

SUPPLEMENT TO THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION FOR 2013

(STATE as of October 2014)

In the e-mail of 2 Oct 2014 the Secretariat of ENQA notified the SQAA that the agency self-evaluation report by the opinion of the panel is deemed to be lacking of relevant, thorough and evaluative information and the SQAA was asked for a revision of the report.

The panel considered that the self-evaluation report is not sufficient in terms of presented evidence, which ENQA supported.

Stimulated by the very constructive critics, suggestions and recommendations by the panel, the self-evaluation group at the agency prepared the additional paragraphs (Supplement) to be added to the Self-evaluation Report of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education for 2013.

I hope that with this addition (Supplement), the Self evaluation report of SQAA for 2013 will be suitable and informative enough to the panel to review the work of our agency.

Ljubljana, 22 October 2014.

Ivan Leban,

Director of SQAA

COMPLIANCE WITH PARTS 2 AND 3 OF ESG STANDARDS AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE AIMS OF ENQA

COMPLIANCE WITH PART 2 OF ESG STANDARDS

Standard 2.1: Use of internal quality assurance procedures

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Guidelines:

The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met. If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

The Agency is substantially compliant with standard 2.1.

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

Following the recommendations by the ECA-ESU expert panel, the agency has committed itself to draft the guidelines for self-evaluation reports of HEIs and the agency staff are committed to focusing the groups of experts at preparatory meetings and site visits on evaluation of the functioning of internal QA systems of HEIs and HVCs. This new approach is also evident in the new trainings of future experts. The agency intends to organize meetings with HEIs and discuss the opportunities for improving the functioning of their internal QA systems.

Evidence:

[Higher Education Act](#) - Articles 32 through 42

[Higher Education Act](#) - Articles 51e through 51z



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[Post-Secondary Vocational Education Act \(in Slovene\) Articles 15, 25 and 26](#)
[Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes](#)
[Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges](#)
[Quality Manual](#)
[Manual for Experts](#)
[Report on Work and Operation 2013](#)
[Web page SQAA](#)

Standard 2.2: Development of external quality assurance processes

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

Guidelines:

In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used.

As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions..

The Agency is fully compliant with standard 2.2.

It adopted all of its criteria according to the provisions of HEA, HVEA and other relevant legislation. In their adoption and subsequent changes, all stakeholders (HEIs, students, relevant ministries, employers, unions, experts ...) were invited to comment and propose amendments to the criteria. The Agency also carries out annual surveys among important stakeholders (HEIs, experts, staff, council members ...) on the comprehensibility and applicability of criteria and considers the findings in the following revisions. All criteria as well as all relevant guidelines and reports are [publicly available](#), also in English language. The webpage also runs a [FAQ](#) section in Slovene regarding the criteria and the accreditation proposal.

The Agency last revised and amended its accreditation criteria in May/June 2014. This revision has followed the recommendations of the ECA-ESU expert panel and relevant stakeholders and focused on removing any duplications and inconsistencies in the criteria, reorganising them and making them more compact and user friendly. The Agency is now drafting a thorough basis for the argumentation and interpretation of the accreditation criteria in problematic areas of assessment such as HR, scientific and research work, integration with the environment, etc.

Evidence:



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

[Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges](#)

[Accreditation Proposal](#)

[Quality Manual](#)

[Manual for Experts](#)

[SQAA Regulations](#)

[Web page SQAA](#)

Standard 2.3: Criteria for decisions

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently
Guidelines:

Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

The Agency is substantially compliant with standard 2.3.

Independence and objectivity of decision-making are assured by the composition of the Agency Council, appointment of independent groups of experts and other mechanisms, such as the possibility of appeal to all Council Decisions made possible by the appeal procedure (Appeal Committee). The decision-making bodies conduct their procedures and base their decisions exclusively on the valid legal provisions and criteria as is evident in all the explanations in the written decisions which include clear references to the valid standards and criteria. The reports of groups of experts also clearly follow and refer to the accreditation and evaluation criteria. The revision of accreditation criteria in May/June 2014 resulted in criteria which above all more clearly differentiate between programme and institutional accreditation. The consistency of decision making is assured by thoroughly trained experts, staff and Council members; and by the fact that the agency staff monitor the drafting of expert reports in a way that the reports include clear references to criteria; and by the [Manual for experts](#).

