



SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

**OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY
ASSURANCE AGENCY IN HIGHER
EDUCATION
for 2014**

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The Director of the Agency confirmed the self-evaluation report in June 2015.

The Agency Council gave consent to the self-evaluation report at its 92nd meeting, 18 June 2015.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

SER – self-evaluation report of the Agency

ECA – European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education

ENQA – The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

EQAR – The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

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

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

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

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

ECApedia – web application combining knowledge in the field of higher education with special emphasis on quality assurance

EEEP – ECA Expert Exchange Platform

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

ESU – European Student Union

SSU – Slovenian Students' Union

THE – transnational higher education

HEA – Higher Education Act

ESF – European Social Fund

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

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

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1. MISSION, VISION, VALUES AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE AGENCY

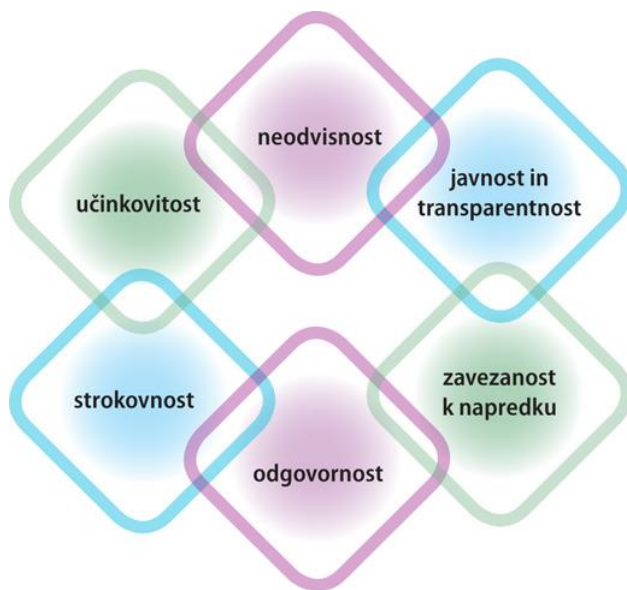
Mission

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

Vision

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

Values



Strategic objectives of the Agency until 2016 are:

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

2. ABOUT THE SELF-EVALUATION OF THE AGENCY IN 2014

At the beginning of 2015, the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency) adopted a new Quality Manual which defines the bodies, method of work of the Agency, the assessment of the quality assurance system of the Agency and the course of the self-evaluation. Therefore, we will not repeat the listed contents in this and the following reports and they will be different from the self-evaluation reports up to 2013.

Since the Quality Manual stipulates that the Director shall adopt the annual self-evaluation reports by 31 March for the previous year; the covered (considered) period in the assessment of the quality of the Agency lasts from the end of February 2014 to the end of February 2015; which is also in accordance with the previous reports.

The Self-evaluation Report for 2014 was adopted a bit later, regardless of the date determined in the Manual. The main reason for it was the wait for the decision regarding the admission to ENQA and the official document containing recommendations for further work. The Agency received the document regarding the full membership on 18 March 2015. This is a tremendous success which at the same time means the fulfillment of one of the two most important strategic objectives up to 2016, obtaining the membership in ENQA and entry to EQAR.

Because of the admission to ENQA, the Agency was reviewed for the second time in 2014 by an international group of evaluators (for the first time in 2013 because of the admission to EQAR and renewal of the membership in ECA). It was determined that the Agency complies with the conditions for a full membership and that it improved its work in the past year in accordance with the recommendations of the first group of evaluators. The findings of the international group of ENQA evaluators, especially the opportunities for improvement, have also been considered in this self-evaluation report in the recommendations and actions for the improvement of quality of the Agency's operation.

2.1. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SELF-EVALUATION

The work plan with the action plan for the self-evaluation of the Agency in 2014 was adopted in April 2014. The working group for self-evaluation prepared a proposal for the most extensive action plan to date, and the final plan was even further extended upon coordination with the stakeholders, mainly the employees at the Agency. While monitoring the achievement of the assignments from this plan, it was determined that their number is too high and that some did not

make any sense at all – which was also determined by the international group of evaluators – therefore we were not able to execute all of them. In addition to that, the work of the Agency was hindered due to a large number of applications being considered, longer sick leaves, additional tensions among the staff, and because of the assignments related with the second audit by the Court of Audit in just two years (the first was in 2012), an anonymous complaint in the media and the related inspection, and because of the negotiations for the necessary additional budgetary resources.

Also because of the unplanned assignments, which do not depend on the decisions of the Agency, a thorough consideration shall be necessary regarding the urgent priority assignments, which are of importance for an uninterrupted development of the Agency and the improvement of the quality of its work in an individual year. Action plans shall be prepared accordingly.

The action plan for 2014 contains contextual themes, named priority fields for quality improvement, which are defined slightly differently as in previous years. It contains 5 priority fields:

a) improvement of the internal system of quality, which also includes criteria and the training of experts – these were special groups of activities in 2013. For 2014, the following was anticipated: consolidation of the accreditation criteria and its interpretation, register of decision-making practices in accreditation and evaluation procedures, change of criteria for experts, criteria for transitions between study programmes, criteria for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges; new Quality Manual, strategy update and determination of strategic objectives after 2016, staff meetings intended for calibration and unification of work and enhancement of loyalty to the Agency...;

b) improvement of the external system of quality; assignments: to design guidelines for self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges (institutions / colleges), organization of consultations regarding the development of internal quality assurance systems of institutions / colleges, drafting guidelines for the regulation of the situation for students with special needs, efficient system for notifying stakeholders...;

c) information system; assignments: choosing the provider of the Agency's information system, activities for the establishment of the system, testing and implementation;

d) international cooperation; assignments: admission to the European association of quality assurance agencies in higher education ENQA, enhancing cooperation;

e) actions for the improvement of the Agency's operation and its position in the Slovenian higher education area: activities to ensure stable and long-term financing of the Agency.

In the assessment of the operation of the Agency, as in previous years, the analysis of survey questionnaires was of great help (Attachment 1) for the members of the Agency Council (Council) and the staff. It enabled us a comparison of the findings of the analysis with those obtained in the previous self-evaluation, mainly regarding the quality of work and the participation of the employees, the Director and the members of the Council. In comparison with 2013, the questionnaires were not changed significantly, the survey was performed before the adoption of the new Manual. Only the questions regarding the good and practices were added at the end of the questionnaires, the respondents also gave proposals for the Agency strategy for the period until 2020, as the long-term strategy or the strategic objectives which were adopted by the Agency at the beginning of its operation expires in the following year (2016). Other stakeholders were not surveyed in 2014, because it is done every two years.

In the preparation of the self-evaluation report we considered, in addition to the findings, obtained in the analyses of survey questionnaires and the findings of the international group of ENQA evaluators, especially the information regarding the operation of the Agency, obtained during the visits of institutions / colleges, at the meetings with various stakeholders, monthly meetings of the Council, meetings with employees, at conferences, in the participation in domestic and international project and interdepartmental groups etc.

Implementation of the activities, determined with the action plan, indicates that priority was given to activities necessary for the admission to ENQA. Performed or started were other most important planned assignments, and the Agency had to deal with many which were unplanned.

2.2. STRUCTURE OF THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

Because the assessment of the Agency's operation began before the adoption of the new Manual, the central chapters in the self-evaluation report and their structure remain the same as in the previous year. It concerns:

- chapter two: assessment of the internal quality assurance system of the Agency and the development in the key areas of its operation;
- chapter three: assessment in accordance with Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG standards, regarding the findings from the last self-evaluation and the

recommendations from the report of the international group of ENQA evaluators;

- chapter four: final evaluation and opportunities for improvement with the actions for the following self-evaluation period and SWOT analysis.

The attachments to the report present: analysis of opinions, new Quality Manual, legal bases, internal and external acts of the Agency and annual reports.

3. DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF THE AGENCY in 2014

3.1. Admission to ENQA and other international organizations

In 2014, the Agency was preparing intensively for the external evaluation for admission to The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education; hereinafter ENQA). In November 2014, the Agency held an evaluation visit of an international group of ENQA evaluators. The decision regarding a full membership in ENQA was adopted on 6 March 2015. With the membership, the Agency fulfilled its second incredibly important strategic objective (the first was admission to EQAR, achieved in the fall 2013), which was set to be achieved by 2016, and one of the two most important objectives from the National Higher Education Programme (it was adopted in April 2011 by the National Assembly). Action 21 states: »The Agency shall be externally evaluated and shall become a candidate for admission to EQAR and membership in ENQA.«; the explanation to this action further states: »If it is determined upon the external evaluation that the Agency does not comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for admission to ENQA, all necessary actions shall be taken immediately (in the event of issues with the legislation, the Higher Education Act shall be changes, in the event of issues with the operation, the operation of the Agency shall be changed immediately).«

Since the achievement of this objective was so important on a national level as well, the Agency devoted plenty of time to it in 2014 when it had to perform several assignments; from February, when it requested an explanation from ENQA regarding the procedure to obtain a full membership, to November 2014 when the Agency was visited by an international group of evaluators. Even after this date, it sent the ENQA secretariat the explanations regarding the stability of its financing and operation after the expiry of the financing from the European Structural Funds (ESF).

On 18 March, the Agency received a letter from the ENQA president, in which the Agency was being informed that the ENQA board adopted a positive decision regarding the full membership of the Agency for a period of five years on 6 March 2015. It also contained recommendations, mainly about the regulation of

financing and a notification that this implementation shall be assessed in one year.

In addition to the membership in the European Consortium for Accreditations (ECA), Central and Eastern European Association of Agencies for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CEENQA), where it has been operating successfully for years, it obtained a full membership in the International Association of Quality Assurance Agencies, [INQAAHE](#), in April 2014.

In 2014, the Director was elected as vice president of CEENQA and to the executive board of ECA.

3.2. Short overview of the work of the bodies and organizational units of the Agency in 2014

In addition to its permanent activities, among them accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges, as well as experts and their training, cooperation with stakeholders, the Agency mostly focused on:

- assignments, related with the admission to ENQA;
- implementation of a new information system of the Agency;
- legal and executive acts;
- international cooperation;
- negotiations for additional budgetary funds after the expiry of the ESF funds;
- unplanned assignments regarding the audit by the Court of Audit, anonymous complaint in the media and the control by three inspection services and relationships between technical members of the staff.

In the introduction, we warned that the action plan for 2014 was much too extensive and it was therefore not possible to fulfill it in full. Nonetheless, the Agency performed the following important assignments from the action plan:

improvement of the internal quality assurance system:

- a) prepared the self-evaluation report for 2013 and all amendments, necessary for admission to ENQA, and started the self-evaluation for 2014 (survey, analysis of survey questionnaires, analyses of the meetings of the Council, analysis of the report of an international group of evaluators, overview of registers and databases);
- b) adopted a new quality manual of the Agency;
- c) adopted and published new, consolidated criteria for accreditation and external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes;

- d) prepared a register of the practices of the Council in the decision-making in accreditation and evaluation procedures;
- e) prepared a draft of the changes of the criteria for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges;
- f) continued the training of candidates for expert on the field (visits);

improvement of the external quality assurance system:

- g) participation at consultations and workshops for the establishment of an internal quality assurance system of higher education institutions;
- h) within the establishing of an information system a determination of a method of more efficient notifying and participation with stakeholders;

information system:

- i) publication of a public tender for the selection of the provider of the new information system of the Agency (eNakvis);
- j) selection of the provider and start of weekly and daily activities for the implementation of eNakvis;
- k) design of a test version of the electronic application for the initial accreditation of a higher education institution;

international cooperation:

- l) intensive cooperation with ENQA and full membership,
- m) preparation of everything necessary for a two-day visit of the CEENQA members in May 2015 in Ljubljana (the Agency shall host the visit);
- n) it was chosen for financing in the Erasmus + programmes, as a partner in the EIQAS consortium project (international comparison of the implementation of Part 1 of the ESG standards in internal and external quality assurance systems and assessment methods);

actions to improve the operation of the Agency and its position in the Slovenia higher education area:

- o) intensive negotiations and preparation of several documents regarding the rebalance of the budget for 2015 and the required funds for 2016;
- p) have more meetings: with representatives of the Ministry of Finance, ministry competent for higher and higher vocational education and a parliamentary group in the national assembly;
- q) active participation in the Opening Up initiative, which advocates for open education (not only in Slovenia and Europe, but on a global scale). The key emphasis of the »opening of education« is in innovative methods of education and learning for all, with new technologies and freely available study materials.

