process;
- there are still many difficulties in preparing and maintaining publicly accessible records on the accredited higher education institutions and study programmes, statistical treatment of data on higher education institutions and study programmes and higher vocational colleges, statistical analyses, reporting data to the ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education etc. Nevertheless, the tasks were performed, but they required more time than they would if the system would have been established.

D) ENTRY OF EXPERTS IN THE REGISTER OF THE AGENCY, AND REVISION OF THEIR TRAINING AND OF THE REGISTER

Due to the growing number of accreditation and evaluation procedures and the lack of experts in certain study or scientific and artistic fields and more demanding procedures in the re-accreditation of higher education institutions, study programmes and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges, of which site visits of groups of experts make part, the Agency Council decided to invite experienced quality assessment experts to participate. On the other hand, self-evaluation findings of the Agency and experience obtained during training of candidates for the entry in the Agency's register, during cooperation with the experts entered in the Agency's register etc. showed that the manual for experts and the training programme should be thoroughly revised in order to provide for a uniform work and better assessment reports which constitute the basis for the decision-making of the Agency Council in accreditation and evaluation procedures. The revision was also a part of the Agency's self-evaluation action plan.

Activity 1: Entry of experienced experts in the Agency's register in accordance with the amended Criteria for Entry in the Register of Experts; revision of the register

Entry of experienced experts: In March 2012, the Agency Council adopted the amended Criteria for Entry in the Registry of Experts. In accordance with the amendment, the Council invited experienced experts whose expertise is the system or the assessment of quality in higher education or who are members of groups of experts abroad (e.g. former rectors, deans, EUA assessors etc.). The first series of invitations for entry in the Agency's registers was submitted to the experts in May 2012 and the second in July 2012; 18 experts responded. Due to the growing needs for experts in particular study fields, the Agency Council additionally invited eight experts from the following ISCED fields: 21 arts (music, teaching), 31 social sciences, 34 business and administration (business information science, e-education), 38 law (civil and commercial law), 44 physical and chemical science, and 72 health (psychotherapy).

From the first invitation in May 2012 to March 2013, 26 new experts were entered in the Agency's register; overall, there are 148 experts in the register, 14 of them students.

Updating the register, electronic form: The Agency simultaneously redesigned and updated the register for experts; in July 2012, it prepared special forms (for experts and for student experts) to obtain and update the necessary information regarding professional experience, habilitation areas, employments, possible certificates on quality assessment, etc. A test web application was prepared facilitating submission of information available on the Agency's website: <http://test.nakvis.si/Strokovnjaki/Account/LogOn>. In cooperation with the staff, the designer of the application (selected on the basis of offers collected in November 2012) made his best efforts to prepare the optimum version. Final improvements are being made and the electronic form is expected to be submitted to all experts in July 2013.

In January 2013, the consolidated register for the Agency Council members was published on the website to facilitate the work of the Council members in appointing groups of experts and of the Agency staff.

Activity 2: Training of experts

Manual for experts of the Agency: Through the practical work, the self-evaluation procedures of the Agency (survey of stakeholders on the implementation of site visits, analysis of accreditation and evaluation reports of groups of experts, review of the existing training material ...) and prompt comments of various stakeholders, the need arose for a coordinated work of members of the groups of experts and Agency staff as well as applicants during the preparation for site visits and during the visits themselves, for understanding their role in this process, for calibrating the decision-making of various experts in similar circumstances and for the uniform structure of accreditation and evaluation reports. In order to achieve this aim, the 2012 Work Plan also included revision of the visit protocol of a group of experts, revision of the manual and of the training programme. In the autumn of 2012, the Agency prepared a new manual for experts. The manual is a guide to accreditation and evaluation procedures aimed at:

- providing answers to concrete questions which arise during practical work;
- improving cooperation between the experts and the Agency;
- improving the quality of assessments and reports of groups of experts.

In December 2012, the Agency organised an all-day conference for experts to present reasons for drawing up the new manual. The manual was very well accepted and the experts were active in providing proposals to improve it. The proposals were taken into account, the manual has been printed and will be sent to all experts and also to candidates who meet the criteria for the entry in the register and who have been selected to participate in training.

The manual describes the entire course of accreditation and evaluation procedures and includes the visit protocol of a group of experts.

The first part presents the particularities and individual phases of the procedures, from the appointment of the group of experts by the Agency Council to the submission of the report of the group of experts.

The second part is entirely dedicated to the report of the group of experts as one of the most important documents on which the decision of the Agency Council is based. Experience from practical work show that the greatest attention needs to be devoted to the report since in the old manual and at trainings organised for experts, the Agency failed to provide uniform and unambiguous guidance for their writing. Experts themselves must have a more important role in the development of the quality system of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges through giving recommendations for their further development, which is recorded in the reports under opportunities for improvement of work of the institutions or colleges. Here, European standards and guidelines are taken into account, particularly the standard "2.5 reporting" according to which reports should be clear and should, apart from findings and commendations, also include recommendations for the improvement of work; in this relation, standards "2.6 follow-up procedures"; "2.7 periodic reviews"; and "2.8 system-wide analyses" are also taken into account. Clear recommendations will contribute to more efficient monitoring of the development of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges through regular external evaluations; the Agency is obliged to carry them out in accordance with

regulations at least every seven years in higher education and every five years in higher vocational education.

The third part is dedicated to substantive and procedural issues. In substantive issues, apart from particularities in the assessment of joint study programmes, distance studies and the so-called e-learning etc., certain more demanding procedures are described which may include extraordinary evaluation of a higher education institution and oral hearing after the site visit and the submission of the report of the group of experts are described in this part.

The Committee for the opening of applications of candidates for entry in the register of experts of the Agency met twice in 2012 (in January and December). They processed 52 applications and decided that 40 candidates would be invited for training, considering Articles 5 and 6 of the Criteria for Experts (proof of experience in quality assessment).

Participation of the Agency in the training of student experts: On 4 January 2013, the Acting Director took part in the training of candidates for student experts organised by the Slovenian Student Union and presented the role and duties of the Agency, duties of experts in accreditation and evaluation procedures with an emphasis on the differences between the procedures, and explained ESG.

Changed public call for application to candidates for entry in the Agency's register: Representation of experts from different study and scientific-research fields in the register is considerably unbalanced: in some fields, they are numerous, which is why not all of them have been appointed to groups for the assessment of higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges or study programmes; additionally, most of the candidates who are waiting for the training come from these fields. On the other hand, the Agency lack experts e.g. in the fields of natural and technical sciences, law, arts ... Therefore, the Agency Council changed the public call for application to candidates for entry in the Agency's register so as to give priority to candidates from the shortage fields.

