

**REPORT ON WORK AND OPERATION  
of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher  
Education**

**IN 2014**

**“Quality – it is very hard to gain it,  
but mighty easy to lose.”**



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## Introduction

2014 marks the fifth year of operation for the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as: the Agency). As the Director of the Agency I am starting my third year in this position. This Report on the Work and Operation of the Agency is like the one for 2013 and summarizes the realization of the tasks and assignments from the Work and Financial Plan for 2014. That Work Plan also included an action (operational) work plan for 2014, based on the Self-evaluation Report for 2013. In February 2015, the updated Rules of Procedure for the Quality of the Agency were adopted, therefore, all plans and reports in the years to come shall be submitted in a manner compliant with the abovementioned Rules of Procedure for Quality. Consideration should also be given to a reduction of the number of documents summarising the activities in the previous year.

In 2014, the Agency – along with permanent assignments in accordance with the mission and the vision – that is the accreditation and re-accreditation or external evaluations of higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges – carried out an external evaluation of the Agency operation in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG Part 2 and 3 – or in accordance with the modified ENQA standards. The Agency received a visit in November 2014 from an international group of evaluators of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, ENQA. For the purpose, the Agency prepared a Self-evaluation Report for 2013 which was additionally supplemented with the state of the Agency in October 2014. This report by the international evaluators was also favourable for the Agency, and on 6 March 2015, the Agency became a full member of ENQA for a period of five years. The Agency must submit to ENQA additional mandatory reports on operation in March 2016 and in March 2017.

By joining ENQA as a full member, we have also achieved the second strategic objective for the Agency for the period of 2011-2016. The first objective was achieved in 2013 when the Agency was registered into the list (register) of trustworthy European agencies, EQAR. Why is this step so important for the Agency? In the National Higher Education Programme Resolution for the period 2011-2020, the Agency was ordered in Measure 21 to be externally evaluated and to apply for membership in EQAR as well as ENQA. In the explanation of this decision, there lay a shadow of a doubt: "should it be determined upon external evaluation that the Agency does not comply with the European standards and guidelines for the quality of higher education or the criteria for the ENQA membership, all necessary actions shall be adopted immediately – in the event of issues with legislation, the Higher Education Act (HEA) shall be modified, and in the event of issues with the operation of the Agency, the operation of the Agency shall be modified immediately." This doubt has dissipated. Naturally, we all strive to operate even better in the future.

The Agency has been gaining reputation as it is actively and equally operational in three other international organisations: the ECA (European Consortium of Accreditation), the CEENQA (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), and the INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education). In December 2014, the Agency signed an Erasmus+ project EIQAS



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(Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems) as a partner, along with Poland, Portugal and Bulgaria.

A lot of the text in this report has been summarised from the extensive minutes of the Agency Council.

Done in Ljubljana, May 2015

Ivan Leban, Director



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**Report of the ENQA panel 2015**

**Letter by the president of ENQA 2015**



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## FROM THE AGENCY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE PERIOD 2011–2016

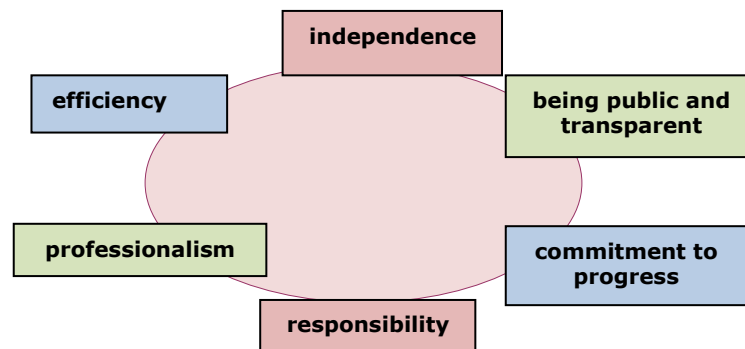
### **Mission**

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.

### **Values**



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE AGENCY (as specified in the Agency Development Strategy for the Period 2011-2016, adopted by the Agency Council in November 2011):

- development and functioning of the quality assurance system;
- monitoring 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.



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**Priority objectives up to 2013, also shifted to 2014 are:**

- transformation of the quality assurance system in higher education and higher vocational education;
- establishment and development of a quality assurance system for the Agency;
- participation in the development of higher education and higher vocational education in Slovenia.

## **ASSIGNMENTS IN THE WORK AND FINANCIAL PLAN FOR 2014**

The Work and Financial Plan for 2014 (hereinafter: the Work Plan) was adopted at the Agency Council meeting on 19 June 2014. With it a too extensive action plan for the operation of the Agency has been adopted and the plan contained the following items: improvement of the internal quality system, improvement of the external quality system, information system of the Agency, international cooperation, measures for the improvement of the Agency operation and its position in the Slovenian higher education area. Each of the abovementioned items has been divided into many subactivities.

Below is a summary of the concluding section of the Work Plan for 2014:

2014 was to be devoted mainly to the international affirmation of the Agency. Besides the accreditations and re-accreditations and external evaluation of higher education institutions, and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, the activities were directed especially towards:

- providing smooth operation of the Agency, particularly in terms of resolving the acute financial and staffing issues;
- selection of and cooperation with the contractor for the establishment of a comprehensive information system of the Agency;
- self-evaluation of the Agency 2013 and a preparation for the external evaluation of the Agency to join the ENQA;
- constant training of candidates for entry into the register of experts, analyses of accreditation and evaluation reports of experts and other required materials;
- active cooperation with stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education at workshops and professional conferences;
- participation in international projects related to the Agency's work;
- cooperation with foreign agencies;
- renewal of the Criteria for Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes and the application form as their integral part;
- collection of data from higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, experts and other stakeholders on Agency's work, analysis of survey questionnaires, and adoption of measures for improvements based on survey results;
- planning of participation at various conferences, consultations and workshops at home and abroad;
- translation of all materials important for the Agency into English, and maintenance of the Agency's website and transparent publications of the experts' reports;
- participation in amending the higher education legislation.





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For the Agency, gaining the trust of all stakeholders and the general public for the work of the Agency and the strengthening of its visibility is of great importance.

All indicated directions were related with the care for the quality of the work of the Agency through self-evaluation and external evaluation of the Agency, by participating with external stakeholders or by establishing an efficient and mutually agreed upon system of external quality assurance and by participating with the European Higher Education Area – EHEA by taking into consideration the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG; hereinafter: ESG Standards.

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The Work Plan for 2014 was set up too ambitiously and too extensively and we were therefore unable to carry out some assignments. At the end of the year various reports are adopted: the Self-evaluation Report for 2014, the Final Annual Accounts for 2014, Business Report for 2014 (the Agency Council was acquainted with it at its meeting on 16 April 2014), and the complete Report on Work and Operation for 2014 (the Agency Council was to adopt it at its meeting on 21 May 2015). This report partially summarizes the contents from the abovementioned reports. I would like to sincerely thank for their efforts to all who participated in the preparation of the reports.