In 2014, the Agency set out to analyse the negative decisions of the Agency Council, all decisions of the Appeal Committee and all the verdicts of the Administrative Court with the aim to consider the introduction of referring to past administrative practices and decisions in accreditation procedures, and to draft thorough interpretative and argumentative support to accreditation criteria. The report on the practices of decision-making bodies has been made in September 2014 and is about to be discussed by the Agency Council in October 2014. The Agency publishes all Council's [final decisions](#) in accreditation and evaluation procedures and all [reports of the groups of experts](#).

Evidence:

[Manual for experts](#)

[Higher Education Act](#)



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QA Procedures

Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes

Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges

Site Visit Protocol

Standard 2.4: Processes fit for purpose

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

Guidelines:

Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes.

Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance.

Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;*
- the exercise of care in the selection of experts;*
- the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;*
- the use of international experts;*
- participation of students;*
- ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached;*
- the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review;*
- recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality..*

The Agency is substantially compliant with standard 2.4.

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

The Agency addresses the candidates for entry in the register of experts through a public call or through invitations by the Agency Council. Applications of candidates are first considered by the Council committee in accordance with the criteria. Upon approval, the candidates are listed for the training for entry in the register of experts. Student candidates are proposed by the Slovenian Student Union (SSU) on the basis of the completed SSU training which was also approved by the Council (and also complete the Agency's training). Since 2014, student experts are also proposed by HEIs and HVCs to the SSU and the Agency. Doctoral students can now directly apply to the Agency for entry in the register.

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

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

The programme for the training of experts was revised in 2013 and two new trainings of candidates were carried out since October 2013 in a manner that in the second part of the training, following the initial joint ex-cathedra training, the candidates partake in actual accreditation or evaluation procedures as observers and cooperate with the group of experts and the agency staff.

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

The new templates for writing expert reports (2013) include additional subsections for all areas of assessment, called "Analysis of findings", so that the experts can also express their findings and opinions extending past the minimum criteria and standards.

According to the 2014 action plan, the Agency also intends to set up a system for informing the experts about all current national and international matters, relevant for their work.

Evidence:

[Criteria for Entry in the Register of Experts](#)

[Manual for Experts](#)

[Site Visit Protocol](#)

[Role of Foreign Expert](#)

[Training of experts \(in Slovene\)](#)

Standard 2.5: Reporting

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find. Guidelines:

In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone.

In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions.



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Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers.

Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

The Agency is substantially compliant with standard 2.5.

The expert reports are ever more consistent and comparable, and tremendous achievement has been made in the past year. The formal consistency of expert reports is provided by published templates which clearly divide the reports into areas of assessment and both into assessing the compliance with minimum standards as well as into a broader analysis of findings (i.e. establishing strengths and opportunities for improvement). The reports also include all essential information on the procedure, as well as matter and purpose of assessment. The clarity and consistency of the reports is also steered by the [Manual for Experts](#) which goes into great detail with regard to the manner of writing expert reports. Another important document, ensuring the consistency of external evaluations is also the newly prepared [Site Visit Protocol](#).

The agency staff now more actively cooperate with the group of experts promoting and ensuring the comparability and consistency of expert reports as well as checking that the reports thoroughly tackle the compliance with legal provisions and Agency's criteria. It is the opinion of the Agency that the staff should not actively cooperate in the drafting of expert reports in order for the work of the group of experts to remain independent and to preserve the status of external evaluation in terms of external also with regard to the Agency not only with regard to HEIs and HVCs.

Since the beginning of 2013, expert reports are being [published](#) and are accessible to all relevant stakeholders as well as broader public at the website. The agency has so far not yet received any noteworthy response to the publication of reports by the stakeholders.

Evidence:

[Manual for Experts](#)

[Experts Reports](#)

[Published report - first page](#)

[Study programme Report](#)

Standard 2.6: Follow-up procedures

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

Guidelines:

Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with



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appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

The Agency is fully compliant with standard 2.6.

Follow-up procedures are included in all re-accreditation procedures, since the progress made by HEIs from the initial until its last accreditation or accreditation of their study programmes is monitored. All re-accreditation and evaluation procedures are carried out by regarding the accreditation and evaluation criteria and the self-evaluation reports of HEIs or HVCs. According to the criteria, the Agency thus evaluates HEIs' or HVCs' progress and development. In doing so, it also considers the realisation of proposed recommendations and measures in self-evaluation reports. Also for this reason, the experts' evaluation reports contain the recommendations for improvement.