3.2.1. Agency Council as a first-instance decision-making body

The highest decision-making body is the Council. Its tasks are stipulated in Article 51.h of HEA. Among them are the appointment and resolution of the

Director, the Appeal Committee, determination of the accreditation procedures and criteria, Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 9/2011; hereinafter: evaluation criteria), Criteria for the entry into the register of experts (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No 95/2010, 17/2011 and 22/2012; hereinafter: criteria for experts) and other legal acts, deciding about accreditations and external evaluations, appointment of the groups of experts.

As a rule, the Council makes decisions at regular meetings and operates in accordance with the Rules of Procedure regarding the operation of the Agency Council. Regular meetings are anticipated one a month (usually every third Thursday in a month).

Decisions in accreditation and evaluation procedures

In the self-evaluation period for 2014, the Agency received 232 applications, which is 18% more than in the previous period:

- 159 applications for accreditation of study programmes and higher education institutions (institutions);
- 7 applications for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges (colleges);
- 66 applications for transformations of study programmes.

In 2014, the Council adopted 118 accreditation decisions.

The accreditation was granted to:

- 93 study programmes of the first, second and third cycle and study programmes for further education; of which 73 study programmes were re-accredited;
- 7 institutions, of which 5 re-accreditations, and
- 36 transformations of study programmes.

Initial accreditation was granted to 20 study programmes. 11 study programmes were granted accreditation by the Council for a period shorter than seven years (hereinafter: shorter period) and gave the applicants a deadline to eliminate the found flaws, and one programme was not granted re-accreditation. Based on the complaints which successfully challenged the decision of the Council, the Council granted re-accreditation for a period of 7 years in the renewed decision-making to 4 programmes.

The main reasons for re-accreditation for a shorter period have not significantly changes compared to previous years. We still find that:

- the institutions did not successfully identify the issues in their operation with self-evaluations procedures which is why the system of internal quality assurance proved to be inefficient;
- staffing structure was not stable – either regarding the staffing structure or the field suitability of the instructors or providers of the study programme;
- implementation of practical training or laboratory practice was not in accordance with the accredited situation or the applicable regulations or the clearly defined scope in advance, work environment and under suitable mentorship;
- some important study contents were left out or the study programme is outdated;
- not enough contact hours were done, there was not enough electiveness;
- insufficient material and financial situation significantly hindered the execution of the study and advisory work;
- students, graduates and candidates for the study were not informed about the study in accordance with the accredited programme.

The Council granted a re-accreditation for a full period to 5 institutions, of which one case concerned a transformation of the institution.

The accreditation was not granted to:

- 3 study programmes;
- 1 private institution.

Initial accreditation was not granted to 13% of study programmes. The main reasons were:

- insufficient demonstration of scientific-research achievements in the field of the study programme, students of the second and third cycle would not be able to do scientific-research work;
- inconsistency of the study programme with the defined objectives and study outcomes or the inconsistency of the contents of the study programme with the field of study;
- a too small share of mandatory content and a not clear direction of the study;
- inappropriately justified employability of graduates or the need for the study programme;
- over-burdening of higher education teachers;
- inadequacy of higher education teachers according to the study and scientific-research or artistic field of the study programme.

Reasons for denial of the accreditation of institutions were mainly:

- placement in the environment and employability of graduates was not demonstrated;

- a suitable structure of the senate from the viewpoint of an equal representation of every field of study was not guaranteed;
- the founder demonstrated no scientific-research work whatsoever, there was no higher education library;
- not enough places for the practical education of students;
- inadequate internal quality assurance system, not all stakeholders would participate in self-evaluation procedures;
- there was no strategy with a plan and methods for the fulfillment of the designed objectives.

in one case, the application of an initial accreditation procedure was discarded because of a formal incompleteness.

The Agency also performs external evaluations of colleges. The Council adopted a positive opinion about complying with statutorily prescribed standards for 11 colleges, in this period there were no opinions with reservations.

An overview of the decisions of the Council regarding the granting of the accreditation for a shorter period or regarding the denial of the accreditation shows that the shortcomings occurred mainly in the scientific-research, professional and artistic work, inadequate quality assurance system of the institutions and in higher education teachers. In addition, among the causes for re-accreditation for a shorter period, the reduction of the contact hours is becoming more frequent which directly influences the quality of the implementation of the study programme.

We must also warn that the extremely important areas, such as scientific-research work and participation of students in it, quality assurance system of the institution / college, staffing stability, are relatively loosely defined with legal and executive acts which is also reflected in the causes for the appeals to the negative decisions of the Council.

The Council also decided on the documenting of transnational higher education–THE (1 THE agreement was entered into the register).

Compared to 2013, there was a significant increase in 2014 in the number of procedures for re-accreditation of study programmes. The reason is the same as in 2013; the majority of »Bologna« study programmes was created during a relatively short period (between 2006 and 2009) and their accreditation was expiring.

Compared to 2013, there were a lot (more) complaints and repeated procedures.

Processing complaints

a) Complaints by applicants

In 2014, Council gave 9 cases to decide on in accreditation procedures, which is 4 fewer than in 2013. In accordance with the recommendations of the Appeal Committee it strived, before making a final a decision in cases in which the determination of the actual situation was more difficult, to determine the correct and full actual situation by calling oral hearings, additional calls for applicants to supplement the applications, complimentary opinions of the group of experts etc. In 2014, there were 35 such decisions of the Council, 10 of which called for oral hearings.

To guarantee the applicants a possibility of equal treatment in procedures, the Council, in accordance with the possibilities given by the General Administrative Procedure Act ([24/06](#) – official consolidated text, [105/06](#) – Administrative Dispute Act-1, [126/07](#), [65/08](#), [8/10](#), and [82/13](#)); hereinafter: ADA), practiced the following in the initial accreditation procedures:

- in initial accreditation procedures for higher education institutions, sending reports of the groups of experts for response from the applicants;
- sending the responses of the applicants to the reports of the groups of experts in the procedures of initial accreditation of study programmes to prepare a possible additional opinion of the experts which is comparable to the preparation of the final evaluation report in the re-accreditation procedures.

In the renewed decision-making regarding the matters which were given to the Council by either the Appeal Committee of the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia, positive decisions were made in every one of them. 8 accreditations were granted, of which only one was extended for a shorter period.

The number of complaints in 2014 was relatively high. Even though the Council, in its old and new structure, acquainted itself with the report regarding the decisions of the Appeal Committee, took into consideration the instructions which were indicated in its decisions regarding the complaints in individual accreditation and evaluation procedures, and tried to follow the established practice in accreditation and evaluation procedures, it was often unable to make negative decisions, mainly because of the Criteria and HEA, due to loose legislative provisions (regarding staffing, scientific-research work in Master's study programmes, placement into the environment), where the Council, based on proof, did not determine a sufficient level of quality. Complainants have often accused the Council of arbitrariness in the decision-making because of the loose legislative provisions.

b) Complaints by stakeholders

The complaints by stakeholders in higher education, mainly students and higher education teachers, referred to violations at institutions. These are mainly complaints regarding the implementation of study programmes:

- inadequate implementation of practical exercise;
- implementation of contact hours in contrast with the accredited situation;
- inadequate qualifications of higher education teachers or irregularities in the habilitation procedures.

Based on this, the Council performed twelve extraordinary evaluations in 2014 (of three institutions and nine study programmes).

Treatment of the practices of the decision-making bodies in accreditation and evaluation procedures

The Agency has prepared an internal report regarding the practices of the Council regarding negative decisions in accreditation procedures or decisions regarding re-accreditation for a shorter period, and the practices of decision-making of the Appeal Committee and the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia in appeal procedures. The report warns about the incompatibility between the assessment of the quality of institutions / colleges and study programmes based on (European) standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG standards) and the requirements of the Appeal Committee and the competent court to consistently adhere to the General Administrative Procedure Act. The latter namely requires the collection of unambiguous proof (regarding subject matter, numbers, documents...) in the fact-finding proceedings and consistent making of final decisions only by taking into consideration by considering Slovenian regulations and based on previous decisions. A contextual approach in the determining of quality related with the decision-making about fundamental rights and obligations of stakeholders in higher education has shown that the decisions of Council, which were unacceptable for the applicants, were successfully contested in appeal procedures without exception.

The Council is aware of the paradox that the regulation cannot determine all the details and minimal standards for various institutions and study programmes, but the administrative procedure, the Appeal Committee and the Administrative Court guides it towards a literal observance of the regulation. Referring to the past practices of the Council is not applicable because the decisions of the Council were not always comparable, because the Criteria changed and because every institutions or study programme has its own peculiarities. It would be reasonable to think about referring to the decisions of the Council in the future, and we would therefore design conceptual bases for decision-making in critical area, such as placement in the environment, scientific-research, professional and artistic work, staffing... The Council should with certain decisions, in which it would be convinced of solid contextual justifications, consistently insist in the repeated procedure as well, by taking into consideration the doctrines of the

profession, science, and arts. The Agency should rationalize the accreditation procedure and chose the right decision with which it will be able to actively and efficiently care for quality in higher education. Compliance with the provisions of APA in the assessment of the most important area, such as quality, may mean a big waste of energy and small returns in the improvement and development of quality and its meaning. It is therefore necessary for the Agency to actively participate in the legislative starting points which will regulate its operation in the future, and to follow the principles of professionalism, independence and transparency. At the same time, it must follow the strategic objectives and European standards and guidelines and to advocate for a continuous improvement of internal and external quality assurance systems, whereby cooperation with all stakeholders is key.

Until the changes the Agency must operate in accordance with the applicable legislation, and must consider the findings of this report in the improvement of conducting procedures and decision-making. At the same time, it must conduct administrative procedures and adhere to ESG standards. The working group of the monitoring of the update of higher education legislation should be based on the findings of this report design the positions that the Agency will represent in the negotiations.

The Council is aware of the obstacles the Agency faces in the quality assessment in the Slovenian higher education area. Higher education is so complicated, alive and diverse that it is not possible to comprehensively and fully codify. The Agency cannot orient itself towards excessive regulation of quality, but it must build on the trust that the institutions themselves can assure and improve quality. In the absence of pedagogical, academic and scientific standards and a firm higher education policy in this area the work of the experts of the Agency is also made difficult. Perhaps the Agency should strive to update pedagogical, academic and scientific standards which, for example, from the criteria for the relevance of publications of scientific-research standards, strictness of operation of different professional commissions etc., and to train the experts to evaluate in accordance with these standards to defer them from assessing matters for which they cannot be experts: for example, assessing the suitability of financial resources in institutions.

Treatment of the criteria

At the beginning of 2014, the Council discussed the initiative to tighten the criteria for accreditation in the field of practical training, mobility and contextual structure of study programmes. It warned that more clear provisions for the assessment of contextual suitability and quality of study programmes needed to be set. Lastly, the representatives of the Council and the group for the update of the accreditation criteria agreed to take into consideration the findings from self-

evaluation and the findings of the international group of experts in the changing of the criteria to improve their usability and that they will not make significant contextual interventions. This would require long-term coordination with all stakeholders, since any contextual change may cause new obligations for applicants and it would be reasonable to wait for the promised change of HEA. There could be issues with the applicable application form because we cannot change it until we implement the new information system.

In June of the same year, the Council adopted new consolidated criteria in accordance with these findings, and there were no significant changes. The provisions are formulated more clearly, duplicated provisions were deleted, and we also deleted unnecessary general provisions, and the introductory provisions regarding the assessment of re-accreditation. It is unambiguously determined which criteria from individual fields of assessment are considered in the deciding about accreditations of study programmes – there are significantly fewer of them than in the old criteria – in accordance with that the number of attachments to the application form has been reduced. It is clearly defined that a study programme is not assessed in the initial accreditation regarding its organization and implementation, but rather its structure and content. One of the important novelties is the requirement to submit drafts of study programmes in the initial accreditation of the institution so that it is possible to determine the adequacy of the scientific-research work of the founder and the planned staffing. The transformation of the institution and accreditation of a dislocated unit and the field of quality assurance are defined in more detail. In the latter, the institutions are imposed how to design their internal quality assurance system and what should be included in their self-evaluation reports.