The Report on Work contains the achievement of assignments from the Work Plan through an overview of the work of the Agency Council as the highest first-instance decision-making body, of the Appeal Committee as the second-instance decision-making body and of the Director.

The success of Agency in realising the set tasks is shown by the order of chapters in the Work Plan for 2014, as follows:

- accreditations of higher education institutions and study programmes as well as evaluations of higher vocational colleges;
- establishment of a comprehensive information system of the Agency;
- joining ENQA;
- update of the Agency strategy and of strategic objectives for the period of 2014-2016;
- system of notifying stakeholders about the activities of the Agency;
- training of experts and members of the Council;
- financial and human resources.



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## **OVERVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE OF FIRST- AND SECOND-INSTANCE DECISION-MAKING BODIES OF THE AGENCY**

A detailed overview of the operation of the bodies with appropriate measures and suggestions for improvement are given in the Self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2014.

### **I. AGENCY COUNCIL**

The Agency Council is the highest decision-making body of the Agency. The members of the Agency Council act in a professional, independent and autonomous manner and are not bound in their work to the decisions, views and instructions of institutions which appointed them and of other institutions. The members of the Agency Council take into consideration in their performance of assignments and in making decisions the principles of preventing a conflict of interest and the principles of impartiality. For this purpose, they shall sign a special statement which obligates them to respect these principles. The Agency Council shall consist of 11 members. (summarised from the Higher Education Act (HEA); hereinafter referred to as: HEA).

The Agency Council meets in accordance with the Rules of Procedure every third Thursday in a calendar month, except for July and August. The meetings may be extraordinary and correspondence meetings. In 2014, the Council met at 12 meetings; of which 10 were regular and 2 were correspondence meetings, there were no extraordinary meetings. Compared to previous years, the number of meetings has decreased and the situation is normalizing. A typical agenda of a meeting is as follows: on overview and confirmation of the minutes for the previous meeting and an overview of the realization of decisions, significant events between two meetings, appeals, quality assurance (processing and deciding on the applications for accreditation and re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes, and for the external evaluation of higher vocational colleges, processing and deciding on the applications for the accreditation of the modifications of study programmes, appointing groups of experts, entry of experts into the register, documents for quality assurance and miscellaneous.

At its regular meetings in 2014, the Agency Council adopted between 24 and 62 decisions per meeting, and the total number of meetings in 2014 was 495 (476 decisions for 2013).

Considering the large number of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, and a (too) high number of study programmes (find transparent data according to the ISCED classification below), the Agency Council is still very burdened by deciding about individual applications. Due to a high number of accreditation and evaluation decisions, the Council has also been focusing on the increasing number of appeals towards the decisions. All procedures are conducted in accordance with the General Administrative Procedure Act. Beside this primary activity the members of the Council also dealt with the current issues of the Agency operation.

The Council has, along with the Agency, strived to remove bureaucratic obstacles and to maintain good relationships with the stakeholders. Among these, the relevant were mainly: a reform of the quality of accreditations, the Director's visits of higher education institutions and annual interviews with the employees.

The Agency Council itself was the initiator of the update of the Accreditation Criteria according to the findings of a group of ECA/ESU experts. The updated criteria considered the remarks of the Council members and are merely a consolidated version of the existing accreditation criteria. The change did not implement any new obligations or rights of the applicants, but it mainly rearranged the contents, deleted the duplicated criteria and terminologically edited the act. The provisions without any clear legal basis now have a basis in the existing criteria which were harmonized with all relevant stakeholders, adopted and never legally challenged.

The Council has also dealt with the issue of the experts of the Agency, their training and the entry of candidates into the register of experts. The criteria for entering candidates to the register of experts should define in more detail the conditions regarding the appropriateness of candidates for entry into the register of experts. Experts from the support services of schools/institutions or, in a broader sense, from the public sector and administration are especially relevant for assessments at an institutional level.

At the beginning of 2014 the Agency performed the second training of candidates for the entry to the register in accordance with the updated training programme. 36 candidates participated at the training. The training providers took the advice and comments of the Agency Council into consideration: only one foreign expert was invited and there was no duplication of content. The general opinion on the execution of the training was very good.

The Agency Council also gave a favourable assessment of the "Monitoring, determining and assuring quality in the Slovenian higher education area from 2010 to 2013" study, prepared by the Agency staff.

The Council also initiated the preparation of new reports by staff for internal materials in the decision-making in accreditation and evaluation procedures. The updated application forms are based on the termination of extensive summarization of references from applications, reports by groups of experts and the applicant's responses. They introduce a transparent summarization of the most relevant facts according to individual assessment areas, in the following order: report of the group of experts, the applicant's response to the report of the group of experts, the final report of the group of experts, findings of the Council reporters, the Council's findings. The new application forms are a good basis for a structured preparation of decisions. All final reports of the experts are regularly published at the Agency's website.

At the beginning of 2014, the members of the Council participated in the preparation of the Self-evaluation Report of the Agency for 2013. The Council also discussed the Business Report for 2013 and the Work Plan for the Agency for 2014 and the Report on the Operation of the Agency for 2013. In 2013, there were 98 higher education institutions, and 918 study programmes in the Republic Slovenia. Per the Council's opinion, the Report on the Operation for 2013 was too optimistic, as the Agency itself



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cannot assure quality in higher education. The Council also believes that the transparency of its operation has not yet been satisfactory. Therefore, the Agency was not very successful in its work in 2013. The Council also recommended to the Director that he amend the report for 2013 by mitigating the assessment of the Agency's operation.

For 2014, a reform of the Higher Education Act has been planned once more.

The members of the Agency Council have attended various conferences, consultations and trainings. The participation at the meetings of the Slovenian Rectors' Conference is especially noteworthy. The President of the Council is also the member of the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education. In 2014, the Agency Council also intensively dealt with the staffing issues in the Agency.

**INDICATIVE OVERVIEW OF STUDY PROGRAMMES ACCORDING TO ISCED -  
MESS REGISTER, STATUS AS OF January 2015 2013/2014**

Isced	Description	UL	UM	UPR	Finš	UNG	ZASEBNI	No. of programmes
14	Teacher training and education science	86	42	22				150
21	Arts	30	2	1		1	6	40
22	Humanities	92	29	22		5	3	151
31	Social and behavioural science	61	10	20	4		13	108
32	Journalism	7					2	9
34	Business and administration	25	18	4			61	108
38	Law	3	6	1			6	16
42	Life sciences	12	5	8		4		29
44	Physical sciences	12	7			3	2	24
46	Mathematics and statistics	9	4	6				19
48	Computing	5	11	2	1		2	21
52	Engineering and engineering trades	15	34	1			8	58
54	Manufacturing and processing	15	3			2	9	29
58	Architecture and building	17	6			1		24
62	Agriculture, forestry and fishery	14	12	2		1	1	30
64	Veterinary	6						6
72	Health care	21	5	4			13	43
76	Social services	7						7
81	Personal services	5	5	8			6	24
84	Transport services	7	5					11



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85	Environmental protection	3	1			6	10	
86	Security services	2	5			2	9	
Interdisc.		7		1		1	10	
	TOTAL	461	210	102	5	18	<b>937</b>	
	%	49.2	22.4	10.9		1.9	15.0	
	No. of students	45651	17971	6169	219	439	8882	79331

Explanation: 3 national and 1 network university (EMUNI) and 49 higher education institutions. Another 54 higher vocational colleges with appr. 35 study programmes and 13,251 students. The total number of students in tertiary education is 90,622.