Assessment of success in performing duties

Activity 1: Entry of experienced experts in the register (in accordance with the amended Criteria for Entry in the Register of Experts); revision of the register		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/NO/PARTLY
Sending out the invitations of the Agency Council to acknowledged or internationally recognised experts for quality in higher vocational and higher education	staff/ Agency Council Director	yes
Preparation of the list of experts with their references to be approved at the session of the Agency Council.		yes
Revision or transformation of the register of experts and constant updating – call for all experts in the register to complete a special form.	Quality Department/ Director	yes; special form prepared in July, test



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Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/NO/PARTLY
		web application is being tested
Surveying of experts, applicants, students and other stakeholders; the analysis of surveys.	Quality Department/ Agency Self-Evaluation Group/ Director	yes
Surveying of the staff on the quality of the visit (external evaluation) and the analysis of surveys.	Quality Department/ Director	yes
Analysis of reports of groups of experts		yes
Revision of the training programme for experts	staff/Director	yes; manual and protocol;
Supplementation of the visit of group of experts protocol		partly; training programme is being prepared
Revision of the Training Manual for Candidates for Entry in the Register		
Preparation of the code of ethics for experts	staff/Director	partly; the draft prepared, some elements in the manual

The tasks were mostly implemented. The register of experts is being promptly improved, the data updated, the electronic form for experts has been prepared – the last improvements of the web applications are underway; the Agency obtained experienced experts in the shortage fields of study, science and arts.

Through prompt monitoring of the work of experts and counselling, reports of experts have improved both in terms of content and structure. Recommendations for improvement of work of institutions or colleges were systematically introduced in the reports, in accordance with the European standards.

The new manual has been printed and serves as a basis for the revised training programme for experts. It involves work standardisation, assurance of comparability and objectivity of assessments, site visits, reports of groups of experts, which constitute one of the fundamental documents on the basis of which the Agency Council adopts decisions on accreditations or opinions on compliance with stipulated standards.

Training according to the new programme will have to be carried out as soon as possible, as 77 candidates await it. It is expected to be executed in June 2013, and before that, the Agency Council will adopt the amended Criteria for Entry in the Register of Experts. The essential changes are as follows:

- more exact specification of the structure of groups of experts, taking into account the type of accreditation or external evaluation, and

- practical test of candidates for experts.

Opportunities for improvement

The tasks listed in the 2012 Work Plan also included the code of ethics of experts. Some elements have been included in the manual but the Code has not been adopted despite the fact that the draft was prepared several months ago. It is planned to be adopted in May 2013, before the training of the candidates for entry in the register of experts.

E) REORGANISATION OF THE AGENCY'S WORK

In addition to new employments, work at the Agency was planned to be reorganised in 2012, as it had been established that the work organisation had been ineffective and inadequate, which was pointed out by the Agency Council and also by SLOKA, the Agency's staff Union. Reorganisation was required also because there were not enough employees to perform all duties of the Agency. Besides improving the Agency's work, unrealised tasks from 2011 had to be performed in 2012, the most urgent being the Agency's self-evaluation, and intensive preparations for the external evaluation of the Agency planned for 2013 had to be made. The situation was even more difficult because two employees left the Agency in the beginning of 2012, and another in the middle of the year. In the first three quarters of the year, the Agency had thus three employees fewer than at the end of 2011.

Activity 1: Changes to classification

With the changes to classification, posts of Heads of Quality Department and of General Affairs Department were abolished on business grounds. The post of Head of General Affairs Department was not occupied and the employee who was employed in 2011 as the Head of Quality Department due to changed reasons referred to in the third intend of the first paragraph of Article 29 of the Employment Relationship Act (ZDR) was offered the post she had had before but she refused. Some duties of the Head of Quality Department were assumed by the Acting Director, and an experienced employee from the Quality Department was authorised to monitor applications and their distribution.

Activity 2: Employment of new employees financed with the ESF funds

In July 2012, a job vacancy in the General Affairs Department was published in accordance with the work plan; the new employee took her position in September 2012. In November 2012, two job vacancies in the Quality Department were published, which is one more than previously planned. The Agency achieved this by changing the project financed from European funds. The posts were occupied at the beginning of 2013.

Assessment of success in performing duties

Activity 1: Changes to classification		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/NO/PARTLY
Cessation of the Head of the Quality Department and Head of the General Affairs Department posts	Director	yes
Reassignment of duties and responsibilities of the Quality Department		
Assignment of duties to individual employees in the substantially completed areas		
Activity 2: employment of new employees financed with the ESF funds		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/NO/PARTLY
Publication of call for applicants to fill a new vacancy in the General Affairs Department	General Affairs Department	yes
Publication of call for applicants to fill a new vacancy in the Quality Department		

All tasks were implemented. Work reorganisation had a positive effect on the work atmosphere, efficiency, quantity and quality of the work performed. Through the reorganisation, the following was achieved:

1. the duties were reassigned so that the staff in the Quality Department were no longer burdened with administrative tasks which hinder quick and effective substantive work of high quality in processing the applications, writing down findings, reports, decisions etc. For example, a new employee in the General Affairs Department became responsible for contract work agreements with experts, payment claims and monitoring deadlines associated therewith;
2. some employees became permanently responsible for tasks in substantially completed areas, such as:
 - for the register of experts and all correspondence with experts until the appointment of the group of experts by the Agency Council;
 - for prompt updating of information on the Agency's website, public relations and organisation of events at the Agency;
 - for the establishment of a comprehensive information system;
 - for international cooperation and development, and monitoring of developments and good practice examples in other comparable agencies;
 - for the presentation brochure, reports and other publications;
 - for prompt updating of information on the applications and accredited higher education institutions and study programmes and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges etc.;
3. the procedure and preparation of materials for the Agency Council sessions was simplified.

Opportunities for improvement

Irrespective of the realised staff augmentation – three new employees were employed – the Agency is still understaffed. Efforts must be made to ensure even more rational work organisation, and employment of another person is planned who will assume some administrative duties from other staff and maintain archive materials, databases etc. In order to implement this objective, classification of posts has been modified and a draft call to fill a new vacancy is ready to be published.

F) PRESENTATION OF REALISATION OF THE TASKS DEFINED BY INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS UNTIL 2013 IN THE AGENCY STRATEGY 2011–2016

ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE AGENCY'S QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

In the working plan for 2012 it was stated that special attention has to be given to the quality and efficiency of work, education of staff, participation in international associations and cooperation with foreign agencies an/or in international projects in the field of quality in higher education.