Even though the updated criteria do not introduce new obligations and rights of applicants, they were adopted as the new accreditation criteria due to the numerous corrections which were required because of the deletion of redundant or duplicated criteria.

A discussion at the meetings of the Agency Council regarding the importance of a more thorough contextual assessment of study programmes even in re-accreditation procedures continued. Special attention needed to be given to the possibility of elimination of shortcomings, which accredited in the initial accreditation. Therefore, a working group for a contextual change of accreditation criteria was again appointed at the end of the year but it has not started working yet.

Because the Agency did not prepare a final proposal of the change of the criteria for the entry into the register of experts in 2014, the Council repeated its requirement from 2013 at the 82nd meeting to prepare the proposal as soon as possible, and the proposal should include the update of the procedure and conditions for the selection of candidates for entry into the register.

At its 86th meeting, the Council adopted Act Amending the Criteria for Transnational Higher Education where a correct indication of the relationship between the provider and contractor is indicated, and the items of individual articles have been suitably changed.

Treatment of the relevant legislation

The Council regularly monitored initiatives and processes for the update of higher education legislation. At its 83rd meeting it appointed a working group for the monitoring of this update, determining shortcomings of the applicable regulations and forming the positions and proposals for future legislative solutions. The working group has not started working yet.

Change of HEA to regulate the situation of graduates of non-accredited study programmes

On 19 November 2014, the act amending HEA was adopted regulating the public validity of diplomas for 200 graduates who finished their studies on study programmes whose accreditation expired. The Agency notified the institution in time to submit the application for re-accreditation, although it was not required to do so based on HEA. The Agency actively participated in the abovementioned amending act and warned about the violations of students' rights the entire time (students of these study programmes) and the severity of the consequences of adopting this amending act for the quality in the Slovenian higher education area.

Comprehensive update of HEA

In fall 2014, the Ministry, competent for higher education (MESS), announced a comprehensive update of HEA, under which – as was shown when the proposal was presented to stakeholders – the structure, operation and competences of the Agency would substantially change. The starting points for the update of HEA provisions were prepared by the Ministry in a small group to which the Agency and Council were not invited. Therefore, the Council adopted a decision at its 87th meeting: »the Agency shall write to MESS and require to be included in the process of preparing a concept and update of HEA«.

As is evident from the previous self-evaluation report of the Agency (for 2013), ministers, competent for higher education, change quickly. This is also related with the numerous proposals for the changes of HEA. The Agency and the Council continuously strive to keep the independence and stability of its operation, for a transition towards institutional evaluation (gradual abandonment

of re-accreditation procedures for study programmes and the joining of its assessments in institutional procedures), enhancement of the advisory function of the Agency and its analytical activity, whereby great concern is given to comparability of its operation with other European quality assurance agencies, compliance with ESG standards and the enhancement of international and interdepartmental cooperation with stakeholders.

Slovenian Qualifications Framework Act

The Agency was actively involved in the establishment of the Slovenian Qualifications Framework (SQF) and attended meetings for the coordination of SQF proposal. It mostly warned about an inconsistency regarding the placement of the old higher education diplomas and the education in the descriptors of the level between the proposal of the act and KLASIUS and clarified the anticipated role and new assignments of the Agency indicated in the draft.

Decision-making regarding the experts of the Agency and training of candidates for entry into the register of experts

The training of candidates for entry into the register of experts of the Agency in accordance with the programme from 2013 continued; the programme was updated at the beginning of 2014. The candidates performed the practical part in groups of experts and they participated at the visits of higher education institutions / colleges.

a) entry into the register of experts

The committee for opening of the applications of candidates for entry into the register of experts met once in 2014. It discussed 3 applications from students.

By the end of 2014, the register of experts featured 168 Slovenian experts and 22 experts-students or a total of 37 new experts. In 2014, the Council entered 3 experts following a special invitation, and, based on a successfully performed training programme, 35 experts were entered in the register.

The Council decided that doctoral students, candidates for experts, must perform the training at SSU, the same as the other students, since the students' point of view is important for the assessment. Because of the lack of students in the register of experts, the Council decided that the candidate-students are eligible for entry into the register until cancellation if they completed the initial part of the training implemented by the Agency following an invitation from the committee for opening the applications of candidates. Because of a duplication of contents, the Council demanded a harmonization of the training programmes of SSU and the Agency.

Candidates from support services of the institutions and broader from the public sector and administration are important mainly for assessment at the institutional level.

b) appointment of the groups of experts

In 2014, the Council appointed 88 groups of experts for assessment in accreditation and evaluation procedures, which is 22 fewer than the year before. Some groups assessed several study programmes because of the joining of procedures. The reason for the decrease is therefore mainly in the joining of the procedures.

The Council stated on several occasions its requirement to unify the bibliography data and the data on the field of activities of candidates regarding the preparation of the materials for the meetings regarding the decision-making for the entry of the candidates into the register of experts.

c) extension of the deadline for the groups of experts, appointment of substitute experts and eliminations from assessments

In 2014, the Council extended the deadline for the groups of experts to submit the joint report; the reasons were: supplementation of the application, assuring an uninterrupted evaluation visit and preparation of the report, study holidays and appointment of substitute members.

Four experts were additionally appointed to the groups of experts, namely because of self-elimination from the assessment or the possibility for share the work in a group.

The Council considered two initiatives to eliminate a Slovenian expert from the group because of the claim of the applicant that the expert hails from a competing institution. The Council concluded that study programmes cannot be assessed by experts who do not hail from the area of the study programme, therefore, there will always be some doubt whether they come from a competing institution. Because the expert was clear that his judgment shall be unbiased and because the opinion of the group of experts is a joint opinion, and not an opinion of an individual, the Council denied the application for elimination.

Treatment of internal legal acts and strategic documents

In this self-evaluation period, the Council confirmed:

- the self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2013;
- business report for 2013;
- work and financial plan for 2014;

- new quality manual.

Regarding the self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2013, the Council raised its concerns regarding the findings of the surveys about the satisfaction of stakeholders, and suggested the staff and members of the Council meet at a coordination meeting and exchange their expectations and opinion. They should improve accreditation procedures, maintain and raise standards of quality and gain more experts from deficit fields.

The Council had numerous discussions regarding the audit by the Court of Audit of the Republic of Slovenia.

In the field of transnational higher education (THE) a working group was formed to prepare the proposal of recommendations for procedures and the drafting of contracts for THE, consortium agreements for joint study programmes and the submission of applications and external assessment of programmes for further education. According to the opinion of the Council the rights of students needed to be better protected which would be enabled by quality consortium agreements. A question is raised whether THE students can exercise the rights of Slovenian students in accordance with HEA. To improve the THE regulations, the Agency started to coordinate the proposal of explanations to the instructions for THE with the stakeholders. These instructions, among others, discuss the duration and study conditions, its form, rights and obligations of students, regulation of internal legal acts determining the implementation of THE, staffing and material conditions (including the presentation of financial resources), quality of the study and the qualification which will be achieved by the graduates.

At the beginning of 2015, the Council discussed and confirmed the new Quality Manual of the Agency. It clearly defines the quality assurance system of the Agency, it is determined that quality as a joint value is continuously improved by every stakeholder with their work meaning that they co-create and develop the quality culture. The quality circle is described and divided into three central chapters: method of the Agency's work; areas of quality and indicators of quality and self-evaluation – assessment of the Agency's quality assurance systems with the preparation of plans and reports, and it is concluded with a chapter which is very important for the quality of the Agency's work: risk management, documentation and data for which an efficient information system needs to be developed. The most important novelty is that for the first time, the Quality Manual defines the basic areas of quality (with concluded sub-areas) with numerical and contextual quality indicators and the related actions and activities of the stakeholders. The areas and sub-areas of quality are concluded with quality standards the Agency wishes to achieve. The areas also include self-evaluation procedures and systemic analyses.

The quality circle which is the foundation of an efficient quality system is concluded at two levels – through self-evaluation with the participation of internal and external stakeholders of the Agency at the first instance, and through planning and reporting about the operation of the Agency to the management, both are connected by the action plan. The Council emphasized that a prompt concern for the fulfillment of action plans is very important, while the Director emphasized that the two action plans so far have been too extensive and that a consideration is due in the future regarding the Agency's priority tasks. Action plans must be feasible, which means they must be significantly shorter. The Council agreed.

3.2.2. Appeal Committee as a second-instance decision-making body

The Appeal Committee met at 4 meetings in 2014, and it decided on eleven cases. The decisions were as follows:

- it denied the appeal in three cases (thus confirming the Council's decision – first-instance body);
- in nine cases it upheld the appeal, eliminated the contested decision and returned the case to the Council for renewed decision-making.

When the Appeal Committee upholds the appeal, the case is returned to the Council for renewed decision-making in accordance with the provisions of HEA. The decision of the Appeal Committee is final in case the appeal is denied, and an administrative dispute is possible against it.

After a review of the discussed cases it is possible to determine that in most of the cases, the appellants asserted all three reasons for appeal from paragraph one, Article 237 of the Administrative Dispute Act. The decisions were therefore contested because of:

- claimed violations of substantial law;
- claimed false or incomplete finding of the actual situation; and
- claimed violation of the rules of the procedure.

3.2.3. Director

In addition to making sure that the fundamental activities of the Agency are performed regularly, which includes a large number of accreditations and external evaluations of institutions and study programmes, the Director was preparing for the visit of the international group of evaluators and for the achievement of the last from the most important strategic objectives of the

Agency until 2016, that is a full membership in ENQA. The Director was in extensive communication with the ENQA panel and secretariat, he organized a work visit of the ENQA panel at the Agency's offices in Ljubljana and ensured the participation of 56 interviewees at these discussions.

In June 2014, he signed an extension of the contract from ESF funds until August 2015.

In Fall and especially in January 2015, he strived to ensure additional budgetary funds after the expiry of the ESF project. He met twice with the parliamentary group SMC in the National Assembly and with the representatives of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Sciences.

Since there was no adequate partner for discussion at MESS for a long time, he tried to get a meeting with the Minister of Finance and in the National Assembly. His activities were focused on three more areas:

a) international cooperation

The Agency was active in CEENQA and in ECA projects. As the vice president of CEENQA, the Director began the preparations for the annual meeting of the members of this organizations which shall be held in Ljubljana on 22 and 23 May 2015 (workshop and GA). At the same time, he cooperated with quality assurance agencies in Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Bulgaria and the countries of former Yugoslavia.

He was actively involved in the efforts to improve the Agency's recognition in domestic and foreign media, he participated with his contributions at various conferences, interdepartmental groups, workshops and consultations and promptly monitored the development of the quality assurance system in the higher education area at home and abroad and reported about it to the staff at the Agency at regular weekly meetings.

b) cooperation with higher education stakeholders

During this self-evaluation period the Director advocated for cooperation with stakeholders and the approximation of the Agency's operation to the investors. He continued to visit institutions. He held informal discussions with rectors, deans, presidents, chairmen, students and in some cases also with owners of institutions.

c) working conditions at the Agency

The Director is continuing regular weekly short work meetings with employees. It is a short exchange of information and an agreement regarding future work. At the beginning of 2015, he performed annual work interviews with all employees.

Even though the meetings are intended to pose questions, exchange opinions and informal discussions, it almost never happens.

From June 2014 to the end of the self-evaluation period, the Director needed to perform additional tasks, related with the second, this time more contextual, audit by the Court of Audit. On several occasions, he needed to explain accreditation and evaluation procedures to the auditors and the method of work of the experts and the Council, and how their work is paid for. Many times, the replies to extensive questionnaires needed to be prepared and extensive documentation needed to be collected. The Director and individual technical members of the staff cooperated promptly with the auditors which further hindered the work of the Agency.

At the end of 2014, the media published an anonymous complaint against the management of the Agency because of staffing, payment for the increased amount of work, changes in the systemization of work positions and relationships with the employees. The Director responded to the complaint immediately and sent the response to the Corruption Prevention Commission, the ministries and the media for information. The Agency was soon visited unexpectedly by the work inspector of the Republic of Slovenia who performed a supervision of the work relationships in the Agency. In January 2015, the Agency received a written notification from the Ministry for Public Administration – Inspectorate for the Public Sector regarding the inspection supervision of the implementation of the provisions of the Public Sector Salary System Act and based on the executive regulation, collective agreements and general legal acts of the employer. None of the performed supervisions discovered any violations referred to by the anonymous complaint, but the work of the Agency was severely hindered.