Follow-up is also included in cases when accreditations are extended for a limited period of time. Prior to the expiry of this period, the HEI or its study programme again undergoes external evaluation by another group of experts which also evaluates whether the HEI has remedied the inconsistencies according to recommendations from the previous evaluation.

Extraordinary evaluation is another key instrument in continuous monitoring of quality of HEIs or their study programmes and can be initiated by the Agency Council prior to the expiry of the accreditation period based on the findings in follow-up procedures.

An improvement in the cooperation with stakeholders in the field of follow-up procedures is evident in 2014. Through improving expert reports so that they focus on effective and well documented recommendations and encouraging the HEIs and HVCs to prepare action plans in response to final evaluation reports of groups of experts, the Agency has been constantly improving the grounds for effective follow-ups on the development and progress. For example, in institutional re-accreditation procedures all universities were called to prepare action plans for future development and improvement. The Agency's action plan for 2014 anticipates the drafting of guidelines for self-evaluation reports of HEIs and HVCs. In early 2014, a system analysis of all self-evaluation reports of universities, their faculties, private HEIs and HVCs was made and [published](#) which also includes recommendations for the improvement of institutions' self-evaluation reports. Since the new HEA will no longer include the re-accreditation of study programmes, the agency is strengthening its follow-up procedures. This also means that self-evaluations of HEIs will have to thoroughly focus on the assessment of individual study programmes.

Evidence:

[Manual for Experts](#)

[Experts Reports](#)

[Quality in the HE Area and HVE Area 2010-2013](#)

Standard 2.7: Periodic reviews

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

Guidelines:

Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not "once in a lifetime". It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

The Agency is fully compliant with standard 2.7.

Periodic reviews are closely connected with follow-up procedures. Re-accreditation of HEIs and their study programmes is carried out cyclically at least every seven years. In cases of accreditation for a limited period of time, the accreditation period can be shortened to three years or less. Extraordinary evaluation can also shorten the initial period of seven years and can be introduced at any point based on incentive by relevant stakeholders or relevant findings in the follow-up procedures. Evaluations of HVCs are carried out every five years. These procedures are all well documented in the 2010-2012 self-evaluation report of the Agency.

The new HEA anticipates shortening the accreditation period to five years according to the recommendation of the ECA-ESU panel. This shortening will also compensate for the anticipated abolition of programme re-accreditation. Transition to institutional re-accreditation only is accompanied by recommendations for self-evaluation reports and drafting of guidelines for self-evaluation reports, which in the case of HEIs will also cover self-evaluation of study programmes. Meetings are also planned with representatives of HEIs, to discuss the issues of transition to institutional re-accreditation and to accordingly improve the internal QA systems.

Evidence:

[Self-evaluation report 2010-2012](#)

[National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020](#)

Standard 2.8: System-wide analyses

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments, etc.

Guidelines:

All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for

structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

The Agency is fully compliant with standard 2.8.

It has [published](#) an extensive system analysis based on the analysis of self-evaluation reports as well as evaluation reports by the groups of experts for the period of 2010 till 2013 including numerous references to previous meta-analyses thus bridging the current findings with the findings from the period between 2007 and 2009. It offers an in-depth analysis of the state of Slovenian higher education area (universities, private HEIs, their study programmes and HVCs) and self-evaluation procedures at HEIs and HVCs. Future system-wide analyses will be periodic (every two years) and more focused on individual topics such as TNHE, e-learning, student practice, etc. After another accreditation period has expired (in five or seven years), a new general analysis of self-evaluation reports and reports by the groups of experts will have been made.

Evidence:

[Quality in the HE Area and HVE Area 2010-2013](#)

[Report on the Work of the Senate 2009](#)

[Meta-report 2007 and 2008](#)

COMPLIANCE WITH PART 3 OF ESG STANDARDS

Standard 3.1: Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Guidelines:

The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990s. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions. The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

The Agency is substantially compliant with the ESG standard 3.1.

It constantly verifies the efficiency and applicability of the established external quality assurance system for HEIs and HVCs, thus the accreditation criteria have been amended several times.

Following the recommendations by the ECA-ESU review panel, in 2014 [the accreditation criteria](#) were optimized in the part which relates to the re-accreditation of study programmes (repetition of criteria has been avoided, the assessment is more focused on subject specific indicators, the number of required annexes has been reduced, the distinction between initial accreditation and re-accreditation of study programmes and HEIs is now clearer).