Implementation goals: the Agency must become a trustworthy and professionally credible counselling body in the field of quality standards development and achievement in the Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education

Activity 1: Providing high-quality professional support in conducting accreditation and evaluation procedures

The Agency strived to solve problems related to filling out accreditation or external evaluation applications, and particularly the the electronic form "Accreditation proposal", as promptly as possible. Some could be eliminated through a phone conversation, the more challenging ones were solved at joint meetings with representatives of applicants or higher education institutions. The electronic form for submitting applications was updated wherever possible. Namely, some of the problems are impossible to eliminate due to the current design of the form and programme flexibility. Record data entry into forms was eliminated which alleviated work of higher education institutions on one side and Agency staff on the other.

At the meetings with Agency staff, issues related to conducting the procedures, interpretation of Agency's acts, the role of experts during the visits, etc. were dealt with. Agency staff, along with the Agency management, searched for solutions to the problems encountered during their practical work. More working days were devoted to deal with the accreditation and external evaluation criteria and the Manual for Experts. Apart from the meetings which were set in advance, the staff was able to have consultations with the Agency management whenever required. According to the way of work that was established, solutions to the occurring problems were checked in the legal department, the management and among the staff; in this way, the entire staff was better informed and the efficiency of its work increased.

The tasks for the implementation of this activity included modernisation of the e-archive (joint folders) and the comparative analyses of foreign agencies (recognition of good practices, comparison of procedures). The latter have not been systematically conducted so far; however, the tasks such as the comparison of procedures and recognition of good practices have been indirectly carried out in: modification of criteria for transnational education, cooperation with foreign agencies in evaluation of joint study programmes and establishment of a branch unit of a foreign higher education institution in Slovenia as well as in active participation of the Agency in various projects and working groups.

Activity 2: Drawing up transparent process schemes for all procedures

The schemes of accreditation and evaluation processes were updated and made publicly available on web pages, in the Manual for experts, in the Agency's presentation brochure, etc. Apart from that, more detailed schemes were prepared as part of tender documents for setting up the integrated information system of the Agency. Together with the selected provider responsible for the final preparation and publication of the call for tenders, the description of working procedures at the Agency and/or interconnection of individual procedures from various fields of work is still being improved in particular. Modification of conducting of accreditation and evaluation procedures at the Agency was primarily related to redistribution of tasks and simplification of the preparation of materials for Agency Council sessions.

Activity 3: Education and training of the Agency staff in Slovenia and abroad

The Agency staff was educated and trained at various workshops and conferences in Slovenia and abroad. Their requests and the work they perform were taken into consideration. Participation of individuals at certain events was also coordinated at joint meetings. Draft rules on education and training of the Agency staff is prepared for adoption.

Activity 4: Participation in international associations and cooperation with foreign agencies for quality assurance in higher education

On 28 February 2012, the Agency organised a symposium on quality assurance in higher education with foreign experts. Among the participants were vice president of ENQA executive committee, president of EQAR, head of accreditation department of the Norwegian agency NOKUT, a quality expert from the University of Edinburgh; students' perspective on quality assurance was also presented.

The Agency staff cooperated with foreign agencies for the purposes of experience exchange, training and establishment of contacts. Particularly intensive was cooperation with the Agentur für Qualitätssicherung und Akkreditierung Austria (hereinafter: AQ Austria) in the procedure of initial accreditation of a higher education institution in Slovenia. It started toward the end of 2011 (from 13 November 2011 to 16 November 2011) when an Agency staff member visited the Austrian agency (Austrian Accreditation Council, OAR). During the visit, the agencies exchanged information on accreditation procedures and operation of both agencies and they tried to find a joint solution for the possibility of establishment of a higher education institution in Slovenia which would carry out study programmes of the Sigmund Freud Universitaet (SFU) accredited in Austria.

Cooperation between the Agency and the AQ Austria considerably intensified in 2012 during the procedure of initial accreditation of a higher education institution in Slovenia (Faculty of Psychotherapy Science of Sigmund Freud University in Ljubljana) and the accreditation of a branch unit of the Sigmund Freud University (SFU), which took place at the same time. They cooperated in the examination of the application, appointment of the group of experts as well as at the visit to the higher education institution in Slovenia in October 2012 (which was also attended by representatives of AQ Austria). Due to certain irregularities in the implementation of the procedure of initial accreditation of the institution – namely, the group of experts falsely applied the criteria for initial accreditation of an institution – the Agency Council decided for the first time, upon the appeal of the applicant and examination of all facts, to exclude the group of experts and appoint a new group in accordance with the General Administrative Procedure Act. In the repeated procedure, the accreditation of the Faculty of Psychotherapy Science of the Sigmund Freud University in Ljubljana is continuing into the year 2013 as well as cooperation with AQ Austria.

Participation of foreign experts from various countries in accreditation and evaluation procedures increased considerably; while in 2011 the Agency cooperated mostly with experts from Croatia, in 2012 it also cooperated with experts from Austria, Germany, Hungary, Spain, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria. On 15 October 2012, an agreement was signed with the agency ASIIN Consult GmbH on acquisition of foreign experts from the fields of natural and technical sciences. Cooperation with this agency is good, its expert was also appointed into the group of experts for the assessment of the University of Nova Gorica; the evaluation visit will take place on 13, 14 and 15 May, 2013.

Activity 5: Participation of the Agency in the international project JOQAR – Joint Programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of Degrees Awarded):

The Agency participates in the Erasmus – Mundus project (and in joint study programmes in general) coordinated by ECA. The general goal of the project is to facilitate accreditations and recognition of study programmes.

The Agency participated in the preparation of the methodology and/or joint European standards for assessing joint study programmes. Along with Spanish (Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency, hereinafter AQU Catalunya), German (Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch Akkreditierung von Studiengängen, hereinafter AQAS) and Dutch (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders, hereinafter NVAO) quality assurance agencies it was assigned the coordination role in one of the four pilot procedures for the assessment of joint study programmes in accordance with the agreed European standards. Intensive coordination of the pilot procedure started in May 2012. Since it is a single accreditation procedure in the framework of which European standards for the quality of joint study programmes are assessed, the Agency initially had to establish cooperation with AQAS and the Czech quality assurance agency (Accreditation commission Czech Republic). Namely, the joint masters study programme EMMIR – Migration and Intercultural Relations, coordinated by the University of Oldenburg and with six other higher education institutions participating, was selected for accreditation. The programme includes four European – University of Oldenburg (Germany), University of Nova Gorica (Slovenia), University of Stavanger (Norway) and University of South Bohemia (the Czech Republic) – and three African – one from Sudan (Ahfad University for Women) and two from Uganda (Makerere University Kampala, Mbarara University of Science & Technology) – higher education institutions. Due to mutual recognition of accreditation decision, the Agency had to maintain intensive cooperation in 2012 with all

of the agencies from the countries in which European higher education institutions are located. Apart from cooperation with the above mentioned agencies and with the European Students Union in the appointment of the group of experts, the Agency also participated at the workshop in The Hague in November 2012 which was focused on consistent interpretation of European standards.