The Council was also notified about the complaint. It was surprised because it believes that the employees have the possibilities to resolve their issues at the joint meetings of the Agency as well as the meetings of the Council. The reasons for such problematic atmosphere among the staff were not possible to determine despite the attempt to talk to the staff, but it found that it could be partially affected by the instability of employment of those employed after the ESF project. Despite that the issues should have been resolved promptly instead of sending an anonymous complaint, as every possibility is available to them at internal meetings at the Agency. The Director was mandated to thoroughly discuss the issue with the staff at the next meeting. The following was agreed upon at the meeting:

- introduction of a special box to collect anonymous opinions and initiatives;
- at the work meetings, more attention shall be paid to prompt solving of any potential issues and minutes including the decisions shall be written;
- the Director shall seek assistance in the managing of the conditions at the Agency from the two technical members of the staff who have completed a workshop for mediation in disputes.

3.2.4. Staff in the General Affairs Department and the Quality Department

The tasks of the staff in both departments are intertwined on several occasions, especially the legal service is active in accreditation procedures, in the preparation of the criteria and legal acts of the Agency, in the international participation etc., therefore, the tasks are not listed according to sector.

The most important tasks, in addition to conducting accreditation and evaluation procedures, preparing reports about the procedures for the meetings of the Council and the Appeal Committee, decisions regarding accreditations, opinions regarding external evaluations, professional assistance to the management regarding staffing and financial matters, solving legal questions, tasks from the action plan and other permanent activities, performed by the technical members of the staff are demonstrated in previous chapters, since the materials, discussed by the Council and the Appeal Committee is prepared by the staff. Therefore, only a couple of the most important have been listed:

- self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2013 and supplements required by the international group of ENQA evaluators;
- tasks related with the visit of the international group of evaluators;
- new accreditation criteria;
- list of the practices of decision-making bodies in accreditation and evaluation procedures;
- new quality manual of the Agency;
- intensive implementation of a comprehensive information system of the Agency;
- preparation of extensive materials and numerous replies for the Court of Audit and other inspection services;
- preparation of the materials for the negotiations regarding the financial situation of the Agency and the changing of legislation;
- active participation with lectures in the training of experts-students at SSU, internal evaluators at private institutions, at the consultation of the Community of Higher Vocational Colleges and other consultations of external stakeholders (strategic consultations, quality assurance consultations...);
- cooperation in international projects.

The staff continued with their activities in international working groups, especially in the following projects:

- **EEEP (ECA's Expert Exchange Platform)**: It is the establishment, testing and implementation of a web platform intended for an easier locating and identification of European experts for external quality assurance procedures. The agencies for accreditations and quality

assurance in higher education will use this platform for mutual (cross-border) exchange of trained and experienced experts. The platform was successfully implemented in December 2014.

- **CeQuInt** (Certificate for Quality of Internationalisation): the purpose of the project which was chosen within the Lifelong Learning Programme (Erasmus); Erasmus Multilateral projects in September 2012, is to improve and accelerate the process of internationalization of higher education and the development of methodology to measure internationalization at a programme and an institutional level. A successful evaluation leads to the European internationalization certificate. The Agency participates in the steering group and participated in 2013 in the creation of the pilot methodology, training of experts in Vienna and it carried out all organizational procedures for the evaluation of a study programme taking place in March 2014 at the Faculty of Economics at the University of Ljubljana. The evaluation with an international group of experts from the field of internationalization of higher education was this time not intended to the assessment of quality standards due to the granting of an accreditation or re-accreditation, but to assess the quality standards of internationalization and the granting of the certificate. In December 2014, a CeQuInt workshop was organized in Warsaw titled: *Good Practices in Internationalization*. The workshop was full of discussions about the good practices which came to life in colleges and universities, clear objectives of the colleges which should support the development of good practices and their dissemination, connectedness of *learning outcomes* and the progress and development of intercultural competences of students. At the beginning of 2015, a dissemination conference was organized in Paris which also included the granting of the *Internationalization Certificate* to the colleges fulfilling the conditions. Among the recipients of the certificate is also the International Business programme of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

During the 2014 self-evaluation period, surveys about employee satisfaction were carried out (discussed in more detail in chapter ESG 3.4 »Human resources«) and the surveys about the satisfaction of the members of the Agency Council, which are discussed in more detail here, along with an analysis of the responses of the employees where the mutual relations and the cooperation between the Agency and the Council are emphasized.

We are finding that the Agency already adopted the Rules on the Action to Protect the Dignity of Staff and Protection of Informers of Corruptive, Illegal or Unethical actions.

The analysis of the surveys done among the members of the Council shows, in comparison to previous years, positive trends in three out of four contextual blocks. An average rating of all responses in 2014 is higher than in 2013 and is 3.9. A more detailed analysis of the surveys is given in the attachment.

From all the contextual blocks, the best rated were the following:

- general satisfaction with Council meetings (rating 4.1; deviation 1.36);
- suitability of the materials for the meeting which is helpful for the decision-making of the Council (rating 4.1; deviation 1.05);
- time is ensured for an appropriate discussion and deciding about every item (rating 4.3; deviation 1.39);
- checking the operative implementation of adopted decisions (rating 4.3; deviation 1.09)...

A negative trend in the responses of the Council may be observed in the average rating of the set of questions regarding the cooperation with the Agency. The members of the Council suggested to be included throughout the entire accreditation process and not only for the final report. The diversification of the responses in this set (cooperation with the Agency) was big. A similarly large deviation may be observed in the following claims:

- the Agency Council operates professionally and independently (rating 3.5; deviation 1.73);
- leading the meetings enables an efficient discussion and encourages new ideas and proposals (rating 4.0; deviation 1.73); which may be connected with non-uniformity in the standpoints;
- the opinions given by any member at the meeting are considered (rating 3.8; deviation 1.64).

On average, the members of the Council gave the highest ranking (4.4) to the contextual block »assessment of the satisfaction of the operation of the Council« and assessed that the Council acknowledges in the decision-making the principles of conflict prevention and impartiality.

In the relationship between the Council and the staff, an opposite trend may be observed as in the previous year. The staff in general gave a better ranking to the relationship to the Council (opinions regarding the constructiveness of the discussions of the members of the Council at the meeting, efficiency of the meetings, cooperation with individual members...). Despite a better ranking in general, the staff gave the lowest ranking to objectivity and appropriate justification of the decision-making. A conclusion can be made that they wish for more detailed justifications of the decisions of the Council, mainly in case of negative decisions or decisions regarding re-accreditation for a shorter period. A positive trend in the survey regarding the employees may be observed in the ranking of the cooperation with the members of the Council and the preparation of the materials which is helpful for the decision-making. In 2014, the Agency acknowledged the contextual proposals made by the Council in 2013 and improved the professional basis for the decision-making by reviewing the

compliance of the findings in the reports of the experts with regulation in advance.

The highest degree of agreement among Council members was in the responses, which were rated above average, about the timeliness of the submission of the minutes of the meeting and materials and the suitable technical support, and about the suitable cooperation with the Director of the Agency and his representation of the staff at the meetings and in public.

Opportunities for improvement:

Regarding the contextual responses and recommendations of Council members and employees we find that the opportunities for improvement may be found in a more active inclusion of the members of the Council in the procedures (not only in the decision-making), and especially to enhance their cooperation with the staff conducting the procedures. We suggest the following:

- Council members join evaluation visits (in the re-accreditation procedures of institutions and study programmes and external evaluations of colleges);
- Council members actively participate in the entire accreditation and evaluation procedures, whereby emphasis needs to be given especially to close monitoring of every phase of the procedure, amendments and attachments to the applications, active participation in the preparation of the materials for the meeting (timely preparation of applicable justifications and decisions in the reports for the meeting) and potential oral hearings;
- the materials are coordinated between the members of the Council and technical staff at least nine days before the meeting;
- any potential disagreements or issues in communication between the members of the Council and employees are resolved in a quick, efficient, calm manner with respect for the counterpart. If that is not possible, the Director and president of the Council shall intervene in the resolution of the disagreements;
- an informal gathering between Council members and the staff should be organized at least once annually where any potential issues, challenges, examples of good and bad practices and the opportunities for improvement are discussed openly;
- Council members are more actively included in international meetings, press conferences, workshops and consultations organized by the Agency or are important for its operation, they enhance its image in the public and encourage further quality improvement in the Slovenian and European higher education area.

4. COMPLIANCE OF THE OPERATION OF THE AGENCY WITH ESG STANDARDS

In the first half of 2014, the activities for the beginning of the admission process to ENQA were performed. In accordance with the provisions of the articles of association of the ENQA association, every Agency wishing to become its full member must successfully undergo an external evaluation which is performed by an international group of evaluators. It is appointed by ENQA. The basis of the external evaluation is the self-evaluation report of the Agency for the previous year. In accordance with self-evaluation procedures at the Agency the report for 2013 (SER 2013) was prepared as a follow-up to the self-evaluation report of the Agency from 2010 to 2012. Because the group of evaluators met with such a form of the report for the first time, and even though they were forwarded the SER 2010 to 2012, the Agency needed to prepare additional explanations before the visit (description of the higher education system, description of the work performed between March and October 2014...). The visit of the ENQA group of evaluators took place on 17 and 18 November 2014 at the offices of the Agency. In December, the Agency received the report about the external evaluation to review and give any technical notes, and the report shows that the operation of the Agency is fully compliant with 9 ESG standards (standards: 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.7, 2.8, 3.2, 3.3, 3.6, and 3.8), substantially compliant with 6 ESG standards (standards: 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 3.1, 3.5, and 3.7) and partially compliant with one ESG standard (standard: 3.4).

Positive findings of evaluators mainly refer to:

- recognized and established role of the Agency in the Slovenian higher education area;
- prompt and periodical (cyclic) assessment of institutions, study programmes and colleges;
- tendencies to transition towards re-accreditation of institutions and gradual abandonment of re-accreditation procedures for study programmes, which is currently reflected in a (too) high number of accreditation procedures and visits at institutions and therefore a too large burdening of institutions;
- strong developmental potential of the Agency in its operation which exceeds the potential of other agencies in the European higher education area.

The evaluators recognized the opportunities for improvement in the following:

- unified understanding and interpretation of accreditation criteria among all stakeholders in higher education, at the same time, they advised us to not change the criteria too often;

- changes of procedures of continuous and continued monitoring of quality in institutions by abandoning re-accreditation procedures for study programmes and by transitioning to institutional re-accreditation which shall be reflected in the preparation of applicable mechanisms for the monitoring of quality (follow-up), and
- regulation of the financing of the Agency from the state budget, but at the same time it was noted that these circumstances are a part of the national context and therefore outside of the Agency's control.

The group of evaluators concluded the ENQA report by congratulating the Agency for its achievements and a recommendation of the ENQA board to offer the Agency full membership in the association.

On 6 March 2015, the ENQA management board made the decision to admit the Agency to the ENQA association as a full member for a period of five years.

According to the methodology of the SER preparation for 2013 we follow in the report for 2014 the findings of an international group of evaluators indicated in the evaluation report for admission to the ENQA association (ENQA report) and we are adding self-evaluation findings according to ESG standards.

4.1. THE AGENCY AND ESG 2 STANDARDS

4.1.1. ESG STANDARD 2.1: Use of internal quality assurance procedures

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

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that the Agency pays a lot of attention to the building and an efficient operation of internal quality assurance systems at institutions /colleges through an external quality assurance system. The latter was also confirmed in discussions with external stakeholders and is also evident from HEA provisions, criteria for accreditation and external evaluation. The report finds that the procedures of the Agency are more progressive than most other accreditation procedures at comparable quality assurance agencies, as they are not focused only on reviewing the established internal mechanisms at institutions / colleges and the current situation, but it is rather focused on the assessment of the development of their quality assurance system. Because the Agency, in accordance with HEA, collects and analyzes self-evaluation reports of institutions / colleges, thus obtains useful information about the level and direction of their development and progress. The group of evaluators emphasizes that this severely burdens institutions / colleges, as they need to collect and send plenty of documentation every year. It discovered that a new information system is

being established at the Agency (named eNakvis), which would simplify the collection and processing of the information – for applicants as well. However, the Agency must be careful and not impose additional (more than necessary) obligations on institutions / colleges.