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## Self-evaluation of the Agency 2013

In 2013, the operation of the Agency was already assessed for the first time by an independent international group of experts (hereinafter: international group of evaluators). In 2012, the Agency decided to first apply for an independent external evaluation by the European Consortium for Accreditation – ECA Consortium; hereinafter ECA) and later for admission to EQAR. The evaluation group also featured a representative of the European Students Union; hereinafter: ESU). The Chairman of the group was Dr R. Heusser (ECA), while other members were Prof. M. Socha (PKA-Poland), Dr M. Frederiks (NVAO-Netherlands) and A. Presacariu (student-ESU). The Agency prepared an extensive self-evaluation report for the period 2010-2012. At the December 2012 meeting of the Agency Council, it was acquainted in detail with the composition of the draft of the report and gave recommendations regarding content. In January 2013, it processed the proposition of the self-evaluation report for the period 2010-2012 and gave some additional comments regarding content. The approval for the report was given at the 62th meeting on 13 March 2013.

The external evaluation of the Agency in April 2013 was successful and the Agency was entered to EQAR in October 2013. Then it started, in accordance with the action plan, to already perform the self-evaluation for 2013 (survey questionnaire analysis, gathering information, performing surveys with staff...), and it started to prepare the self-evaluation report for 2013 at the end of the year. This report was the basis for the assessment of the operation of the Agency for the admission of the Agency to ENQA. The Self-Evaluation report for 2013 is available at the Agency's website: [www.nakvis.si](http://www.nakvis.si).

The mission and the tasks of ENQA and EQAR are very similar, but there are some differences.

EQAR is mostly a transparent informational tool for all stakeholders in the European higher education area and it represents a list of trustworthy agencies for quality assurance in the European higher education area. EQAR is managed by organizations of the so-called E4 as the founding members, in cooperation with European governments and other social partners who are part of the Bologna process - BFUG.

While the objective of EQAR remains the management of the list of reliable agencies for quality assurance in the European higher education area, ENQA wishes to contribute through its full members to the assurance and improvement of the quality of the European higher education and acts as a driving force for the development of quality assurance systems in all signatory countries of the Bologna declarations. Joining EQAR shows the current "image" of reliable agencies in Europe, and ENQA wishes to contribute through cooperation with its members (and potential members) to a constant development of quality and to the establishment of a quality culture in all higher education institutions in individual member states. ENQA was founded in 2000.

The entry to the EQAR register as well as a full membership in ENQA were two of the most significant objectives of the Agency and were written as an obligation in the National Higher Education Programme Resolution for the period 2011-2020 (NHEP 2011-2020).



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## Admission procedure to ENQA

In most European countries quality assessment agencies periodically evaluate (and in some countries grant accreditation) to higher education institutions and/or their study programmes. EQAR is the register of such agencies, therefore a list of the agencies which operate in accordance with the ESG standards. The register is freely accessible to anyone on the Internet – [www.eqar.eu](http://www.eqar.eu). The proposal to establish EQAR was given in May 2007 at a London conference of ministers responsible for higher education. After the confirmation of the ministers on 4 March 2008, four members of the E4 Group – ENQA, EUA (European University Association; hereinafter: EUA), ESU and EURASHE (European Association of Higher Education Institutions; hereinafter EURASHE) founded EQAR.

In July 2013, we received the final reports about the international evaluation of the Agency, where it is evident whether and how the Agency operates in accordance with the 16 ESG standards (Parts 2 and 3) and in accordance with the ECA Code of good practice. The basis for the assessment of the Agency was the self-evaluation report of the Agency for the period 2010-2012 and the findings from the visit of the 4-member international group of evaluators from 22 to 24 April 2013, who performed a number of interviews. The group prepared two reports which are published at the Agency's website ([www.nakvis.si](http://www.nakvis.si)). The reports are favourable for the Agency – of the 16 ESG standards the Agency is fully compliant with 7 standards, substantially compliant with 8 standards and partially compliant with 1 standard. It is important to note that the international group of evaluators did not find any non-compliance of the Agency with the ESG standards. The ratings of the compliance are as follows: "fully, substantially, partially and, non-compliant to ESG standards".

Even though the Secretariat of the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education (the predecessor of the Agency) wanted to submit a request for a full membership in ENQA in 2009, the procedure started in 2014, when the Agency was operating in its current form for 4 years.

The timeline of the whole admission procedure to ENQA is as follows:

July 2013 -	letter to ENQA about the admission procedure
December-April 2014	preparation of the Self-evaluation Report for 2013
25 February 2014	official letter for admission
19 May 2014	answer from ENQA with instructions
27 June 2014	signed agreement between ENQA and the Agency with ToR
11 July 2014	confirmed group of reviewers and date of the visit
31 July 2014	sent SER 2013 to ENQA
28 August 2014	SER 2013 reviewed by the ENQA secretariat
2 October 2014	request by ENQA to amend SER 2013 with the situation in October 2014
7 October 2014	additional explanation to ENQA
23 October 2014	sent the amendment to SER 2013

Supplement to SER 2013 (situation in October 2014)  
<http://test.nakvis.si/en-GB/Content/GetFile/624>



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and SER 2013

<http://test.nakvis.si/en-GB/Content/GetFile/567>

28 October 2014	final confirmation of the date of visit by the ENQA panel
8 November 2014	notification for all 56 interviewees
17-18 November 2014	visit of the ENQA panel at the Agency
21 November 2014	request by the ENQA panel to clarify the financial situation and staffing of the Agency – 4 additional questions
25 November 2014	the Agency replies to the 4 questions
14 January 2015	receipt of the ENQA panel final report
26 February 2015	urgent letter of the ENQA secretariat about the clarification of the situation at the Agency when all the ESS funds shall run out in August 2015 (60% of all funds)
27 February 2015	the Agency sent a clarification on the discussions in the Slovenian National Assembly and Ministry of Finance
6 March 2015	the ENQA executive board discussed the Agency's application
9 March 2015	receipt of the notification about the full membership in ENQA for 5 years
11 March 2015	sent a thank you letter to all (the ENQA panel, the ENQA secretariat, the Agency, interviewees) who participated in this action
18 March 2015	receipt of a letter by the ENQA president with explanations and 2 additional requests (March 2016, March 2017)

All personal documentation on the procedure (23 pages) is available at the Director of the Agency.