In December 2012, in the presence of AQAS representatives, it organised and carried out external evaluation of a joint study programme at the University of Oldenburg in Germany. After the preparation of joint recommendation, the group of experts participated at the workshop in February 2013 which was focused on achieving consistency of the content of reports in pilot procedures. The report was subsequently sent to the University of Oldenburg for the response. After the response, it will be sent to AQAS, the Accreditation commission Czech Republic and our Agency for the decision to be taken, which is expected to take place in May 2013.

Apart from the coordination of a pilot procedure, the Agency actively participates in the steering group where it gives proposals with regard to methodology and European standards for the assessment of joint study programmes, in a working group 1, WG 1, in which it participated in February 2013 in Madrid in the preparation of the programme of JOQAR dissemination conference, which will take place in June 2013, also in Madrid.

Activity 6: Participation of the Agency in the MULTRA international project (which is tightly linked to JOQAR)

within the JOQAR project, the Agency is also included in the MULTRA project – Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes, and strives to become its full member. The prerequisite for the latter is successfully carried out external evaluation of the Agency, anticipated for 22 and 23 April 2013 – currently, the last preparations for this evaluation are taking place.

Activity 7: Participation of the Agency in the QROSSROADS international project

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, of which the information on national quality assurance and accreditation bodies and bodies for recognition of acquired qualifications makes part. In the last year two meetings of members of the third ECA consortium working group responsible for the Qrossroads project (working group 3; WG 3) were organised. At the meetings it was established that all of the web tools and databases of the ECA consortium (Expert exchange platform – EEEP, Qrossroads in ECAPedia) have considerable deficiencies, as follows: no uniform ECA entry web page exists, searching through web pages is not well arranged and is not sufficiently efficient, the percentage of visitors who abandon visits to the pages is too high, adding and updating databases is time consuming. In the working group, the Agency participates in the preparation of tender documentation for the selection of a contractor for the renovation and improvement of a uniform ECA entry web page and databases and other publications on web pages, in the preparation of a uniform registry of European quality experts and in the improvement and development of the ECAPedia web portal. The Agency also participates in advertising (presentation) of the purpose and goals of this project.

Activity 8: (Training for) counselling to higher education and higher vocation education stakeholders

Trainings for Agency staff were organised (joint meetings, participation at consultations from their working field) and continual (solving cases in practice, continual counselling and directing of work). They were getting familiar with the role of various stakeholders in accreditation and evaluation procedures, they actively participated in the creation of the Manual for experts, modification of criteria, self-evaluation of the Agency, etc. In self-evaluation procedures they monitored the compliance of the Agency's operation with ESG standards and with operation of other comparable agencies.

Assessment of compliance in implementing the goal and performing of the tasks

IMPLEMENTATION GOALS: THE AGENCY MUST BECOME A TRUSTWORTHY AND PROFESSIONALLY CREDIBLE COUNSELLING BODY IN THE FIELD OF QUALITY STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT IN THE SLOVENIAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION		
Activity 1: Providing high-quality professional support in conducting accreditation and evaluation procedures		
Task	Implementation and responsibility	Task carried out YES/NO/PARTIALLY
Continual solving of problems related to the use of electronic application form <i>Accreditation proposal</i>	Quality Department Director	
Exchange of experiences, information and coordination of work of the Agency staff who conduct interconnected and comparable procedures.	SQAA specialist service/ Director	yes; permanent task
Interpretation of criteria, resolving of open issues and dealing with the topics related to the work of Agency staff, at regular meetings.		yes; permanent task
Updating e-Archive (common folder)	SQAA specialist service	partially
Comparative analyses of foreign agencies (identifying good practices, comparing procedures, etc.)		yes; it has to be systematically put in order
2. Activity 2: Drawing up transparent process schemes for all procedures		
Task	Implementation and responsibility	Task carried out YES/NO/PARTIALLY
Transforming the plan for conducting proceedings at the Agency and preparing protocols for individual procedures.		yes
Simplifying the protocol and manner of preparing materials for Agency Council sessions.	SQAA specialist service/ Director	yes
Activity 3: Education and training of the Agency staff in Slovenia and abroad		



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Task	Implementation and responsibility	Task carried out YES/NO/PARTIALLY
Preparation and adoption of the Rules on Agency staff education	General Affairs Department Director	partially; the rules are ready for adoption
Preparation and adoption of the plan for education and training of the Agency staff in Slovenia and abroad; Consultation with Agency staff.	Director	no
Education and training of Agency staff at seminars, workshops and consultations in Slovenia and abroad.		yes
Activity 4: Participation in international associations and cooperation with foreign agencies for quality assurance in higher education		
Task	Implementation and responsibility	Task carried out YES/NO/PARTIALLY
Organisation of a symposium with foreign experts.	SQAA specialist	yes
Active participation at consultations, conferences in the field of the Agency's operation.		yes; permanent task
Organisation of visits to foreign quality assurance agencies in higher education.		yes; permanent task
Organisation of a visit to the Agency by a foreign agency.		yes; permanent task
Exchange of quality assessment experts; striving for cooperation of the Slovenian experts with foreign agencies.		yes
Signing of bilateral agreements with related foreign agencies and institutions, and maintaining of regular contacts.	Director	yes
Activity 5: Participation of the Agency in the JOQAR international project – Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of Degrees Awarded:		
Task	Implementation and responsibility	Task carried out YES/NO/PARTIALLY
Coordinating the project. Cooperation with the Slovenian provider of the EMMIR joint study programme (European Master in Migration and Intercultural Relations) University of Nova Gorica.	Quality Department Director	yes
Analysis of the conditions for the provision of joint study programmes in EU countries, and analysis of good practice examples.		
Activity 6: Participation of the Agency in the MULTRA international project (which is tightly linked to JOQAR)		
Task	Implementation	Task carried



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	n and responsibility	out YES/NO/PARTIALLY
Active work in the ECA project group.	SQAA specialist Director	permanent task (until the conclusion of the project)
Activity 7: Participation of the Agency in the QROSSROADS international project		
Task	Implementation and responsibility	Task carried out YES/NO/PARTIALLY
Active work in the ECA project group.	SQAA specialist Director	yes
Activity 8: (Training for) counselling to higher education and higher vocational education stakeholders		
Task	Implementation and responsibility	Task carried out YES/NO/PARTIALLY
Internal education of Agency staff on current developments in the European higher education area	Quality Department, external experts/Director	partially
Monitoring of compliance of the Agency's operation with the European standards and guidelines and international principles in the area of quality assurance.	SQAA specialist service	yes; permanent task, systematically in self-evaluation report

Efforts to maximally consolidate the work at the Agency were successful. Cooperation with external stakeholders improved while trust in the work of the Agency was also reinforced. The Agency enhanced its counselling role in setting up of internal quality systems in higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges which was also a result of systematic introduction of recommendations for improvement into evaluation reports of the groups of experts. Greater satisfaction of stakeholders with the work of the Agency was confirmed at various meetings.