It commended the efforts for transition to institutional re-accreditation (extension of the accreditation of the institution which would also include the assessment of study programmes). This would mean fewer accreditation procedures for institutions and more emphasis could be given to the improvement of internal quality assurance systems. The representatives of the ministry competent for higher education and other stakeholders in higher education agree with this transition.

The group further finds that legislation provisions do not allow a reduction in the scope of assessment when regarding a proven, excellently developed internal quality assurance system of an institution. However, it does commend the Agency for the good work it did for the improvement of internal quality assurance systems of institutions / colleges.

ENQA recommendations:

The Agency should consider preparing guidelines for writing self-evaluation reports of institutions / colleges and make sure they are more efficiently included in their activities.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

In the previous self-evaluation report of the Agency (SER 2013) we recommended the use of regular consultations for stakeholders intended to discuss the guidelines for efficient operation and development of internal quality assurance systems, emphasizing the meaning and enhancing the meaning of quality at institutions / colleges and the exchange of good practices.

We find that the operation of the Agency in the previous year was made difficult by an extensive and demanding action plan on the one hand, and on the other hand by various unforeseen events which demanded plenty of time and energy (the audit by the Court of Audit, anonymous complaint and the related inspection supervisions, the negotiations for financial resources), an uninterrupted work was also hindered by the relationships between employees and the Director and the number of processes.

Intensive activities for the establishment, testing and implementation of eNakvis and explaining the meaningfulness and justification of the operation of the Agency at competent ministries and in the National Assembly also need to be mentioned.

The unachieved activities should be optimized and considered in the following action plan.

Opportunities for improvement:

In the following period the action plan must include clearly defined priority objectives which will be achievable in one self-evaluation period. We find that it is reasonable to complete an objective from the previous action plan which has not yet been achieved, i.e. the preparation of guidelines for writing self-evaluation reports for institutions / colleges. The guidelines must be prepared and coordinated with the stakeholders in higher and higher vocational education; therefore, special workshops and consultations shall be required.

4.1.2. ESG STANDARD 2.2: DEVELOPMENT OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 2.2: fully compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that these Criteria and the legal acts of the Agency were forwarded to all the stakeholders for remarks and propositions before being adopted at the Council, and most of the propositions was considered in the preparation of the final version of legal acts. The criteria for accreditation and external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes (accreditation criteria) were changed twice in the last year. The last change (June 2014) occurred based on the recommendation of the ECA and ESU external evaluation (end of 2013) to eliminate duplications and inconsistencies. All criteria and the legal acts of the Council, manual for the experts, form for the submission of applications for accreditation and external evaluation, reports regarding the work of the Agency, self-evaluation report of the Agency and other important strategic documents are published at the Agency's website and are available to all interested parties.

The group of evaluators did not indicate any recommendations for improvements.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

It is evident from the SER 2013 that the opportunities for improvements included the proposed preparation of guidelines for self-evaluation reports and obligatory interpretation of accreditation criteria. We find that the tasks from the action plan in this part were not achieved and they need to be anticipated in the following self-evaluation period.

In 2014, the accreditation criteria were changed based on our own findings and proposals of stakeholders (mainly institutions and experts of the Agency) and ECA-ESU international evaluators. Changes are described in chapter 3, pages 17 and 18.

The basic tasks for the preparation of the interpretation of criteria were done and an overview of decision-making practices of the bodies in accreditation and evaluation processes was done (for a more detailed description see chapter 3, pages 15 and 16). The practices were discussed by the Agency in several meetings, some actions were already planned and executed (also within eNakvis), some will still need to be realized (interpretation of the criteria).

As a partner, the Agency is actively participating in the international consortium of the EIQAS project (Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems), financed from the Erasmus + programme, KA2 in 2014 (for a period of two years). The objectives of the project are:

- to increase the capabilities of higher education institutions (institutions) in participating countries to develop their internal quality assurance systems in a way that would enable better awareness and understanding of Part 1 of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance;*
- to recognize, develop and distribute the examples of good practices in internal quality assurance system of participating institutions;*
- to increase the capabilities of participating agencies in the external quality assurance system by comparing their methodologies for the assessment of internal quality control systems of institutions and the exchange and development of good practices in their assessment.*

Opportunities for improvement:

Key priorities of the Agency for the following self-evaluation period need to be determined. They should not be too extensive and spread across several different areas; therefore, we suggest that based on the results of the EIQAS project the starting points for the preparation of the guidelines for self-evaluation reports of institutions / colleges are determined. Two Slovenian universities also participate in the project as partners, whose findings in the establishment and development (improvement) of internal quality assurance systems shall be considered in the preparation of the draft of this document, and shall be coordinated with key stakeholders in higher and higher vocational education in the following steps.

The preparation of obligatory interpretation of accreditation criteria is a priority.

4.1.3. ESG STANDARD 2.3: CRITERIA FOR DECISIONS

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 2.3: substantially compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that all criteria of the Agency are publicly available and published at its website. The groups of experts in the assessments and preparation of joint and evaluation reports use standardized forms (templates for writing reports) and instructions for filling out reports prepared in accordance with the areas of assessment under the criteria. The Agency Council adopts every decision regarding accreditations and external evaluations based on the published criteria for accreditation and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges (evaluation criteria). Before adopting the final decision of the Council, the applicant have the option to make remarks to reports made by the groups of experts.

The Agency has several actions at its disposal to ensure consistency in decision-making procedures. Such actions are the following:

- training of experts (training of candidates for entry into the register of experts, consultations of experts), members of the Council and the staff;
- Quality Manual defining the processes of internal quality assurance mechanisms of the Agency;
- manual for experts defining in detail their work and the use and explanation of accreditation criteria and evaluation criteria;
- cooperation of the technical staff with experts and their help during the visits to institutions / colleges;
- well-functioning appeal system;
- conducting surveys which the Agency uses to measure the satisfaction of stakeholders and ensures information regarding the quality of its operation and services as a whole (also regarding the work of technical staff and groups of experts). This ensures a concluded circle of quality. The purpose of such collecting of information is the continuous improvement of accreditation and evaluation tools.

The group recognizes several actions to ensure a consistent interpretation of the criteria, but a considerable number of its changes makes a consistent interpretation difficult. It finds that the Agency put a lot of efforts in the last years to ensure objective and transparent decision-making processes. A move to a positive direction in this field is shown by the introduction of different mechanisms, for example, the changed and more goal-oriented system of training candidates for entry into the register of experts, the related consultations and the published meta-analysis. Various analyses of reports and decisions of the council may also be used as a tool for a deeper understanding of

various roles and accountability among the staff, members of the Council and experts of the Agency.

ENQA recommendation:

The Agency should enhance the efforts to strengthen the understanding of the criteria and develop and publish their interpretation.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

Recommendations from SER 2013 to prepare guidelines for the interpretation of the Criteria have not been achieved completely. An overview of the practices of the decision-making bodies in accreditation and evaluation procedures with contextual starting points and proposals for interpretations of individuals criteria, for example, scientific-research, professional and artistic activity, human resources, library and placement in the environment. This topic was discussed at a couple of meetings. Establishment of a comprehensive information system (eNakvis), designing new application forms and instructions for its filling out and participation in the EIQAS project for the improvement of internal quality assurance systems of institutions / colleges relate to the interpretation of the criteria.

We find that the public procurement and the selection of the provider for the establishment of eNakvis were successful (selection of the provider and the supervisor). Since November 2014, there have been intensive coordination meetings and workshops between the Agency and the selected provider as well as other stakeholders (MESS, MPA, SRC...) to establish eNakvis with quality and as soon as possible. In accordance with that, in the new information system the Agency shall adjust the application forms for accreditation (initial accreditation and re-accreditation of institutions, study programmes, changes of study programmes, transformations of institutions, accreditation of a dislocated unit), application forms for external evaluations of colleges, but mainly it will enable the applicants the improvement of their user experience by:

- making the instructions for filling out application forms such to enable faster and more efficient filling out (contribution to a clearer understanding of the criteria, procedures and the decision-making);*
- not making the applicants enter the same (already entered) data in various application forms;*
- having constant insight into the situation of their applications and their content;*
- making eNakvis compatible in content with the record and analytical information system of higher education of the Republic of Slovenia (eVŠ);*
- enabling an exchange of documents and applications at the institutions and the applicant before submitting the application form to the eNakvis*

system (for example, correspondence between the member and the university);

- *by enabling the giving of proposals for the improvement of the operation of the Agency in different phases of procedures (satisfaction surveys).*

Opportunities for improvement:

Absolute priority in the following self-evaluation period shall be given to the further activities for the testing, coordination with stakeholders and establishment of eNakvis as soon as possible. It is important that the system shall enable a user-friendly experience, and this contributes to a more transparent operation of the Agency, a better understanding of the Criteria, procedures and application forms. The obligatory interpretation of criteria is also connected to it. In the following self-evaluation period will be decided on the form of this document (as a special document or as more detailed instructions for the interpreting of individual areas of assessment, related with the new forms for accreditation and evaluation).

4.1.4. ESG STANDARD 2.4: PROCESSES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 2.4: fully compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group supports the efforts of the Agency for the assurance of professionalism, successfulness and efficiency of the work done by the groups of experts. It especially commended the extensive training of experts–student and the inclusion of students in the whole operation of the Agency. It emphasized the importance of an international structure of groups of experts (there is at least one foreigner in every group), mainly to prevent a conflict of interest and get new knowledge and views on education and its quality.

In the opinion of the group of evaluators, there are some uncertainties in the division of assignments and obligations among the employees (conducting the

procedures) and the members of the Council, and it therefore suggests that this area receives more attention in the future.

The mission of the Agency is directed towards control in accordance with previously determined criteria, and its operation demonstrates the help to institutions / colleges in their improvement and development. The Agency has a clear vision how to contribute to the development of internal quality assurance systems which was confirmed by the stakeholders in the discussions. The group also noted that the stakeholders encourage the further development of analytical and developmental activities of the Agency. They welcome the transition to institutional accreditation which would ensure the Agency more time for developmental and analytical assignments.

ENQA recommendation:

The Agency must explain (define) in more detail the accountability and roles of every participant in the preparation of decisions of the Council.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

In accordance with the recommendations from the self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2013 the programme was even further improved. The training of candidates after the second, practical part of the programme (visits to institutions / colleges) was successfully continued.

We find that the training of new members of the Council, which was suggested in SER 2013, was not executed. All members were informed about the key documents dealing with quality in the Slovenian and European higher education area.

Among the opportunities for improvement in SER 2013 was also the preparation of guidelines for persons with special needs (physical accessibility and adjusted study materials). We find that the guidelines were not prepared as it was determined through formal and informal discussions with stakeholders that it would be reasonable to adjust the entire education process. Due to the complexity of the suggested topic a consortium was formed to apply the project to the Erasmus + programme. The purpose was mainly to recognize and eliminate all types of obstacles and enable equal education to all interested parties. Even if the project is not chosen in the tender, the partners (in a narrower scope) shall continue the activities and together prepared guidelines which be of help to institutions / colleges, their staff and students in various adjustments to ensure equal access to education for persons with special needs.

Opportunities for improvement:

We suggest a one-day training for all members of the Council (in the form of workshops) and continuing the activities to prepare the guidelines for the improvement of accessibility and adjustability of education for people with special needs.

4.1.5. ESG STANDARD 2.5: REPORTING

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 2.5: substantially compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that the Agency, in accordance with the provisions of Article 51.f of HEA publishes (at its website) its decisions as well as the reports of the groups of experts regarding accreditations and external evaluations, except for negative decisions regarding the initial accreditation of institutions and study programmes and the related reports of the groups of experts. To ensure suitable comparability and consistency of reports, the experts have help in the form of various documents: The Manual for Experts (as help for the preparation, organization and implementation of assessments), templates for writing reports and the instruction on how to fill them out. For every area of assessment, the experts must prepare an adequate analysis of the situation and emphasize and justify the advantages, opportunities for improvement and potential inconsistencies. The templates for writing reports include the for broader analyses of advantages and opportunities for improvement.

To emphasize and retain the external part and the independence of the assessment procedures, the staff the Agency authorized to conduct procedures do not write reports of the groups of experts.