External Evaluation was performed by: Achim Hopbach, Managing Director, Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria), Austria (Chairman); Karin Järplid Linde, Acting Head of Department, Swedish Higher Education Authority, Sweden (secretary); Milan Pol, Professor of Education – Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic; Andrejs Rauhvargers, Professor, University of Latvia, Faculty of Education, Psychology and Arts, Current Secretary General, Latvian Rectors' Council, Latvia (appointed by EUA); Blazhe Todorovski, Executive Committee, European Students' Union (appointed by ESU).

The Agency is listed in the register of trustworthy European agencies, EQAR [www.eqar.eu](http://www.eqar.eu) (from October 2013 to 31 July 2018) and is now a full member of ENQA [www.enqa.eu](http://www.enqa.eu) (from March 2015 to 6 March 2020).

Details on the decisions are available in the two documents attached:

[http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/agencyreports/2013\\_05\\_SQAA\\_ApprovalDecision.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/agencyreports/2013_05_SQAA_ApprovalDecision.pdf)

[http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Letter-ENQA-to-SQAA\\_180315.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Letter-ENQA-to-SQAA_180315.pdf)

The full report on the external review of the Agency with recommendations are in the following documents:

[http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/agencyreports/SQAA\\_External\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/agencyreports/SQAA_External_Review_Report.pdf)

<http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Review-report-of-the-SQAA.pdf>





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## **Amendments to the Higher Education Act (HEA)**

In 2014, issues arose when some higher education institutions discovered that their students were enrolled to programmes whose accreditation would shortly expire or the programmes were even without accreditation. There was supposed to be approximately 200 such students. Naturally, the information on publicly valid programmes and with it also on the expiration of valid accreditation of study programmes and institutions (publicly available from the register of the Ministry for Education, Science and Sport (MESS), the Agency's website) are significant for a future student. However, the students have a legal right to finish the study programme they enrolled to.

A suitable positive solution was found for the students (similar as was with the 1000 higher education diplomas a few of years ago). The biggest issue was that the entire field of higher education is regulated by HEA and that it is not regulated with individual acts (for example, an umbrella law, Public higher education institutions act, Private higher education institutions act, Accreditations and evaluations act). The issue was discussed several times with the staff at the Agency in 2014.

The Agency has warned the legislator that with preventive measures (for example, an agreement between the higher education institution and the student which must be concluded before enrolment or a record in the articles of association of the higher education institution where the institution commits itself that its student may continue their studies at another institution in case the study programme will not be granted a re-accreditation or if the study programme ceases to exist or if the owner of the private institution goes bankrupt or if the private institution becomes insolvent – or a public institution loses funds) it should settle the status and the rights of those students. The status and the rights of students should also be regulated or the situation anticipated and regulated when the students enroll to a non-accredited programme which gains an accreditation during the time of their study. This is all a legal matter which has not yet been resolved and is such in the jurisdiction of the legislator.

If the Agency Council adopted the criteria changes and wrote in the criteria that if an institution does not decide to renew its accreditation of study programmes, the students retain their student status and finish the studies according to the publicly valid study programme, the Council would violate HEA (Article 66) or would newly define rights which are not defined by law. By doing this, the Agency Council would overstep its jurisdiction. Therefore, the solution of the problem is on the side of the legislator and of higher education institutions. The Agency does not decide on student statutes nor financing nor is it allowed to intervene with the legal right which ensures the higher education institution the autonomy of education, research and operation. Article 66 of HEA determines the rights and obligations of students, the right to enrolment and education is warranted under equal conditions determined by the law, articles of association and the study programme. Therefore, the Agency cannot regulate these students' rights with accreditation criteria.

The Agency asked for the opinion of the ENIC/NARIC centre of the line ministry regarding this problem. In the situation when an accredited higher education institution would execute a non-accredited study programme in accordance with Article 17 of HEA, the ENIC/NARIC centre would not consider the application of graduates of such a programme because it only considers the situations of accredited study programmes at home and abroad.



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The following situation is also not legally regulated when a higher education institution begins to offer a study programme which has not yet been accredited and then applies for accreditation at the the Agency, and when the first generation of students is in their third year of studies, obtains the accreditation for this programme and lists it in the register. To the question whether the diploma of the student of the first generation is then publicly valid or not, the ENIC/NARIC centre replies that they are currently processing an application of a private higher education institution, where they issued a positive opinion for such a diploma because the institution enrolled the students of the first generation to a then accredited study programme and through recognition recognized all of their obligations executed at the non-accredited programme (the contents of the one or the other programme was not significantly changed).

In a situation when the Agency would not renew the accreditation but the programme would still have students enrolled and would wish to have their education and diploma recognized, it was clearly stated to us that the ENIC/NARIC centre would not issue a positive opinion for such diplomas or would not consider them. If a student finished the programme after the programme had the accreditation taken or was not renewed, this diploma and education would not be publicly valid in the Republic of Slovenia. It was explained to us that in such cases it is most sensible for the institution to enroll these students to an accredited programme which enables them to finish the education at a publicly valid programme (in this case their obtained academic title changes). Should such a similar programme not be executed, the institution must ensure that these students continue and finish their studies at another institution and a comparable programme.

Higher education institutions are mainly responsible for the quality of their programmes (deans or rectors) and decide themselves for the initiation of procedures for re-accreditation within the statutory deadlines. The Agency is a monitoring body. At the same time, the Agency can no longer review programmes which are not accredited, and we are absolutely very careful at the Agency in the interpretation of legal provisions which are in the jurisdiction of the legislator and the Government Office for Legislation. The Agency was in favour of a positive solution of the problem because this was used to solve the students' problem, but the legislator should have taken care of this sooner with better consistency.

The complication was resolved by the legislator with the amendment of the HEA. In November 2014, the amendments of HEA-J were adopted. With the amendments to the Higher Education Act the right of students to finish their studies in a publicly valid manner at a study programme whose accreditation cease to be valid was regulated to protect the acquired rights of students and public benefit. The public validity of documents was also regulated – of diplomas issued to students after the expiry of the validity of the accreditation of study programmes, and the rights of students, which derive from the student status, enrolled after the expiry of the accreditation.

The Agency was frequently in the media because of the validity of diplomas and the enrolment to non-accredited study programme. Regarding these issues, the director had to provide explanation for RTVS1, Planet-TV, Radio 1, Val 202 and Radio Študent media outlets. The media also reported about the Agency's offices and the adequacy of the lease agreement of the Agency.



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## **The Agency's documents and operation**

In 2014, the Agency Council processed several important documents, and was acquainted up-to-date about the operation of the Agency through regular reports at the Agency Council meetings (about events which took place between two meetings). The Report on the Work and Operation of the Agency in 2013, prepared by the Director, was given approval by the Council at its meeting in April 2014. The report was sent in time as a courtesy copy to the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. There was no response.