International cooperation of the Agency in various projects was (is) more extensive than anticipated. Apart from the planned projects, the Agency also started to participate in the CeQuInt project (Certificate of Quality of Internationalisation): the purpose of the project, selected within 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 develop methodology to measure internationalisation at both programme and institutional levels. Successful evaluation will

lead to the European internationalisation certificate. Our Agency also participates in the steering group and is responsible for selecting the study programme and conducting evaluation. The evaluation with the international group of experts in the field of higher education internationalisation will not be intended for the assessment of quality standards aimed at granting accreditation or re-accreditation, but for assessing the standards of internationalisation quality and awarding the certificate.

in November 2012, the Agency took part at the first meeting of the steering group in The Hague and actively participated in the preparation of the assessment methodology. It also selected a study programme, proposed experts for the implementation of the assessment, gave suggestions in relation with the self-evaluation report and the appeal procedure and held a meeting with representatives of a Slovenian higher education institution where the assessment is planned to take place. On 28 March 2013, the Agency organised and carried out the second steering group meeting in its premises. It was attended by twelve representatives of foreign partner quality assurance agencies (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders – the Netherlands, Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education – France, CTI (Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur) – France, Agency for Science and Higher Education – Croatia, Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria – Austria, Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency – Spain, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council – Finland, Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation – Germany, Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hannover – Germany, The Polish Accreditation Committee – Poland and German Academic Exchange Service – Germany).

Opportunities for improvement

Since the current design of the electronic operation does not enable essential upgrade of the system in all areas of the Agency's operation, a thoroughly modified electronic form is required to enable continuous development and updating in order to ensure more transparent and safer operation of higher quality; the modified form is planned as part of the integral information system of the Agency. At joint meetings, difficulties were detected in relation to filling out the e-form, updating of the application in the e-form (no more than one update was possible), there is no uniform system of recording and providing information and databases are not interconnected. The above mentioned will have to be rectified through the establishment of the integrated information system.

In the future, more effort will have to be put into rationalisation and better organisation of work. More joint meetings will have to take place at the Agency with the aim of finding solutions for problems that occur in working within certain thematic fields, internal exchange of information, reconciliation of opinions, directing of work, etc. In 2012, the Agency also had to carry out tasks from the previous year, there was a considerable increase in the number of accreditation procedures while at the same time the number of staff was reduced; therefore, there was no time for weekly meetings which had usually required several hours. Besides, the staff was occupied with numerous time consuming tasks (e.g. collecting and updating of databases, etc.) which will be assumed by a new staff member. Draft call for applications for the open vacancy is prepared and ready to be published.

Education and training of the Agency staff needs to be more systematically planned. The adoption of education plan will be enabled by the Rules on education and training of the Agency staff which is prepared for the adoption.

A visit of a foreign agency at our Agency. In the future, the Agency will strive for even closer cooperation and exchange of staff with other agencies for quality assurance in the European higher education area.

II. TRANSFORMATION OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

In 2012, the Agency strived for the transformation of the external quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education. This involves transition from bureaucratic procedures for accreditation and evaluation to jointly agreed external quality system, for which close and constant cooperation with higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, the Agency's experts and other stakeholders is of crucial importance. The Agency strengthened its counselling role, issued a new manual for experts and initiated revision of the training programme for experts and accreditation and evaluation criteria.

Executive objective: following the European criteria and standards in development of the external quality assurance system

Activity 1: Updating the external quality assurance system in accordance with the European standards

Through the daily cooperation with higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges in accreditation and evaluation procedures and with experts, the Agency strived for the development of quality culture in the higher education area in accordance with ESG. At the conference held in December 2012, it presented its role in this regard and guidelines to achieve this aim. It wishes to develop the external quality assessment system by giving recommendations for the improvement of operation of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges in expert reports, in the Agency Council decisions and by presentation of findings obtained in the analysis of self-evaluation reports of institutions and colleges, thereby promoting their development and efforts for high-quality education and all of their activities.

Activity 2: Harmonising the acts and rules of the Agency's operation with the European standards and other regulations

Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes are the basic regulation in accreditation and evaluation procedures and thus the Agency Council decided to revise them first. The Agency promptly monitored practical application of the Criteria and collected comments from stakeholders, and also drew up surveys to obtain information thereon and proposals for the improvement of the Criteria. It analysed the applicable Criteria through self-evaluation procedures and decided to amend them.

In accordance with the 2012 Work Plan, the Criteria were amended on two levels, as indicated below:

a) for the purpose of harmonisation with legislation; the first amendment was made in June 2012 for the purpose of harmonisation with the Fiscal Balance Act - ZUJF (Official

Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 40/12, 55/2012 Constitutional Court Order: U-I-162/12-5, Up-626/12-5, 96/2012-ZPIZ-2, 104/2012-ZIPRS1314, 105/2012, 25/2013 Constitutional Court Decision: U-I-186/12-34), and the second in January 2013 due to the enforcement of the Act Amending the Higher Education Act - ZViS-I (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 109/12). The amended Criteria were published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 51/2012 and No 6/2013.

b) for the purpose of improving the regulation according to the self-evaluation findings; in December 2011, the Agency Council appointed a special working group for the amendment of the Agency's acts; the group became operational in January 2012. It gathered comments on the Criteria from 2011 (submitted by mail, presented at the conference of experts in November 2011 ...), examined difficulties arising in daily work and in the Agency Council's decision-making in accreditation and evaluation procedures, it examined the findings of the Agency Council and the Appeal Committee, and obtained additional opinions regarding the Criteria and procedures of the Agency's operation through the survey of all stakeholders in June 2012 (higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, applicants, experts, the Agency staff, the Agency Council members, students). It also reviewed criteria of foreign quality assurance agencies (mostly from Norway, Switzerland ...). It found that the following needed to be regulated more precisely:

- distinction between the accreditation of a higher education institution and the accreditation of a study programme;
- fulfilment of conditions and criteria for the assessment of scientific-research work with regard to the type of institution and study programme cycle;
- fulfilment of conditions and criteria for the assessment of higher education teachers' suitability, and
- the procedures and the application submission form needed to be simplified.