The group of evaluators finds that it is not entirely clear how the improvement of internal quality assurance systems is encouraged at institutions / colleges. Are these defined advantages, opportunities for improvements and inconsistencies or the entire operation of the Agency which leads and encourages the dialogue with stakeholders. It was determined from interviews that the ministry competent for higher education and the other stakeholders wish for more detailed information and analyses of the situation which would be prepared by the Agency.

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

Findings of the self-evaluation:

We find that the international group of evaluators did not recognize any inconsistencies with this standard, even though the Agency does not publish the reports by groups of experts in the procedures with a negative decision (applies for the initial accreditation procedures). If there was a need to publish such decisions of the Council and the reports of the groups of experts, we suggest to immediately publish the reports and decisions at the Agency's website.

Opportunities for improvement:

We find that the opportunities for improvement may be found mainly in regular consultations and thematic workshops intended for additional training and education of the Agency's experts which will contribute to better efficiency and an even bigger quality of their work and the work of the Agency. Closer cooperation with institutions / colleges in the establishment of internal quality assurance systems is also important this way and similarly (with meetings, thematic workshops ...).

4.1.6. ESG STANDARD 2.6: FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 2.6: substantially compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that the duration of an accreditation in initial accreditation and re-accreditation procedures is granted for a maximum of seven years. In the re-accreditation procedures for institutions and study programmes and external evaluations of colleges (opinion regarding the criteria for external evaluation) progress and development of internal quality assurance systems since the last accreditation of external evaluation is being monitored. In re-accreditation procedures all universities were called to attach action plan for future development and improvements in their responses to the report of the group of experts.

In the case of re-accreditation for a shorter period (up to three years) the so-called follow-up is part of the procedure. In these cases, the groups of experts assess the elimination of inconsistencies in accordance with the law, the criteria and recommendations determined in the previous procedure.

The group of evaluators finds that in general there are no formal tools for the follow-up of further actions to improve quality assurance procedures in re-accreditation procedures. The only action pointing at the suitability of the follow-up procedures is the requirement of the Agency for the institutions to attach action plans based on the findings from external evaluations before a final decision on the re-accreditation. Despite the fact that the Agency performs many activities which enable it to monitor the development and improvement of the quality of institutions / colleges. This includes the collection and analysis of annual self-evaluation reports of institutions / colleges, several re-accreditation procedures for study programmes, which also include meeting the criteria at an institutional level. This way, the Agency gets insight into the follow-up procedures and the improvements of internal quality assurance systems of institutions / colleges.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

The recommendations of SER 2013 were focused mainly on the deepening of relationships with stakeholders which was done in numerous ways. On the one hand, the Director continued to visit institutions / colleges where he presented the operation of the Agency and its bodies, and at the same time he obtained information regarding their satisfaction with it and opportunities for improvement. On the other hand, the Agency participated in the SSU training (training of candidates-students for entry into the register of experts), internal evaluators of quality at institutions, various round-table discussions (at home and abroad) and in international working groups (within the ECA consortium).

We find that the applicants as well as the Agency still have too much work due to the numerous re-accreditation procedures of study programmes (mainly those with a larger number of accredited study programmes), meaning that external evaluation may be performed several times annually at the same institution. To regulate that, a change of HEA is necessary, and the Agency has been drawing attention to it for several years. By transitioning to institutional evaluation, it would have the opportunity to formally regulate and prescribe follow-up procedures for quality assurance systems, and at the same time the institutions would no longer have the burden of numerous re-accreditation procedures for study programmes.

We find that the mechanisms of follow-up processes on quality are already part of re-accreditation procedures, but they would need to be formalized in HEA in accordance with the recommendations of the international group of evaluators.

Opportunities for improvement:

We find that the Agency despite numerous procedures it conducts mainly to re-accredit study programmes and within the legislative constrictions is making efforts to follow up on quality. It wishes to substantially enhance its operation in this area which is why it has been advocating for a transition to institutional evaluation for several years now which would significantly decrease the number of visits at institutions. It would enable a more comprehensive and thorough assessments at an institutional level as well as on the level of programmes, at the same time it would ensure enough space (and time) to successfully develop and implement a model for the follow-up on quality. Since the discussion of the proposals for the changes of HEA hinders the uninterrupted work of the Agency – the proposals interfere its work and even independence too much, therefore it must prove its unacceptability to the competent bodies – on the other hand, the transition to institutional accreditation and the enhancement of the establishment of internal quality assurance systems are necessary, it would be reasonable to think about regulating this area with a special law about the as soon as possible to consider and regulate its operation in full and would determine the procedures and conditions for accreditations and external evaluations and the procedures for the follow-up on quality. An independent law would enhance the Agency's independence. We see a possibility for improvement in a precise formalization of follow-up procedures for quality.

4.1.7. ESG STANDARD 2.7: PERIODIC REVIEWS

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 2.7: fully compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that according to HEA accreditations in higher education are valid for a maximum of 7 years, and accreditations in higher vocational colleges for a maximum of 5 years. An extraordinary evaluation procedure may be initiated at any time (decision of the Council) during the accreditation based on the suspicion regarding major violations in the operation of the institution or the implementation of a study programme. The initiative may be submitted by any stakeholder, and a decision in the extraordinary evaluation procedure may shorten the initial period of the validity of the accreditation.

Progress achieved since the last accreditation is considered and assessed in the re-accreditation procedure. Since the criteria for the re-accreditation also refer to the assessment of the institutional point of view of the implementation of the study programme (the assessment of the institution despite the validity of its accreditation), the group of evaluators supports the initiative to transition to institutional evaluation and to shorten the validity of the accreditation to a

maximum of 5 years. Formal procedures for the follow-up of quality should be ensured.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

According to the applicable legislation the Council may adopt in the re-accreditation procedures a decision for an extension of maximum of seven years, for a shorter period (up to three years) or does not grant the re-accreditation. Considering a high number of applications considered in the re-accreditation procedures for study programmes we find that the legislation must necessarily be changed.

Opportunities for improvement:

We agree with the findings of the international group of evaluators and propose the regulation of the transition to institutional evaluation as soon as possible.

4.1.8. ESG STANDARD 2.8: SYSTEM-WIDE ANALYSES

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 2.8: fully compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that the Agency at the end of 2013 published its first systemic analysis based on self-evaluation reports of institutions / colleges and reports by the groups of experts. It covers the period from 2010 to 2013. Previous analyses were published by the predecessor of the Agency, the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education (in the years from 2007 to 2009), which enabled it to connect the findings from the previous period of operation in the field of the assessment of quality assurance systems in higher education.

The Agency plans to prepare and publish periodical systemic analyses in the future (every two years). They will discuss different areas: transnational education, e-education, they will be focused on the students' views in the educational process. The next systemic analysis which will be based on the discussion of self-evaluation of institutions / colleges and the reports of the groups of experts is anticipated in the next five to seven years. In the meantime, the Agency will be preparing periodical metanalyses according to individual indicators of quality.

The group has commended the efforts of the Agency in this area which was confirmed by the stakeholders in discussion. The latter encourage the preparation of such documents in the future; therefore, the ENQA report

emphasizes that the Agency should continue its work and retain its position as a valuable source of professional knowledge in the Slovenian higher education area.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

We find that the response of stakeholders to the preparation of systemic analysis is very positive and it is therefore necessary to carry them out in the future as well. We anticipate that the implementation of the new eNakvis will considerably simplify the collection and processing of information, intended for various analyses of the state of quality in higher and higher vocational education.

Opportunities for improvement:

We suggest that in the planning of new strategic documents (from 2016 onwards) the preparation of systemic and sectoral (meta)analyses of the Agency and to mainly acknowledge the burdening of the technical staff (regular work, organization and implementation of various events, periodical external evaluation of the Agency for the renewal of the membership in international associations – ECA, ENQA, EQAR...) and the proposed changes of the legislation in the field of higher education.

4.2. THE AGENCY AND ESG STANDARD 3

4.2.1. ESG STANDARD 3.1: USE OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 3.1: substantially compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that the Agency, with regards to its relatively short existence (established in 2010), is a respected organization among its stakeholders which sometimes exceeds the current legislative regulation with its engagement. It is evident from the report that the applicable HEA hinders a fully balanced quality assurance system of the Agency which would encourage the development of internal quality assurance systems at institutions / colleges as well as provide an optimal execution of all activities of an external quality assurance system (assessments). The proposal of the Agency to balance the system is to transition to institutional re-accreditation. This would require legislative changes.

The group of evaluators has commended the Agency for the good work it has done since its establishment despite the obstacles of the applicable legislation.

The operation of the Agency is fully compliant with ESG standards 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.7 and 2.8 and significantly compliant with ESG standards 2.3, 2.5 and 2.6.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

We find that the group of evaluators in some places determined significant (and not full) compliance of the Agency's operation with the ESG standards also due to HEA provisions. Even if the competent ministry changed HEA tree times in the past year (but only was change was adopted which regulated the public validity of old study programmes where the applicant did not extend the accreditation, but there were still students in the programme), none of the proposals regulated the operation of the Agency in a satisfactory manner. The proposed legislative changes were connected with the change of the two ministers competent for higher education which does not ensure stability and development, but rather forces all stakeholders to constantly study the relevant proposals and negotiations, justifications, numerous meeting etc., which further hinders the work instead of improving it. The Agency also spent an incredible amount of time for that in this self-evaluation period.

4.2.2. ESG STANDARD 3.2: OFFICIAL STATUS

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 3.2: fully compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that the Agency was established in 2010, that it is a non-governmental organization for quality assurance, financed as a direct budget

user meaning that it has its own budget. Its operation is determined in Article 51 of HEA.

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

It was confirmed in the discussions done by the group that the Agency has an established legal basis for its operation. It also mentioned that despite its own budget it receives more than a half of its resources from the European Social Fund (ESF).

Findings of the self-evaluation:

The findings of the self-evaluation are consistent with the findings of the international group.

4.2.3. ESG STANDARD 3.3: ACTIVITIES

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 3.3: fully compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that the key activity of the Agency is focused on the field of so-called external quality assurance at an institutional and programme level. It regards the procedures of initial accreditation, re-accreditation of institutions and study programmes and the procedures of extraordinary evaluations of institutions and programmes at all levels of higher education. The Agency also performs external evaluations of colleges. All assignments, competences and responsibilities are defined in HEA (Article 51). It is obvious that the Agency regularly performs the full spectrum of activities regarding external quality assurance in Slovenian higher education.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

In SER 2013, the opportunities for improvement were mainly recognized in the activities for the Agency to be admitted to the ENQA association as soon as possible. Even though we achieved the objective of a full membership, it is important to continue with the activities for the improvement of the internal and external quality assurance system.

We find that the Agency received in 2014 a total of 159 applications for the accreditation of study programmes, 7 applications for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges and 66 applications for changes of study programmes.

Compared to the previous self-evaluation period, the number of received applications increased by 18%.

The number of adopted decisions of the Council, related with accreditation and external evaluation procedures was 445, in average more than 44 per meeting.

We find that the operation of the Agency is too extensive because of the assignments and obligations defined in HEA. In addition, the Council decided on 66 changes of study programmes.

It is a too high number of accreditation and evaluation procedures; therefore, an optimization with various mechanisms is necessary.

Opportunities for improvement:

The Agency should strive for a comprehensive regulation of its own operation in a law (new act regarding the Agency and appropriate amendments of HEA), which shall regulate the transition to institutional re-accreditation, and at the same time the entire process of operation, assessment and decision-making of the Agency shall be defined. At the moment, part of the procedures is regulated with HEA, the majority is regulated by the General Administrative Procedure Act (GAPA), for which we find that it is not appropriate the assessment and improvement of quality assurance systems in higher education. Moreover, it conflicts with ESG standards.

In the changing of the legislation, the following should be considered:

- current situation in Slovenian higher education (number of study programmes and higher education institutions),*
- shortening the validity of the accreditation (from seven to five years),*
- development and formalization of follow-up processes for quality assurance; and*
- assurance of transparency in the operation and the decision-making of the Agency;*

at the same time, ensure the stakeholders all the necessary information of interrupted operation (also with efficient and user-friendly information support – eNakvis).

4.2.4. ESG STANDARD 3.4: RESOURCES

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 3.4: partially compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group focused mainly of human and financial resources. It finds that the Agency employs 24 members of the staff, it is situated in the centre of Ljubljana, uses leased premises measuring 900 m², which is suitable for 30 job positions. Annual interviews of the Director with employees are established, he makes the effort to develop them.