In 2014, the Agency Council processed the following important documents:

- Self-evaluation Report of the Agency for 2013;
- Business Report for 2013;
- Report on Work and Operation for 2013;
- Criteria for Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes;
- a report by J. Sirok: Quality in the Slovenian Higher Education Area in the Period from 2010 to 2013;
- report of international ENQA evaluators;
- Audit Report of the Court of Audit for 2011;
- updated application forms of the reports by the staff for internal materials for the decision-making deciding in accreditation and evaluation procedures.

All accreditation and evaluation procedures which are processed by the Council, and especially the process of decision-making, are of very sensitive nature. By awarding them accreditation, the study programmes become publicly valid. A single study programme is worth upwards from EUR 100,000. Therefore, these activities must be performed with responsibility and a great deal of discretion. Objectivity and professionalism are here of significant importance.

The Council members as well as the staff must act in a thoughtful and competent manner in every moment during the accreditation and evaluation procedures. That requires them to be impartial. Anytime it was detected that a conflict of interest could occur, the staff of the Agency, the experts and the Agency Council members consistently recused themselves from accreditation and evaluation procedures. The violation of the principle of impartiality can be a cause for an early dismissal of the membership in the Agency Council or in the groups of experts. When experts may be in a conflict of interests or they violate this principle, the Agency Council shall appoint others to the groups of experts, but when it regards the staff at the Agency, it is a violation of work commitments.

### **Audit report of the Court of Audit**

At the May 2014 meeting, the Director acquainted the Council with the audit report of the Court of Audit for 2011 regarding the regularity of operations of the Agency. The report assesses the operations of the Agency negatively. The response to the objection of the Agency about the audit findings was also rejected by the Court of Audit. The Agency was obligated to prepare a response report in 90 days and to perform two measures – to include an anti-corruption clause in the agreements and to recover Council meeting fees paid in excess from Council members. The Director believes that the Court of Audit has a



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wrong interpretation of Council meeting fees and costs of work, to which the Council members are justified in accordance with legal regulations. The amount of the costs of work is determined in the Rules of Procedure of the Council. The Director had no intention of executing the measure of recovering funds from Council members as he would violate their constitutional rights. This was noted in the response report.

In November 2014, the Agency received a Post-Audit Report from the Court of Audit and an Appeal of the Court of Audit to the Agency Council to act and to eliminate the irregularities. In the Post-Audit Report, the Court of Audit repeats the findings from the Audit Report that the Agency does not have an adequate legal basis to pay the Council members and the members of the Appeal Committee for their attendance at the meetings in 2011, alongside meeting attendance fees, for work in the total amount of EUR 39,978. The Agency satisfactorily carried out two out of three required corrective measures, while the third, regarding the payment for work of the members of the Council and the Appeal Committee was not. This measure was reviewed as unsatisfactory.

The Director explained to the members of the Agency Council that in the response to the Audit Report he could either require from the members of the Council and the Appeal Committee to return the indicated amount, whereby this also forms a basis for returns for the periods after 2011 and the members of the Council and the Appeal Committee would have the possibility of a legal remedy and may sue the Agency, or he would not carry out the measure with an adequate justification, because he would therefore, on the basis of the existing opinion of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, violate their existing right to the payment for the work performed. According to the opinion of the Court of Audit, by not requesting the return of the indicated amount in accordance with the Court of Auditors Act, the Director violated the obligation of good business of the Agency, but it was not a severe violation of good business. In case of a severe violation the Court of Audit could require the dismissal of the Director. Since such a violation has not been determined, the Court of Audit has concluded that the execution of the required corrective measure may only be implemented by the Agency Council, within its jurisdiction, as the highest decision-making body at the Agency. It was required that the Agency Council within their jurisdiction ensure the execution of activities for the collection of unduly paid funds and to report in writing in 30 days to the Court of Audit how they decided about this appeal. The Director attended the session of the Committee of the National Assembly for the Control of Public Finances where he explained why he did not carry out one of the imposed measures. He also explained that there is a collision of provisions in the statutory and secondary legislation. The secondary legislation contains conflicting provisions, such as Article 51.n of HEA, including the provision that the members of the Council and the Appeal Committee are entitled to Council meeting fees as are other public agencies. The Agency requested an opinion from the Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Legislation about the abovementioned collision and the Office took the position that in their opinion – to avoid different interpretations – the act on the establishment of the Agency should be correspondingly amended in a way that the provision on Council meeting fees be stricken (paragraph one of Article 26). The amendment of the executive act is in the jurisdiction of the establisher of the Agency. The Director assessed that the members of the Council and the Appeal Committee do an incredibly responsible job by regularly



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deciding on the accreditations and re-accreditations of study programmes and higher education institutions and that the amount of their payment corresponds with the level of responsibility. The Council also notified the Court of Audit on this matter.

In 2014, the Court of Audit also sent the Agency a decision on a new audit for the period from 1 March 2010 to June 2014: obtaining an opinion about the efficiency of the evaluation, accreditation and concession granting procedures in the assurance of quality and diversity of study programmes. The audit also included MESS and the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. In the response to the 1st letter of request at the end of 2014 the Agency submitted all requested information. The submitted report consists of 16 chapters, 38 pages of text and 330 attachments. In March 2015, we had to submit additional information as a response to the 5th letter of request. The preparation of this information requires a lot of additional work from the Agency.

## **Experts and training**

In the beginning of 2014, the Agency carried out the second training of the candidates for the admission to the register of experts in accordance with the updated training programme. 36 candidates participated at the training.

The analysis of the survey questionnaires of the participants of the second training for entry to the register of experts was favourable. The training programme was slightly modified in accordance with the suggestions of the Agency Council and the analysis of the survey questionnaires from the first training of candidates in October and November 2013. Instead of two foreign experts the second training only featured one foreign lecturer. The practical exercise from the first day of training included an actual application for the first accreditation of a higher education institution. Of all participants on the training the online questionnaire was filled out by 23 candidates. The basic analysis of the online questionnaires shows a general satisfaction of the participants with the training. The participants listed the following opportunities for improvement:

- another session should be organized;
- the lecturers should discuss a concrete processed application;
- more concrete instructions regarding the issues in the writing of reports;
- more examples of a good practice;
- the first two days should not be consecutive (travel, homework...);
- too much acquainting with regulations which we have already read ourselves in the preparation for the training;
- more examples from practice;
- more feedback with concrete recommendations regarding the practical assignment we did;
- more time for consultation and cooperation with the staff and experts;
- more case studies;
- preparation of consolidated criteria so that the experts will not have to check every amendment individually;
- more time should be dedicated to the higher vocational colleges;
- presentation of a report of an external evaluation.



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This training was carried out in accordance with the reformed programme. The objectives of the updated programme are comparable with the objectives of the previous training (the candidates acquire competence for work in groups of experts, review of the documentation (applications with documentation), visits to institutions/schools and writing reports), but there is more focus on practical training with more concrete examples (examples from »real« accreditation procedures). The novelty is the second part where the candidates must obligatorily attend either a tour in the procedure of a first accreditation of a higher education institution or a study programme, or an evaluation visit. The Council then, based on the completed training, the opinion of one of the members of staff and the group of experts the candidate joins, decides about their entry to the register. The Council also again confirmed that the Slovenian Student Union (SSU) continue to train candidate students which is a condition for their training at the Agency.