According to the Agency's action plan for 2014 and in collaboration with stakeholders (Association of Blind and Partially Sighted Slovenia, Association of Slovenian Students with Disabilities, HEIs and the Ministry of Higher Education), a new set of recommendations and guidelines will be prepared for the arrangements of architectural barriers in HEIs and HVCs and for optimizing access to learning materials, web pages and other relevant material resources.

Evidence:

[Quality in the HE Area and HVE Area 2010-2013](#)

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

[Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges](#)

Standard 3.2: Official status

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

The Agency is fully compliant with the standard 3.2.

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

Evidence:

[Higher Education Act](#) - Article 51e

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

Standard 3.3: Activities

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

Guidelines:

These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

The Agency is fully compliant with the standard 3.3.

The main activities of SQA (Article 51f of HEA) relate to the accreditation of HEIs, their study programmes and to the external evaluation of HVCs.

Agency Council members and staff are also actively involved in various projects and inter-sectoral activities and groups (Bologna expert group, ECA Working group 1, 2 and 3, the inter-ministerial group on amendments to the HEA, etc.).

The Agency is a full member of the ECA, CEENQA, INQAAHE and has entered into EQAR in 2013.

This year, the agency participated in a EU tender in the field of Strategic Partnership of Erasmus+ Programme along with different partners from Slovenia and other countries: PKA (Poland), EduQacja Foundation (Poland), Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (CRASP), A3ES (Agencia de Avaliação e Acreditação to Ensino Superior), Conselho das Universidades Reitores Portuguesas (CRUP), University of Minho (Portugal), University of Nova Gorica (Slovenia), University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and the National Agency for Accreditation (Bulgaria).

The selected and financed project entitled "EIQAS - Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems" represents strong and fruitful collaboration among project partners and will contribute to the acquisition of new experiences and exchange of good practices.

Evidence:

[Higher Education Act](#) - Article 51f

[ECA/ESU Review Report 2013](#)

[MULTRA-Observation Report 2013](#)

Standard 3.4: Resources

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

The Agency is substantially compliant with the standard 3.4 ...

... until the end of August 2015. Until then, the Agency has the guarantee of all available (financial, material and human) resources for uninterrupted implementation of all activities. But the question remains, whether funding will be arranged after the expiry of this period and currently, no certain solution is at hand. At present, our funding is regulated in the budget of the Republic of Slovenia (approximately 40% of all funds necessary for the operation of the agency) but the majority of funds are from the European Cohesion Fund, which will end in August 2015.

In accordance with Article 51.m of the HEA, funds for the operation of the Agency shall be provided from state budget.

Evidence:

[Higher Education Act](#) - Article 51m

[National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020](#) - Measure 20, 21 and others

[Report on Work and Operation 2013](#) - Human Resources, Financial Resources

Standard 3.5: Mission statement

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

Guidelines:

These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

The Agency is fully compliant with the standard 3.5.

Mission

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

Vision

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

Evidence:

[Higher Education Act](#) - Article 51.e and 51.f

[SQAA Strategy 2011-2016](#)

[SQAA presentation brochure](#)

Standard 3.6: Independence

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

Guidelines:

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:



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- *its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);*
- *the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;*
- *while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.*

The Agency is fully compliant with the standard 3.6.

The Agency and its operation are entirely independent from the government, HEIs, HVCs and all other interest groupings, organisations and individuals.

The organizational structure of the Agency safeguards the independence of both Agency Council as well as Appeal Committee. In addition to this the applicants have, provided there exist reasonable grounds, also the possibility to challenge the decision of the Agency Council in an administrative dispute (extraordinary legal remedies), but only after availing all legal remedies at the agency.

The independence of expert groups is provided by their statement regarding potential conflict of interest.

Each applicant has the right to challenge an expert in the procedure on the basis of her/his possible incompetence or in case of conflict of interest. The same applies to Agency staff and Council members.

If the expert has already been appointed but a conflict of interest is proven later, the Agency Council appoints another expert or may replace the entire group of experts.

Evidence:

[Higher Education Act](#) - Article 51e, 51f, 51h, 51i and 51j

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

Standard 3.7: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- *a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;*
- *an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;*
- *publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;*



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- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Guidelines:

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes.

Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people.

Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

The Agency is substantially compliant with the standard 3.7.

Despite the fact that a lot of invested effort was put in the necessary changes of the criteria for accreditation and external evaluation of HEIs and study programmes (see ESG standard 3.1), there is still much room for improvement. According to the findings of the external evaluation, the criteria must be revised in a way that they become more transparent, less extensive and more focused on actually improving the assessment of quality systems and learning outcomes. Immediate and comprehensive revision of accreditation criteria also is hindered by the announced changes to the HEA, which will introduce the transition to institutional re-accreditation only.

For easier interpretation of the criteria and more transparent operation and decision-making by the Agency Council, mandatory interpretation of the criteria or guidelines which would facilitate interpretation of individual articles shall be adopted. In accordance with the Agency Action Plan for 2014, new guidelines for writing self-evaluation reports are being defined and prepared.

The Agency [publishes all full reports of expert groups](#) on its website, as well as all decisions on accreditation and external evaluations, adopted by the Agency Council.

Evidence:

[Experts Reports](#)

[Higher Education Act](#) - Appeal Committee - Article 51j and 51k

[Higher Education Act](#) - Experts - Article 51u and 51z

[Criteria for Entry in the Registry of Experts](#)

[Report on Agency Work and Operation 2013](#)

Standard 3.8: Accountability procedures

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

Guidelines:

These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;



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2. Documentation which demonstrates that:

- the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
- the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
- the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;
- the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.

3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.

The Agency is substantially compliant with the standard 3.8.

In accordance with recommendations from the external evaluation of the Agency and in accordance with the Action plan for 2014, some profound changes are being implemented into the existing Quality Manual.

The changes will focus mainly on the formalization of already-established informal self-evaluation processes, which has long been underway. Also, external evaluation has shown that the existing informal mechanisms are well established and they offer satisfactory grounds for continuous improvements in quality of the Agency.

The renewed Quality Manual is being coordinated and drafted. We assume that it will be adopted within two months.

The Agency was under revisions of Court of Auditors in 2012 and in 2014.

Evidence:

[SQAA presentation brochure](#)

[SQAA Quality Manual](#)

CONTRIBUTION TO THE AIMS OF ENQA

As a full member of ENQA, the Agency will strive for the exchange of good practices with ENQA and its (affiliated) members.

Since 2009, the Agency is actively participating in various projects of ECA Consortium, especially in:

- the field of external evaluation of joint study programmes (JOQAR project);
- preparation and the establishment of the EEEP (ECA Expert Exchange Platform);
- CeQuInt (Certificate for Quality of Internationalisation);
- MULTRA;
- collaboration in three different ECA Working Groups (WG1, WG2 and WG3).

Since this September 1, the Agency has been involved in the project "Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems" (EIQAS) in which we cooperate with other partners from Poland, Slovenia, Portugal and Bulgaria. The project is focused on internal quality assurance (IQA) and higher education, and has two objectives:

- to increase the capacity of higher education institutions in the participating countries to develop internal quality assurance by enhancing their awareness and understanding of Part 1 of ESG and identifying, developing and disseminating good innovative practice in internal quality assurance;
- to increase the capacity of the participating QA agencies in external quality assurance by comparing their methodologies for assessing internal quality assurance and exchanging and developing good practice in IQA assessment.

Therefore, the agency already demonstrates international cooperation in the field of quality assurance and already contributes to the quality of European higher education area and to the implementation of ESG principles at the European level.

The agency also has rich experience on the national level on account of:

- consistently conducting accreditation procedures according to the provisions of ESG;
- counselling services in quality enhancement and management for HEIs and other relevant stakeholders (counselling by the agency staff and participation at conferences, in QA projects at HEIs and HVCs, etc.);
- policy making at the national level when it comes to amending and introducing new legislation (as a crucial stakeholder in the preparation of legal provisions and as a key negotiator).

Since its establishment, the Agency is continuously strengthening and developing quality culture in co-operation with its relevant national and international stakeholders. On the national level, it is striving for effective implementation of ESG standards and for the dissemination of ESG principles.



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We believe that SQAA can actively contribute to increasing the visibility of ENQA and to strengthen ENQA in co-operation with institutions, such as ECA Consortium, CEENQA, affiliated QA agencies, as well as any regional QA agencies, not affiliated with ENQA.