A separate chapter was dedicated to the internal quality assessment system at higher education institutions and criteria according to which it would be assessed.

The group for the revision of the criteria worked intensively throughout the year and held numerous meetings, the first of them in January 2012. Additionally, the chair of the working group met several times with the Agency staff from the Quality Department and the legal service responsible for the preparation of draft criteria (of which application forms are part); the draft criteria were later discussed at the working group meetings. The draft criteria and application forms were being improved by the working group, together with all Agency staff, at two all-day meetings convened by the chair of the working group.

The Agency Council first learned about the concept of the revised criteria at its June session, and the draft revised criteria including different application forms were discussed at the dedicated session on 30 August 2012. On this day, the ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education submitted the proposal for the amendments to ZViS, which provided for a different structure of the Agency Council and appointment of its members (the Government being the one to appoint and select them, which would pose a threat to its autonomy), and additionally the amendments related to the traditional education and re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes, for public consultation. The Agency immediately responded to the proposed amendments, with which it could not agree, and discussions and meetings lasting until December 2012, which is why – and because the proposed amendments would have significantly affected the accreditation procedures and therefore the criteria – the work of the working group stalled. Their work continued after the amendments to ZViS were

adopted in January 2013 (the group held four meetings between January and the beginning of March 2013). The proposal for the amendment to the criteria will be again discussed by the Agency Council at the April session.

In the Agency's self-evaluation procedures, the Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges and the **Criteria for Entry in the Register of Experts** were also assessed. The Agency Council adopted the amended Criteria in March 2012 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 22/2012); the reasons are described in Section D on page 25.

Activity 3: Monitoring quality of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, and counselling

In 2012, the Agency systematically analysed reports of groups of experts on accreditations and external evaluations in order to improve the structure of the reports, obtain an insight as to the situation (circumstances, and particularly the development of the quality system) at higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges and to monitor the development of quality in higher education and higher vocational education. The analyses of the reports were presented at the conference in December 2012, and some findings, mainly the observations regarding the structure of the reports and assessment of individual areas from the criteria, were used in the revised manual for experts. In addition to other findings (e.g. from the analyses of the self-evaluation reports of institutions and colleges, international comparison ...), the results of the analyses of the reports of groups of experts will help to determine and collect quality indicators of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges.

One of the tasks was also to collect and analyse the self-evaluation reports of all higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges and thereby internal quality systems of institutions and colleges. The task is demanding and very extensive (there are 102 reports in total), and the analysis is expected to be ended in April 2013. Based on the results, the Agency will decide how to organise meetings and workshops with the quality committees at higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges.

Preparation of answers to frequently asked questions: frequently asked questions the Agency received from applicants, experts and other stakeholders, to which it provided prompt answers, are ready to be published on the website. They concern the interpretation of individual provisions in the accreditation criteria, criteria for transferring between study programmes, the assessment of the institution's senate structure, expansion of a study field, changes of study programmes, joint study programmes, joint implementation of subjects, distance studies, professional and academic titles and their abbreviations, duration of procedures and the register of experts of the Agency. By publishing answers to frequently asked questions, the Agency wishes to contribute to a more efficient work of all stakeholders in accreditation and evaluation procedures and to uniform interpretation of specific areas of the Agency's operation.

Activity 4: Transparent and public work of the Agency

A large step forward was made in this field in 2012. The Agency became more publicly visible, which led to the increased importance of the external quality assessment in higher education and higher vocational education. By actively appearing in mass media, particularly when ZViS was being amended in the autumn of 2012, its role in defending and explaining positions on an independent external quality assessment system by

preserving stakeholder-related structure of the Agency Council, in striving for apolitical appointment of its members, impartiality and professionalism in decision-making in accreditation and evaluation procedures pursuant to ESG and other international guidelines, was strongly reinforced.

The Agency's website was renewed and the English version of the site was created. The website is promptly updated and information on the accreditations of study programmes, higher education institutions and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges is refreshed on a monthly basis. It regularly publishes amendments to criteria and other acts, catalogue of public information, overview of its work, responses to the actual events (it was particularly active in this field when ZViS was being amended). The presentation brochure of the Agency and the manual for experts were printed as separate publications. Both publications and the self-evaluation report were also published on the website, in Slovenian and English version. Before translating them into English, a tender for translation and proofreading of professional, legal and promotional texts was published on the Agency's website, and the Agency selected the most suitable translators by 10 July 2012. Ten candidates first applied to tender. They had to submit complete applications including test translations of texts prepared by the Agency.

At some site visits, the Agency also needs interpreters; primarily on the applicants' request for interpretation from Slovene into English. In November 2012, after a call for tenders, it thus selected two interpreters with the best bid.

Cooperation with journalists was also regulated; the spokesperson of the Agency was appointed. The Agency regularly answers to journalists' questions, which were numerous in the last year. Most of them related to the position regarding the amendments to the legislation, to accreditation and evaluation procedures, particularly initial accreditations of private higher education institutions or universities. Some of the questions also concerned the decisions of the Agency Council regarding distance studies. In the last few months, the Agency was mentioned in mass media almost every week (often several times per week).

Assessment of success in the implementation of the objective and in performing duties

EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE: FOLLOWING THE EUROPEAN CRITERIA AND STANDARDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM		
Activity 1: Updating the external quality assurance system in accordance with the European standards		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/NO/PARTLY
Developing quality culture in cooperation with higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges through counselling and exchange of good practice examples	staff/ Agency Council, Director	yes
Activity 2: Harmonising the acts and rules of the Agency's operation with the European standards and other regulations		