The next training for professionals shall be organized in June 2015.

## **Cooperation with stakeholders**

Throughout the year, the president and the members of the Agency Council attended work meetings, consultations, discussions and other events related with higher education, they promptly discussed initiatives and questions of various stakeholders. They are in constant contact with the staff of the Agency.

Beside attending events related with the amendment of the legislation and criteria and training of the experts of the Agency, the Council mostly cooperated with the leaderships and other representatives of universities or higher education institutions and with the representatives of MISS. The current topic is the transition from a programme to an institutional evaluation and accreditation. The Council regularly discussed questions of various stakeholders and anonymous notifications as well as various initiatives or notifications about irregularities at higher education institutions. With this regards it has also decided to perform extraordinary evaluations.

One of the Agency's staff is responsible for the preparation of answers to professional, journalistic and parliamentary questions to which we provide answers regularly and promptly.

The Agency's website <http://www.nakvis.si> is regularly updated. The title page of the website is very educational as it features a geographical overview of higher education institutions.

## **II. APPEAL COMMITTEE**

When discussing the work of the Appeal Committee, it is worth mentioning the report about the practices of the Council regarding negative decisions in accreditation procedures or in the decisions to limit the renewal of the accreditation and the practices of the decision-making of the Appeal Committee and of the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia in appellate procedures. The report namely warns of the inconsistencies between the soft approach of the Agency towards determining and



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assuring quality based on (European) standards and guidelines for quality, and the requirements of the Appeal Committee and the competent court in consistently following the General Administrative Procedure Act. The latter namely dictates collecting unambiguous proof in the determination procedure and making consistent final decisions only and only in the framework of Slovenian legislation and based on past decisions. The soft approach in determining the quality regarding the decision-making about the basic rights and obligations of the agents in higher education has shown that the decisions which were unacceptable for clients were almost without exception successfully contested in appellate procedures. The report finds that because of that the Council cannot guarantee the level of quality anticipated by the standards and quality guidelines. Therefore, the Agency should decide whether it will consistently conduct the procedures in accordance with the provisions of the General Administrative Procedures Act or whether it will strive towards a complete list of procedures in a legal act, which would help it to overcome the use of the General Administrative Procedure Act, or that its decisions would no longer be directed to the level of basic rights and obligations of higher education institutions but rather towards designing non-binding recommendations for the improvement and consultations, ranking and notifying the public.

In the opinion of the Council, the Agency must operate according to the existing legislation, and must take into consideration the findings of this report in the improvement of conducting procedures and of decision-making. Considering the current situation, it must at the same time conduct administrative procedures as well as consider European quality standards and guidelines. In the update of the Act, the working group should, to monitor the update of the higher education legislation based on the findings of this report, create opinions which the Agency shall represent in the negotiations. The Council is aware of the obstacles the Agency faces in assuring quality in the Slovenian higher education area.

The Appeal Committee and the court have pushed the Council into a blind alley of administration distanced from the quality aspects with its demands to follow the regulations to the letter, along with the fact that the regulations are loose and undefined. Secondly, higher education is so complicated, lively and diverse that it is impossible to regulate it in full and in detail. The Council is aware that the rule of law demands regulations be followed, and it believes it may interfere too much with the autonomy of higher education institutions. The latter should have more freedom to be able to adapt to the development and changes, especially at the level of study programmes. The Agency should not be directed towards an excessive regulation of quality, but should start building on trust that higher education institutions can assure and improve quality by themselves. The tightening of regulation (for example, at higher education institutions with stricter habilitation criteria) did not raise the quality of the study. Slovenia does not lack detailed regulation but rather a strong academic, scientific and educational community which would be able to self-regulate. In the absence of educational, academic and scientific standards and a firm higher education politics in this area the Agency's experts do not have a clear framework regarding quality which they could use as a basis for their decisions. Maybe the Agency should continue to strive for the reformation of educational, academic and scientific standards which, for example, often stem from the criteria for the relevance of scientific-research achievements, the rigor of the operation of various professional committees etc., and to qualify the experts to be able to judge in accordance with these standards and to refrain



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them from judgment for which they cannot be experts: for example, to judge the suitability of financial resources at higher education institutions.

Nonetheless, it would make sense that after appointing new members of the Appellate Committee that the Council would meet with the former members of the Appellate Committee and discuss the principle positions in the work of both bodies and the situations when it is clear that a study programme or higher education institution does not in any way achieve the minimal quality standards but it has to be granted the accreditation because of unclear, open or incomplete regulations. It might be appropriate to present the issue to external stakeholder, for example the Rectoral Conference and the Committee for Higher Education.

To summarize – the Appellate Committee most often reacted because of procedural reasons – it found a material violation of the administrative procedure. In most cases the decisions did not have the appropriate explanation or the significant parts of an explanation which it legally should have. A wrong or an incomplete actual situation was discovered and therefore the use of material law was incorrect (therefore also material reasons) or material law was used wrongly.

The operation of the Agency and the decision-making is related to the general administrative procedure. Since legislative provisions (HEA) about the accreditations and their renewal are very loose, many higher education institutions rather decide to go the appellate or court route and hire eminent law firms instead of considering the well-intended recommendations for improvement provided in the final reports of independent experts.

### **Appeals by stakeholders**

The appeals from stakeholders in higher education, especially from students and university teachers, referred to individual violations at higher education institutions. It mainly concerns the reporting of irregularities and inconsistencies (anonymous as well) in the execution of study programmes, namely: inadequate execution of practical exercises, executing contact hours in contrast with the accreditation situation, shrinkage of organized education, inappropriate constitution of the bodies of the institution and the commissions of the senate, non-compliance with European directives for regulated professions with automated recognition, non-compliance with the ECTS rules and unsuitable qualifications of university teachers, irregularities at habilitation procedures etc. The Council regularly discussed these appeals.

In 2014, 3 extraordinary evaluations were initiated based on applications, and 2 initiatives were rejected.

### **III. DIRECTOR OF THE AGENCY**

In accordance with article 51.i of HEA the Director has the following duties:

- to organise and direct the work and operation of the Agency;
- to present and represent the Agency;
- to implement the decisions of the Agency Council;





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- to submit general acts for publication in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia;
- to ensure that Agency operates in accordance with the law, constituent instrument and general acts of the Agency;
- to adopt general acts regulating the operation and work of the Agency, for which no other authority is competent according to this Act and constituent instrument;
- to prepare a financial plan proposal for the Agency in cooperation with the Agency Council;
- to adopt a work plan of the Agency, for which consent of the Agency Council is required;
- to prepare report on work and operation of the Agency, for which consent of the Agency Council is required;
- to administer material and financial operation of the Agency;
- to decide in matters of labour rights of the employees;
- to adopt act on internal organisation and systematisation of workplaces;
- to carry out other tasks in accordance with this Act and constituent instrument.