Since the Agency has the status of a direct budget user, it negotiates its own financial sustainability directly with the minister competent for finance, and not the ministry competent for higher education. In accordance with Article 51.m of HEA, the resources for the operation of the Agency are ensured in the national budget. At the moment, the operation of the Agency is mainly financed from the European Social Fund (60%) and partially from the budget of the Republic of Slovenia (40%). ESF resources are anticipated until the end of August 2015, therefore, all financial, human and material resources are ensured until then.

The group of evaluators finds that the current annual resources sufficed for the entire operation as well as the developmental and analytical activity of the Agency. It expressed concern regarding the high percentage of financing from the ESF resources. Translated in the staffing resources, this means that 14 out of 24 employees is employed for a definite period. Even though the general commitment of MESS is to offer support to the Agency in the negotiations with the Ministry of Finance, the group of evaluators believes that the financial situation of the Agency is endangered. Until the end of the visit, there were no known facts about the solution to this issue, therefore, the group decided that the operation of the Agency is only partially compliant with this ESG standard. The solutions are, on the one hand, possible by assuring the resources for the operation of the Agency from the national budget, while on the other hand, a possibility to charge for accreditation and external procedures was mentioned during the visit.

According to the circumstances, the group of evaluators finds that this area should be resolved in a national context and is out of the control of the Agency.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

In the previous self-evaluation period, the Agency had assured the appropriate financial, human and material resources for uninterrupted operation and development. In accordance with the recommendations from SER 2013, the efforts and activities to regulate the stable financing of the Agency were enhanced. A financial plan was prepared which clearly demonstrates all planned expenses according to various items (quality, material costs, investments and maintenance, salaries of employees). Various stakeholders were presented on several occasions the anticipated issues if the resources for long-term stable financing of the entire operation of the Agency, after the expiration of the financing from the ESF project, if these resources will not be available. In 2014

and at the beginning of 2015, the Agency urged the Ministry of Finance on several occasions to regulate the financial situation, but the resources from the budget have not yet been assured. All three ministries for higher education (which were at the positions in the previous year), the Slovenian Students' Union, Court of Audit and others were informed about the financial situation of the Agency.

Financial resources

Financial resources of the Agency are integral and project:

- there are fewer of the first, although the Agency is a direct budget user, and come from the national budget;*
- the second come from ESF and are intended exclusively to pay for expenses related with the operation of the Agency (accreditation and external evaluation procedures).*

At the end of 2015, the partial financing from the ESF project shall conclude, therefore, it will be necessary to find long-term and stable financing of the Agency. Otherwise, its operation shall be significantly hindered, if not disabled. It should be emphasized that all costs of accreditations and external evaluations are an obligation of the Agency in full (employees' salaries, meeting fees for the members of the Council and the Appeal Committee, material costs, payment to groups of experts, participation and attendance at the meetings of working groups, interdepartmental groups, international working groups and attendance at international conferences, workshops and consultations etc.).

The valid budget of the Agency for 2014 was EUR 1,385,298.51, of which the integral funds were approximately a third (a total of EUR 474,055.51), the remaining part were ESF resources (a total of EUR 911,243.00).

The salaries of 9 employees employed for an indefinite period and the salary of the Director are financed from integral resources, material costs (costs for rent and operation costs), investments (for 2014 a total of EUR 1,157.07), quality (meeting fees for the members of the Council). Part of the material costs is also paid from the ESF resources.

The ESF resources are used to finance the salaries of 14 employees employed for a definite period and cumulative costs for the entire operation of the Agency (all costs for the accreditations and external evaluations).

Opportunities for improvement:

Similar as the group of evaluators, we find that the Agency has the resources for its operation ensured for a short period (until October 2015, for the duration of

the ESF project), but it is necessary to ensure stable financing for the future. As found by the group, the future financial position of the Agency (and its future operation) depends mostly on external factors (the legislator and the Ministry of Finance) and is not under the control of the Agency, which is why we emphasize here that this must be regulated by its founder, and that the is the state or the government.

Human resources

The analysis of the survey regarding the satisfaction of employees at the Agency shows slightly negative trends in individual contextual blocks compared to the previous year. The average rating of all responses in 2014 is the same as in 2013 and is 3.4. The responses had five levels; five being the highest rating or the highest level of agreement, while one meant the lowest. The structure, pattern and more detailed results of the survey are presented in the attachment. The employees specify examples of good and bad practices in the survey which are indicated unchanged in the attachment.

There are 24 employees at the Agency, of which less than half are financed directly from the budget (9 employees and the Director), while 14 are financed from ESF resources. As was already mentioned in SER 2013, in the other half of 2013, the drawing of resources from the ESF project was confirmed until October 2015, but the unregulated financing of the Agency is partially reflected in the surveys regarding the satisfaction of employees. The survey analysis shows reduced satisfaction (analysis of the average rating of the received responses) for the question about the consistency/safety of the job (from 3.4 in 2013 to 2.6 in 2014). A lower level of satisfaction as in the previous self-evaluation period may be detected in a good third of responses, mainly in the set of question about satisfaction with work and cooperation between employees, informedness of the staff, participation in the management and decision-making, organization and leading of the Agency, and the criteria for promotion.

It may be concluded from the analyses of the survey questionnaires that all sets of questions regarding the organization of the Agency, motivation and general satisfaction with work were rated slightly worse as in the previous year, while the set of ratings regarding the relationship with the Council received better ratings. Some of the lowest rated responses to the questions from the sets of ratings regarding the satisfaction with work, motivation and organization of the Agency referred to (all responses up to the rating 3.5 were considered):

- mutual relations among the staff at the Agency (rating 2.5; deviation 1.19);*
- continuity of employment (rating 2.6; deviation 1.49);*
- clarity of criteria and opportunities for promotion (rating 2.7; deviation 1.64);*
- efficiency of work meetings (rating 2.6; deviation 1.45);*
- inclusion into management at the Agency (rating 2.8; deviation 1.58);*

- *organization of work in professional services (rating 2.9; deviation 1.49) and general organization of the Agency (rating 2.9; deviation 1.35);*
- *satisfaction with the management of the Agency (rating 3.1; deviation 1.51) and clarity of tasks (rating 3.1; deviation 1.47);*
- *appropriate rewarding of work efficiency (rating 3.2; deviation 1.46);*
- *informedness regarding the decisions of the management (rating 3.4; deviation 1.61) and informedness regarding the events and activities at the Agency and outside of it (rating 3.4; deviation 1.49) and the opinion that every individual contributes to the success of the Agency (rating 3.4, deviation 1.42).*

Lower-rated questions which point to a negative trend of satisfaction with work refer to the rating of the satisfaction with the security of the employment (2.6) and the rating of mutual relations among the staff (2.5). In the rating of the continuity of employment a bigger dispersion of responses may be observed, which was to be expected, in the rating of mutual relations among the staff a smaller dispersion of responses can be observed. There are significant differences not only between the responses of the employees, but also in their operation at the Agency (examples of good and bad practices which they specified in the survey). Searching for unique reasons and actions for a general reduction of satisfaction of the staff would require additional analyses. We may conclude that the regulation of financing would contribute to the increase of the satisfaction of employees, but it is not possible to determine if it would completely eliminate the conflicting opinions and the worsened mutual relations. The largest dispersion in the responses which were rated worse as in the previous year, and therefore the largest non-unity in the opinions of the employees are shown in the questions about the inclusion into management at the Agency, informedness about the decisions of the management and the related opinion about transparency, and the question about equal opportunities for promotion. The informedness of the staff with the decisions of the management and the informedness about events at the Agency and outside was also rated worse than in the previous year.

The staff, regardless of their type of employment, have the opportunities to express their opinions at joint meetings, in self-evaluation processes, at individual annual interviews with the Director etc. (survey questionnaires, comments to the proposal of SER), in addition, they can participate in the discussions about the proposals and amendments to HEA and the preparation of important documents and legal acts of the Agency (in the last year mainly: Quality Manual, change of the accreditation criteria, list of practices of decision-making bodies), as well as in the establishment and testing of eNakvis.

The Agency organizes joint meetings (usually every Monday at 9:00 am), where the Director and the staff discuss the current topics, the challenges in the operation of the Agency, guidelines for the future and other. In 2014, there were also meetings, in accordance with the current work-related questions, intended

to calibrate the work and discuss the practices of decision-making bodies of the Agency. To improve informedness of the staff about the events at the Agency, a practice of publishing minutes of joint meetings has already been implemented, which are available in the internal joint folder.

The responses of employees indicating a positive trend compared to the previous year refer to the better opportunities for professional education, more satisfaction with the payment for the performed work, more willingness for additional efforts and the better knowledge of the Agency's values. The staff attended more professional trainings compared to the year before which is also evident in the list in the report on the operation of the Agency.

Regardless of the type of employment, the staff are civil servants and to them applies the payment system, promotion system and further career development in accordance with the applicable legislation and current financial policy in the country.

Once a year, the Director performs an individual annual interview with every employee. The objective is to assess and make a review of the work performed in the previous year (also method of work and the relations among the staff), creating a work plan in the following year and expected results.

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

Opportunities for improvement:

The situation indicated by the level of satisfaction among the staff and mostly the high dispersion (deviation) in the responses to individual questions may worsen the quality of the operation of the Agency in the future, and can especially have a bad influence on the work atmosphere and the relationships among the staff. Even though the staff have opportunities for active participation and giving proposals (weekly meetings, individual annual interviews, participation in the changes of the legal acts of the Agency, self-evaluation of the Agency and performing the tasks from the action plan, informal discussions with the Director etc.), findings of the survey show that the numerous possibilities of cooperation do not give the expected results in the opinion of a certain group of employees. The diversity of the causes for dissatisfaction (examples of bad practices) shows a need for a quick response. We believe that a certain level of dissatisfaction among a part of the staff is also a reflection of the unregulated financing of the Agency in the future (permanence of employment), but despite that we must emphasize the broader aspect of this problem. Dissatisfaction is also reflected in the worsened interpersonal relationships which may affect the efficiency of the operation, level of motivation of individuals and the level of engagement and

accountability of for work, management and organization of work at the Agency... We suggest emphasizing all the detected issues (the issues detected in the survey analysis) at the weekly meetings and to discuss them openly. The issue should be resolved gradually according to concluded contextual blocks, and at the same time more effort needs to be given to eliminate the noises in communication.

We suggest that external mediation be tried to identify actual issues and prepare the proposals to improve the conditions.

Any potential conflicts should be resolved in a peaceful manner and by respecting the counterpart(s).

Information-communication resources

Since the middle of 2014, the Agency is executing the activities for the establishment, testing and implementation of the new, individual information system of the Agency (eNakvis). In June and July, the entire tender documentation for the implementation of the public tender was prepared, the tender for the provider of eNakvis was published in August 2014. In the meantime, there was a presentation and the explanation of the technical specification of the system. In November, the Agency signed a contract with the most favorable bidder, Optilab d.o.o. In the first phase, an analysis of the situation and a detailed list of processes for a successful implementation of functional requirements. Weekly meetings (on several occasions, many days in the week) are organized at the level of a project group, which includes the persons responsible at the Agency, the representatives of the selected provider and the representatives of the company Brihteja, d.o.o., which consults the Agency as external controllers in every phase of the building of the system (the Agency does not have an IT specialist employed for the appropriate technical support in this phase).

Currently, the second phase of the production of eNakvis is taking place. The internal working group (made of the staff at the Agency) is closely working with the providers in the contextual building blocks of the information system (production of new application forms for accreditations and external evaluations and applications) and the initial testing. After the successful development of the test version of eNakvis, individual applicants (institutions / colleges) shall be invited to participate and they will test it in practice by filling out the forms and applications. Feedback of the actual users (applicants) of eNakvis shall contribute to the further improvement of the system and the user experience.

Opportunities for improvement:

The planned actions need to be continued and the timeline for an efficient use of eNakvis in practice as soon as possible needs to be followed.