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Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije
za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/NO/PARTLY
Amending the Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes	Agency Council	yes, June 2012 (harmonisation with ZUJF)
Drawing up and sending out the questionnaires (surveys) on the criteria and procedures of the Agency's operation	staff	
Analysis of the existing Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes, Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges and other acts of the Agency or responses by the stakeholders.		yes
Proposals for new Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes, and coordination with all stakeholders.	staff, Agency Council Working Group/Agency Council	yes
The new Criteria to be considered and adopted by the Agency Council.	Agency Council Working Group/Agency Council	partly; several discussions, not adopted yet
Activity 3: Monitoring quality of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, and counselling		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/NO/PARTLY
Analysis of reports of experts on the accreditation of higher educational institutions and study programmes and external evaluations of higher vocational colleges, and drawing up a report thereof.	Quality Department/Director	yes
Determining higher education and higher vocational education quality indicators, and starting their collection.		indirectly, through accreditations, analyses
Collecting self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, and analysing internal quality assurance systems.		partly: analysis being terminated
Meetings (organisation of workshops) of the Agency with committees or others responsible for quality of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges and other stakeholders.	staff/Director	yes, meetings
Activity 4: Transparent and public work of the Agency		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/



n·a·k·v·i·s

Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije
za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

		NO/PARTLY
Continuing renewal of the website, designing website in English and promptly updating the website	staff/Director	yes
Publication of the Agency Council's decisions, report on the work and work plan of the Agency, and other reports or presentation materials		yes
Correcting the tables on accredited higher education institutions and study programmes and their prompt updating		yes
Drawing up the table of evaluated higher vocational colleges and its prompt updating		yes
Publication of annual reports, i.e. analyses of accreditations and external evaluations		partly
Preparation of the Agency's presentation brochure, its translation into English and publication on the website		yes
Revision of the training manual for experts, its translation into English and publication on the website.		yes
Establishment of permanent cooperation with journalists. Designation of the public relations representative	authorised person/Director	yes

In the implementation of this objective, the Agency made an enormous progress compared to 2011. It became visible in the general public and it succeeded in raising awareness on the importance of an independent external quality system in the Slovenian area, pursuant to ESG.

Amending the criteria went according to plan until August 2012, and stalled between September and the end of 2012 due to other unexpected tasks that had to be done. Nevertheless, considerable work was carried out, while harmonisation of the proposal for the amended criteria with external stakeholders was postponed until 2013.

Among the most important unplanned tasks were the consideration of the amended ZViS and conducting re-accreditation procedures for all four universities, despite the fact that only one re-accreditation of a university had been planned for 2012 and others gradually by 2015. Such planning was understandable, as these are the most difficult, extensive and demanding procedures. The largest Slovenian university counting 26 members was granted re-accreditation; site visit to the second university was carried out and the procedure is coming to an end; groups of experts have been appointed by the Agency Council for site visits to the third and fourth university, the visits are planned for May 2013.

The consideration of the amendment to ZViS lasted for several months, and the staff were additionally busy with conducting university re-accreditation procedures, which slowed down the Agency's development work.

One of the unfinished tasks is the analysis of the self-evaluation reports of all higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, which was also due to many unplanned tasks the Agency performed in 2012 resulting in slight adjustment of the implementation of tasks listed in the work plan.

Opportunities for improvement

In the future, conferences with experts aimed at discussing concrete examples from the practice should be performed more often. Conferences or workshops with other stakeholders in higher education are also needed, particularly with representatives of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges and their quality committees. In relation thereto, counselling services and development and analytical department should be developed systematically. The latter is particularly associated with staffing, which is why efforts should be made to reinforce the Agency staff and to amend legislation and the criteria.

Analyses on accreditations and external evaluations and findings from the self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges must be systematically provided in a meta-report (following the example of the report on the work of the Senate for Evaluation in 2007, 2008 and 2009). In this respect, quality indicators of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges must be determined and published, collected and analysed.

III. PARTICIPATING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA

The mission of the Agency is constant cooperation with the ministries and other organisations in forming and determining national legislation and regulations from the area of higher education and higher vocational education, namely by means of active participation in working groups and at different meetings, and by drafting proposals for laws and other acts. Deadlines for these tasks depend on external stakeholders – typically, the ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education.

Executive objective 1: Implementation of the National Higher Education Programme 2011–2020 in the field of quality and internationalisation, and active participation in the Higher Education Act renewal

Activity: participation in drafting the new Higher Education Act

Based on the experience from its operation in 2010 and 2011, on the collection of proposals for the amendments to ZViS and several considerations of difficulties the applicable legislation causes in the work of the Agency staff, the Agency Council and Appeal Committee decision-making in accreditation and evaluation procedures, the Agency prepared the proposal for the amended ZViS. The Agency Council discussed the proposal at a special session dedicated to the consideration of systemic solutions (legislation and criteria), on 30 August 2012. The Agency Council and management wanted to inform the responsible ministry of their proposal for the amended ZViS in September 2012. It mainly included comments and proposals for:

- transition to institutional accreditation and external evaluation: programme accreditations are only preserved when accrediting new study programmes, while in the re-accreditation procedure, their implementation is verified through external evaluation, which is a condition for re-accreditation to be granted to the institution and the programmes it implements. A group of independent experts should be authorised to make a decision during the mandatory site visit to the

institution as to which programmes and their implementation they would examine in more detail (according to predefined conditions and criteria of course). The Agency Council must also have the authority to decide which programmes will be assessed in more detail by the group;

- reduced duration of accreditation from 7 to 5 years: the institution must be re-accredited every 5 years;
- regulation of transnational education so that different forms of this education are considered, including branches of a higher education institution abroad (Article 33. of ZViS);
- definition of a branch of a higher education institution and its transformation;
- more exact specification of accreditation and evaluation procedures and applicants' rights in the procedures, which means cessation of the application of the General Administrative Procedure Act (only *mutatis mutandis* application of the Act should be enacted);
- harmonisation of inconsistent provisions of ZViS: deadlines for submission of applications and authorisation; non-compliance with the transitional provisions of the Act.
- conditions to appoint a member or deputy member of the Appeal Committee should be loosened (Article 51.j of ZViS).

Moreover, the Agency Council prepared proposals for a more clear specification of legal form of the Agency and appointment of a new Agency body - administrative/supervisory boards; it suggested that definition of competences and learning outcomes be regulated, taking into account that the phrase 'learning outcomes' is usually used in the European higher education area, and that the Agency be given an opportunity to charge for accreditation and evaluation services.

The Ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education submitted its own proposal for the amendments to ZViS for public consultation but the Agency could not give its consent thereto. The reasons are described in the beginning of the report in the Chapter *Overview of the work of first- and second-instance decision-making bodies of the Agency* on page 8. Consideration of the proposal for the amendment by the National Assembly committees and the National Assembly lasting for several months (18 September 2012; 4 October 2012; 15 October 2012; 17 October 2012; 3 December 2012) and coordination with the ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education were initiated. The Agency promptly published its opinion on the amendments to ZViS and its modification by the responsible ministry (and all subsequent versions) on its website and in mass media. In this respect, it provided an official notification in writing to the Secretariat-General of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, the National Assembly Committee and the ministry (14 September 2012; 26 October 2012).