The Director strived, besides ensuring that the basic activity of the Agency was carried out, which consists of a large number of accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions and study programmes, to continue until the end of 2014 to include the Agency into the international higher education area (joining ENQA) and to cooperate constructively with stakeholders.

The Agency was actively involved in CEENQA, and in ECA projects.

Because of the strengthening of relationships and the improvement of the cooperation with the stakeholders and a more thorough acquaintance of the applicants with the work of the Agency, the Director continued to visit the higher education institutions.

Upon the commencement of his term, the Director introduced brief Monday work meetings with all staff members. It is a short exchange of information and an agreement about future work. At the beginning of 2015, he also performed annual interviews with every employee at the Agency. The cooperation between employees at the Agency and the cooperation between the Director and the Agency Council is crucial for the successful operation of the Agency. The interview is an overview of the work in the previous period and the setting of objectives for the following year.

The regular annual interview is a one-on-one conversation between the employee and the manager and should enable a systematic and deepened insight into the work of an individual at the Agency. The annual interview was also the basis for the assessment of the performance at work and was used to plan the further development of an individual's career path. At the annual work interview, both the superior and the employee discuss the individual's work, participation, work relations and relay feedback about these topics and set possible goals for the coming year.

These annual interviews are supposed to enable the employees to improve their work performance, and the managers to get to know their staff, their thoughts, actions, ambitions, ideas and wishes. Simultaneously, they give the manager a deeper insight into the work process at the Agency and will influence the division of work at the Agency. Annual interviews were conducted in January 2015 and lasted from half an hour



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to one hour. They were conducted with all members of the staff who first filled out a simple questionnaire. They answered to questions about their work at the Agency, examples of good and bad practice in the work, what concretely they would change in the work at the Agency, their additional training and what burdens them most in their work.

Below is a summary of the findings from minutes and interviews.

**Examples of good practices:**

Experts - The process of training the experts was ranked the highest.  
Agency - Joining EQAR, good organization of the visit of the ENQA panel, a successful update of the Guidelines for ..., publication of the experts' reports online, international placement of the Agency, decent self-evaluation report 2013.

Work and

work conditions – work on the information system, flexible work hours, relaxed atmosphere, agreements about work, possibility of working from home, independence in conducting procedures, accessibility of the management, regular meetings, work without pressures.

Agency Council - List of practices of the Council's decision-making and a discussion about it

Director - His regular visits at higher education institutions

**Examples of bad practises:**

Agency - Anonymous letters and appeals without basis and which took the Agency's reputation and time because the opposite needs to be proven, slowness in fulfilling assignments from the action plan, not enough promotion of the Agency among students, not enough consultations, conferences with stakeholders, too slow realization of agreements, the responsibility for work is too concentrated in a small group of employees which causes an inefficient and non-transparent operation of the Agency, is the Agency en route to an inefficient and useless agent in higher education, not enough loyalty to the Agency, information leakage.

Staff - Poor information transfer to employees, not enough inclusion of employees in the strategic and content-related tasks of the Agency, too much freedom regarding work hours, too much "democracy" in how to work, uneven workload.

Director - Too soft leadership of the Agency, yielding to employees, failure to comply with the decision of the Court of Audit, some work processes are not defined, communication noises, failure to recognize issues, non-transparent operation of the management, the management works too slowly, failure of the management to act and the issues deepen, sometimes an unjustifiably enlarged workload, levelling.

Agency Council - Unprofessional operation of the Council, the decisions are overturn in appeal procedures too many times, not enough participation of Council members in the preparation and writing of decisions.

Experts - Sometimes not enough rigor in the operation of groups of experts, arbitrariness and inconsistency in the decision-making.

**Possible suggested changes:**



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- Agency - Departmental management arrangement, introduction of department heads, dispersal of responsibilities, introduction of human resource management, improvement of relationships at the Agency, better organization, transparency and efficiency, exact allocation of roles, better affiliation to the Agency, preparation of the strategy for the period 2015-2020, the Agency should perform analytical and research assignments.
- Staff - The inclusion of younger colleagues into strategic and content assignments of the Agency, better informedness of all employees, equal division of work, more efficient operation, more active participation of employees at work meetings, obligatory presence at the regular meetings and Council meetings, appointment of reliable employees to international commissions, more legal knowledge and more professional meetings, unification of the work of the staff.
- Director - More decisive leadership, equal division of work, adequate rewarding of employees, leadership should become more people-friendly and democratic, shorter and more efficient meetings, better transfer of information.
- Experts - more consultations for experts, unification of the experts' work,
- Agency Council - more professional decision-making of the Council, better and more active participation of Council members in the writing of decisions, better information transfer about the changes of study programmes.
- Miscellaneous - Too frequent changes can sometimes be counterproductive – the Agency is young and needs time.

### **What burdens me in my work?**

The most common answer was certainly – the work I do makes me happy and does not burden me at all. The rest was:

Relationships between the staff - Tense, bad relationships between co-workers and bad work conditions at the Agency, communication noises, interference of others in the work of individuals, too high workload, lack of homogeneity-lack of solidarity-lack of connection-lack of loyalty.

Work - Writing negative decisions, oral hearings (a written request for amendment would be more appropriate), the experts missing their deadlines, failure to file the files to the archive, slowness of the amendment of legislation, unsuitable light and temperature.

From the interviews and the filled-out questionnaires it is evident that the responses mainly divide into two big groups – to the responses from employees employed for an indefinite period and to the responses of employees employed for a definite period who are financed from the ESF resources. Even if the regular Monday meetings are intended for asking questions and informal discussions, such exchanges are virtually non-existent at the meetings.

The Director is regularly active as an evaluator in the EUA IEP (European University Association-Institutional Programme Evaluation). In 2014, he participated at the



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evaluation of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Macedonia. The Director has been elected as the CEENQA vice president and in the ECA executive committee.

In December 2014, the Director, along with the Polish (coordinator), Portuguese and Bulgarian agency and other partners (UL and UNG among others), signed a two-year Erasmus+ project EIQAAS (Enhancing Internal Quality Assurance Systems).