4.2.5. ESG STANDARD 3.5: MISSION STATEMENT

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 3.5: substantially compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that the mission, vision and strategic direction of the Agency are clear, publish and suit its purpose. Key statements and strategic direction should already be translated in the business plan of the Agency. Room for improvement is seen in the division of accountability and work with the relevant stakeholders which should be done better in the official documents of the Agency.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

We find that the Agency has adopted all key strategic documents, mission, visions, and strategy of operation up to 2016. For the first time we included in the satisfaction questionnaires the question about the proposals for new strategic guidelines of the operation after 2016. Most of the proposals of the employees and the members of the Council was directed towards the improvement of its recognition, independence and competency, therefore it should:

- become an acknowledged stakeholder in the assessment and improvement of quality assurance systems in the Slovenian and international higher education, whereby it is important to follow ESG standards and to actively cooperate with all stakeholders (students, institutions / colleges, the ministry, competent for higher education etc.);*
- become a key creator of new ideas and good practices in the improvement of quality assurance systems in the Slovenian and the joint European higher education area by enhancing mainly the advisory role of the Agency;*
- ensure clear and transparent procedures for assessment and decision-making and ensure a continuous improvement of the quality of own work;*
- actively participate in the changes of the relevant legislation (specialized law regarding the Agency) and advocate for an appropriate transition to the institutional re-accreditation by retaining an independent status of the Agency as a professional body in the field of quality assurance in higher education and the regulation of its stable financing in the future.*

Based on the proposals, the starting points for a new middle-term strategy of the Agency shall be prepared (beyond 2016).

4.2.6. ESG STANDARD 3.6: INDEPENDENCE

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 3.6: fully compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that the legal bases defining the establishment, status and operation of the Agency are perfectly clear and unambiguous. The operation of the Agency is fully compliant with this standard as well as in relation with higher education institutions, ministries and other stakeholders, despite the finding that in the mainly from public resources financed higher education, the state may also be recognized as a stakeholder. The group is convinced that the organization structure of the Agency ensures that the assessments and the decisions on accreditations and evaluations are fully the accountability of the Agency.

The procedure of avoiding conflicts of interests was also recognized as appropriate, not only for experts, but also for employees and the members of the Council. The fact that the Agency is negotiating the stable financing of the Agency directly with the ministry competent for finance and not the ministry competent for higher education is a testament to the Agency's independence.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

We find that the Agency has developed the appropriate mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interests. In addition to signing a statement regarding the prevention of a conflict of interest, the experts before entering the register of experts declare a potential conflict of interests or partiality in a discussed case before being appointed to a certain group.

In accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, the same applies for technical members of the staff. In every case the justification of a conflict of interests may be a reason to eliminate an expert, technical member of the staff or a member of the Council from the procedures and a ground for appeal.

After the appointment of a group of experts the applicant is informed about the structure of the group and has in the duration of the procedure an opportunity to demand a particular expert be excluded because of partiality or a reasonable doubt about their professionalism. The Council decides on the request for exclusion.

Should there be a conflict of interests, individual members of Council exclude themselves from the discussion and the voting.

Opportunities for improvement:

The Agency should strive to retain the status of an independent professional body for quality improvement in higher and higher vocational education as it must remain an autonomous factor in this area in the future.

**4.2.7. ESG STANDARD 3.7: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE
CRITERIA AND PROCESSES USED BY THE AGENCIES**

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 3.7: substantially compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The agency has all the formal and legal tools which determine its operation. Accreditation criteria and evaluation criteria were developed upon consultation with external stakeholders and are publicly available at the Agency's website. The application form for accreditation and evaluation is also published there. The manual for experts dealing with six different accreditation and evaluation procedures is also published. The tasks and obligations of the experts are slightly different in certain procedures, but they all have in common that the Agency appoints three experts (of which one is a student and one is a foreign expert) to groups for assessment. The procedure is initiated at the proposal of the applicant (except in the case of extraordinary evaluation). In all re-accreditation and external evaluation procedures, a visit at the institution / colleges is anticipated, and the basis for assessment are the self-evaluation report and the filled-out application. The visits are anticipated in nearly all procedures, the exception being initial accreditations of study programmes, where a visit is an exception. Every decision of the Council, final evaluation and accreditation reports of the groups of experts are published at the Agency's website, except for negative decisions (and reports of the groups of experts) regarding initial accreditations (of institutions and study programmes). Informal follow-up procedures for the monitoring of quality improvement are implemented, they would need to be formally defined in the future accreditation and external evaluation model (upon the transition to institutional re-accreditation). But the group of evaluators also finds that in the current situation and with the current legislation, such as the number of accreditations and external evaluations, implementing a new formal follow-up system would not be reasonable.

ENQA recommendation:

Suggested is to improve the integration of institutions / colleges and the preparation of the guidelines for the preparation of self-evaluation reports and applications for accreditation which is already planned for and prepared by the Agency.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

We find that the recommendation from SER 2013 and the related preparation of guidelines for writing self-evaluation reports from the action plan of the Agency for 2014 were not fully achieved. In the previous self-evaluation report, the following was done in accordance with the recommendations and findings from previous self-evaluations: list of practices of decision-making bodies, changed accreditation criteria (a more detailed description can be found in chapter 3, pages from 15 to 18), discussion of the issue at the Council and joint meetings, and in the implementation of eNakvis by designing more clear processes and drafts of new application forms.

In 2014, the Quality Manual of the Agency underwent a thorough update and was published at the beginning of 2015 (February).

Opportunities for improvement:

One of the priorities for the next self-evaluation period must be the preparation and adoption of the guidelines for the preparation of self-evaluation reports of institutions / colleges.

4.2.8. ESG STANDARD 3.8: ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURES

Compliance of the operation of the Agency with ESG standard 3.8: fully compliant

Findings of the international group of evaluators:

The group finds that the Agency has a Quality Manual which defines the cooperation and communication with stakeholders as well as the organization of the Agency and various assignments of the Agency and various assignments of different groups. As described above, there are efficient mechanisms to prevent

conflicts of interests both for the experts as well as the staff and the members of the Council.

Every year, the Agency prepares a self-evaluation report with which it examines the level of its comprehensive success and efficiency of its operation in a certain period and suggests improvements. The basic objective of self-evaluations is the improvement of the internal quality assurance system of the Agency which will help the further development and improvement of the external quality assurance system.

Self-evaluation is based on the action plan for a particular year and is based on the findings and recommendations from the previous SER.

To determine the satisfaction with its operation, the Agency uses various types of questionnaires. The questions involve accreditation and external evaluation procedures, work of the groups of experts, field visits, satisfaction of stakeholders with procedures and the criteria. as well as the quality of the work of the staff, management of the Agency and the Council.

In 2013, the Agency successfully passed the external evaluation for entry into the European register of trustworthy agencies (EQAR). This enhance its developmental activities and contributed to a significant change of the Quality Manual. Many changes are related with the formalization of the already established self-evaluation procedure which is done every year. The group of evaluators has confirmed in the ENQA report the successful work of the Agency in its efforts to improve internal and external quality assurance systems, which is why it is sure that it will successfully close the quality loop with the updated quality manual.

Findings of the self-evaluation:

In February 2015, the new Quality Manual of the Agency was published, and it regulates the system of the Agency's self-evaluation, areas of quality and indicators (in more detail on page 21 and the link: <http://test.nakvis.si/sl-SI/Content/Details/66>). The self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2014 was made following the example of previous years, in the next period (2015) the new Quality Manual shall be considered.

5. FINAL ASSESSMENT AND THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Many factors are recognized by SER 2014 in its analysis, which make the operation of the Agency difficult, some of which were already detected in the previous self-evaluation reports. Exposed were mainly the following:

- big differences among the employees regarding the satisfaction and the worsening of interpersonal relationships at the Agency;
- numerous changes of HEA and changes of ministers competent for higher education (every change of HEA intervenes in the operation, competences, tasks and organizational structure of the Agency);
- unplanned activities hindering an uninterrupted operation of the Agency (in addition to numerous accreditation and evaluation procedures) – external audit by the Court of Audit and numerous inspection bodies, anonymous letters.

Self-evaluation findings and findings made by the international group of evaluators indicated in the ENQA report, discover the opportunities for improvement which need to be considered. In addition to that, the Agency is required to report to ENQA in one year (March 2016) about how the recommendations were achieved.

Therefore, 2015 and the first months of 2016 should mainly be intended to:

- prepare an explanation and interpretation of the accreditation criteria which would enable all stakeholders (internal and external) a clear view of the accreditation and evaluation procedure, enable them a unified understanding of the evaluation and decision-making procedure, and guide them in the preparation of self-evaluation procedures and the writing of reports. A unified understanding among the staff and the members of the Council is of key importance for the consistency of the decisions, procedure transparency and operation of the Agency. External stakeholders must have a reliable and safe basis in the clear and predictable assessment and decision-making system in the accreditation and evaluation procedures. Whereby it needs to be taken into consideration that the criteria do not change if there is no important reason for it;
- formalize the follow-up system of monitoring the improvement of quality assurance systems. With the transition to institutional re-accreditation it would be necessary to place a formalized follow-up system, which would join and consider all the necessary findings of the assessments. But for that a change of HEA would be necessary or a basis in the law would need to be required. The Agency advocates for a specialized law, and several stakeholders support it: students, unions, rectors' conference, association of higher vocational colleges. In the next self-evaluation period, the

priority will be on the participation in the changes of HEA and, in agreement with the stakeholders, the preparation of the specialized act regarding the Agency;

- regulate a long-term and stable financing of the Agency. Despite the ENQA findings that the abovementioned is outside of the control of the Agency, the negotiations with the Ministry of Finance need to be continued, otherwise the operation of the Agency in the future may be severely limited or even impossible;
- to finish new, contextually rounded application forms for various types of accreditations or evaluations (application forms), testing and the final establishment of eNakvis.

Key actions to be taken into consideration in the future operation and management of the Agency and the preparation of the action plan for 2015 are:

- successful and efficient implementation of eNakvis (cooperation with stakeholders, testing and improvement of new application forms for various types of accreditations, introduction of electronic applications for colleges...);
- enhancement of the efforts to regulate the long-term and stable financing of the Agency;
- further engagement to transition to institutional evaluation and regulation of the operation of the Agency, either in a specialized act regarding the Agency or by changing HEA (a more detailed list of procedures carried out by the Agency in the act; enhancement of its advisory role and its analytical and developmental activity; direct connection of the operation of the Agency with ESG; assurance of its independence and transparency...);
- preparation of the guidelines for the self-evaluation of institutions / colleges (in cooperation with the stakeholders);
- preparation of the interpretation of accreditation and external evaluation of institutions / colleges;
- stabilization of interpersonal relationships at the Agency and determination of actions to improve communication, cooperation, management and leading the Agency.

5.1. SWOT analysis:

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national and international recognition of the Agency (successful external evaluation and full membership in the ENQA association and entry to EQAR) • publication of all legal acts, guidelines, self-evaluation reports of the Agency, decisions of the Council and final evaluation reports of the experts (at the website of the Agency) • active participation of the Director and some members of the staff in international associations and international working groups • establishment of appropriate mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interests among external experts, members of the Council and staff members conducting the procedures • preparation and publication of the new Quality Manual of the Agency • participation of the Agency in international projects (EIQAS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unregulated long-term stable financing of the Agency • worsened relationships in the Agency • too large number of accreditation and external evaluation procedures (overburdening of the technical members of the staff with the conducting of procedures, and at the same time an overload of the applicants with the preparations for the application forms and documentation, for the visits of experts etc.) • insufficient informatization of the Agency (scattered databases, difficult transparency) |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • successful and final implementation of the eNakvis system • efforts made for a peaceful resolution of challenges in communication and operation of the staff of the Agency • preparation of guidelines for the preparation of self-evaluation reports (active participation of key stakeholders in the preparation of the draft and the proposal of the act) • more active role of employees and members of the Council in | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overburdening with procedures (mainly re-accreditations of study programmes) is limiting other activities of the Agency (advisory role, systemic analyses, cooperation with stakeholders) • unstable long-term financing of the Agency in the future • limitations of the improvement in external quality assurance systems (quality improvement, enhancement of the meaning of quality), due to the HEA provisions and the |

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|--|--|
| <p>interdepartmental groups and international projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organization of regular consultations, conferences and workshops intended mainly to improve the quality of internal quality assurance systems of institutions / colleges • implementation of appropriate legal bases for a more efficient operation of the Agency, mainly the enhancement of its advisory role (transition to institutional evaluation, decrease of the administrative load of the Agency and the applicants, a more detailed definition of procedures...) | <p>acknowledgement of the General Administrative Procedure Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuous proposed changes of HEA • relationships among the staff |
|--|--|