Executive objective 2: Forming and implementing uniform criteria and standards of higher education internationalisation

Activity: preparation of the Criteria for Transnational Higher Education

The Criteria for Transnational Higher Education were adopted in March 2012 and were published in the Official Gazette (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 18/2012). Coordination before the adoption was time-consuming because provisions of

ZViS failed to take into account different forms of this education, to which the Agency constantly pointed. However, even after the enactment of the amended ZViS in the beginning of 2013 (1 January 2013), this field is still not regulated despite the amended provisions governing transnational education. The Agency, instead of assessing the most diverse forms of this education including branches abroad, was deprived of the authority which it had until the end of 2012, i.e. granting consents to transnational education contracts, and was given duties the ENIC NARIC centre had within the ministry (recording higher education institutions that wish to provide education in Slovenia), the duties not associated with the Agency's basic activity, i.e. external quality assessment. This is why the Agency has several difficulties in harmonising the Criteria for Transnational Education with the amended ZViS. Together with the draft criteria, the amendments were discussed at the February session of the Agency Council and the Council decided to caution the responsible ministry thereof and ask it for the explanation regarding the new provisions. The ministry responded in the second half of March 2013, and the proposal of the amended Criteria is ready for consideration and adoption at the April session of the Agency Council.

Executive objective 3: Participation in forming the national qualifications framework

Activity: participation in forming the national qualifications framework

Throughout the year, the Agency participated in the working group of the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training, the national coordinator of the European qualifications framework, in preparing qualification structures of the national qualifications framework in individual sectors and fields (catering and tourism, computing, health, pharmacy, social work, agriculture, forestry, fishing and veterinary medicine ...). In June 2012, it participated in the all-day conference with different stakeholders.

At the end of November (28 November) 2012, a meeting of the narrow group of members of the inter-sectoral working group for the preparation of the national qualifications framework (IWG) was held at the Agency to present a part of the final report on the national qualifications framework (NQF) related to the integration of NQF in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area and the external quality assurance system in higher education.

The Agency took part in the preparation of materials relating to the higher education area for the final report *Integration of the national qualifications framework in the European Qualifications Framework for life-long learning and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*.

Executive objective 4: Forming, introducing and developing uniform criteria and standards in study programmes

Activity: constant cooperation with the stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education and experts of the Agency in exchanging experiences, good practice examples and needs

The Agency began to develop its counselling role, which was a bit neglected in the first years of its operation. It strived for prompt provision of answers to the questions of applicants, higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, students, journalists, ministries and others, and improved counselling and assistance to experts. On a monthly basis, it updated the data on its website regarding accreditations and external evaluations and promptly submitted it to the ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education, together with decisions and other documents required for updating and entering data in the register. It also had several meetings with the representatives of higher education institutions, the ministry responsible for higher education and higher vocational education, the representatives of the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training and others, aimed at discussing open issues and seeking joint solutions to some problems that had come to light during practical work.

Assessment of success in the implementation of the objectives and in performing duties

EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 1: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMME 2011–2020 IN THE FIELD OF QUALITY AND INTERNATIONALISATION, AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT RENEWAL		
Activity: Participation in drafting the new Higher Education Act		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/ NO/PARTLY
Drafting proposals for the amendment of the Higher Education Act	staff/Director, Agency Council	yes
EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 2: FORMING AND IMPLEMENTING UNIFORM CRITERIA AND STANDARDS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALISATION		
Activity: preparation of the Criteria for Transnational Higher Education		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/ NO/PARTLY
Preparation of the Criteria for Transnational Higher Education in cooperation with stakeholders from higher education Organisation and implementation of a workshop with the stakeholders	staff; Agency Council Working Group/ Agency Council	yes
Analysis of conditions for the implementation of transnational higher education in other countries, monitoring the development of this education, i.e. education according to joint study programmes	staff/Director	partly; permanent task
EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 3: PARTICIPATION IN FORMING THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK		
Activity: Participation in forming the national qualifications framework		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/

		NO/PARTLY
Participation at work meetings and conferences of the working group for forming the national qualifications framework.	Quality Department/ Director	yes
EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 4: DEVELOPMENT AND CONCERN FOR INTRODUCING THE UNIFORM CRITERIA AND STANDARDS IN STUDY PROGRAMMES		
Activity: Constant cooperation with the stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education and experts of the Agency in exchanging experiences, good practice examples and needs		
Task	Implementation and accountability	Task performed YES/NO/PARTLY
Organisation of a conference with the stakeholders and experts on quality standards development	Agency Council/ Director	yes

Executive objective 1

In this field, the Agency was active throughout the year, and the Agency Council discussed the amendments to ZViS at several sessions.

Proposals for the amendment to ZViS were formed; the Agency notified the responsible ministry and other higher education stakeholders thereof, and submitted an initiative in writing as a part of the opinion on the proposal for the amendments to ZViS to the National Assembly and the Secretariat-General of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia.

Opportunity for improvement

Efforts for the amendments to ZViS must be pursued. The positions of the management and the Agency Council must be presented to the new minister responsible for higher education and higher vocational education and efforts must be made to amend ZViS as soon as possible. Through the transition from programme to institutional accreditation, regulation of procedures and rights of stakeholders and the related cessation of application of the General Administrative Procedure Act, regulation of transnational education and funding of the Agency's services after the expiry of the ESF project, smooth operation of the Agency in all fields for which it was established must be provided – including development and analytical work, which has not been adequately (fully) developed due to understaffing and excessive number of accreditation and evaluation procedures (over 200 per year).

Executive objective 2

Because of legal provisions not taking account of the diversity (different forms) of transnational education, the Criteria for Transnational Higher Education were adopted later than other criteria. For this reason, coordination with the stakeholders also took longer. In harmonising the Criteria with the amended ZViS in this field, the Agency also faces similar difficulties. The amended criteria are prepared and the Agency Council will discuss them at the April session. The amendment will still fail to regulate different forms of transnational education.

Opportunity for improvement

The Agency must continue to strive for such amendment to ZViS allowing for regulation of different forms of transnational education, including accreditation of a branch of a Slovenian higher education institution abroad.

Executive objective 4

The tasks were successfully completed. Everyday cooperation with stakeholders in higher education was reinforced and improved. The improved cooperation with stakeholders had a great effect on quality and efficiency of the work of the Agency and the experts.

Opportunities for improvement

The Agency should organise more meetings and workshops with different stakeholders aimed at discussing practical examples, exchanging opinions and seeking joint solutions.