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## **PRESENTATION OF PERFORMANCE OF TASKS DEFINED IN CHAPTERS OF THE AGENCY'S WORK PLAN FOR 2014**

## A) ACCREDITATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND STUDY PROGRAMMES, AND EVALUATIONS OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES (2014)

<b>EXECUTIVE OBJECTIVE 1: ACCREDITATIONS AND EVALUATIONS</b>					
<b>Activity 1: accreditations in higher education</b>					
<b>Task</b>	<b>Implementation and accountability</b>	<b>Applications received in 2014</b>	<b>Applications processed in 2014</b>	<b>Anticipated No. of applications in 2015</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Initial accreditation of study programmes	Quality	13	22	15	
Re-accreditation of study programmes	Department /	150	85	238	
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions	Agency Council	1	4	2	
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions		5	4	12	
Transformation of higher education institutions		1	2	1	
Applications already submitted in 2014		76*	/	156	*received 2013
<b>Activity 2: evaluations of higher vocational colleges</b>					
<b>Task</b>	<b>Implementation and accountability</b>	<b>Applications received in 2014</b>	<b>Applications processed in 2014</b>	<b>Anticipated No. of applications in 2015</b>	<b>Notes</b>
External evaluation of higher vocational colleges	Quality Department / Agency Council	7	15	6	

Note: The applications to change study programmes are not considered in the table. According to the Fiscal Balance Act (ZUJF, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 40/2012), a private higher education institution may change the compulsory components of study programmes according to the same procedure under which they have been adopted. A university changes the compulsory components of study programmes on its own. It then informs the Agency on the modified compulsory components of study programmes within 30 days of their adoption. The Agency considers the modification when re-accrediting study programmes.

The data on the anticipated number of applications in 2015 for initial accreditations of study programmes and higher education institutions and the transformation of institutions are only estimates. Regarding the differences in the number of received and considered applications it should be taken into consideration that the applications come throughout the entire calendar year, especially the application for re-accreditation of study programmes (deadline: 30 September). Their consideration may therefore be completed in the next calendar year.

Explanations:



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The list of publicly available records of the accredited higher education institutions and study programmes is published at the Agency's website <http://www.nakvis.si> under three links

- [Public records on the accreditation of study programmes from 2004 to 2010](#)
- [Public records of study programmes accredited after 1 March 2010](#)
- [Plan for re-accreditations and public records on the accreditations of higher education institutions](#)

Additionally, MESS publishes the Register of Higher Education Institutions and their study programmes

[http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/delovna\\_podrocja/direktorat\\_za\\_visoko\\_solstvo/sektor\\_za\\_visoko\\_solstvo/razvid\\_visokosolskih\\_zavodov/](http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/direktorat_za_visoko_solstvo/sektor_za_visoko_solstvo/razvid_visokosolskih_zavodov/)

## Accreditations in higher education

### Quality assurance system in higher education

#### 1. Accreditation procedures in higher education

Granting accreditation or re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes is the basic activity of the Agency. It is an external system of quality assurance in order to continuously improve higher education and to enable a quality education. In 2014, the Agency completed **157** accreditation or evaluation procedures, in which it:

- granted accreditation to **22** study programmes (of the first, second, and third Bologna cycle);
- re-accredited **85** study programmes;
- granted accreditation to **4** higher education institutions;
- accepted **2** transformations of higher education institutions;
- re-accredited **4** private higher education institutions;
- carried out **30** procedures for the changes of study programmes and **10** procedures for the changes of higher education institutions.

In addition to that, there are accreditation procedures for **169** study programmes being conducted within the prescribed time-limits and **10** accreditation procedures, related to higher education institutions.

#### 2. External evaluation of higher vocational colleges

In 2014, the Agency carried out **11** evaluation visits, anticipated in the plan for 2013, which was adopted by the Agency Council (in the plan for external evaluation for 2013 there were 15 external evaluations for higher vocational colleges anticipated) and completed the procedures which were initiated in 2012.

Of the 11 procedures in 2014, the Agency confirmed in **9** cases that the higher vocational college achieves the statutory standards, and in two cases it did not.

**Procedures completed** from 1 January 2012 until 31 December 2012 and until 31 December 2013

Between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2014, the Agency completed

$212 + 150 + 157 = \mathbf{519}$  accreditation or evaluation procedures, in which it:

- granted initial accreditation to  $93 + 37 + 22 = \mathbf{152}$  study programmes (of the first, second and third Bologna cycle);
- re-accredited  $68 + 71 + 85 = \mathbf{224}$  study programmes;
- granted initial accreditation to  $6 + 2 + 4 = \mathbf{12}$  higher education institutions;
- re-accredited  $1 + 18 + 4 = \mathbf{23}$  higher education institutions;
- accredited changes to  $44 + 22 + 40 = \mathbf{106}$  study programmes.

In 2014, there were three extraordinary external evaluations.

The operation of the Council in 2014 was not only limited to making decisions on accreditations and re-accreditations. At the meetings (from 75 to 86) the Council also:

88 appointed groups of experts

12 returned reports to groups of experts and asked for an additional opinion

14 urged the applicants to amend the applications

6 sent submitted appeals to the Appeal Committee to rule on them

2 decided an oral proceeding be convened



1 stopped a procedure of external evaluation

At the initiative of the Council, 26 experts and nine students with a student status were entered in the register of experts for a period of five years.

The basic activity of the Agency will become harder and harder to perform in the coming year of 2015 because of incomplete legislation and uncertain financing.

## **B) ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY (activity listed in the action plan for 2013)**

The road of the development of an information system of the Agency was as follows. In spring 2014, a public tender was to be conducted (preparation of the tender documentation, production of the study and the selection of the provider), while the electronic form was expected to be ready in 2015.

Postponing the final establishment of a comprehensive information system to 2015 was not supposed to have a negative impact on the work process, since the electronic form for submitting the applications for accreditation and external evaluations, and other web applications would already be updated so that there would not be any major difficulties occurring in the work process. However, we are aware of the importance of the information system for the future operation of the Agency. It will mainly be used in preparing overview reports. We are aware of the criticism of the applicants.

In 2014, we prepared the appropriate documentation. In 2014, we successfully carried out the tender for the provider to build the information system in accordance with the provisions of the Public Procurement Act (ZJN-2). In September, the Agency held a public opening of offers to build and maintain the information system of the Agency. 4 offers arrived in time for the deadline. The lowest was 100,000.00 EUR, while the highest was 150,000.00 EUR. The estimated value of the project was 160,000 EUR. The tender was followed by the signing of the agreement with the selected contractor Optilab d.o.o., and the works on the development of the information system began at the end of 2014 and are expected to be completed in August 2015. An agreement for the establishment of the information system of the Agency in the value of 100,000 EUR was signed. There were no appeals against the selection of the provider. All activities were managed by the Agency employee Andrej Krčec.

### **Assessment of success in the achievement of the objective (realisation of tasks)**

<b>Activity: establishment of a comprehensive information system</b>		
<b>Task</b>	<b>Implementation and accountability</b>	<b>Task performed YES / NO / PARTIALLY</b>
Preparation of tender documentation.	Staff / Director	Yes
Publication of the tender and selection of the contractor.		Yes
Participation in forming and applying the support information system.		Yes



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Connection with the e-VŠ system.		Partially; subject to coordination
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The objective set for 2014 was achieved in full. The aim of establishing a renewed comprehensive information system is more efficient and rationalised work of higher quality and a simplification of accreditation and evaluation procedures and other work processes at the Agency. Data collection and drafting of reports will also be simplified.

### C) JOINING ENQA

The detailed course of admission to ENQA has been described in the operation of the Agency Council in the previous chapter. The Agency fulfilled both strategic objectives of its development for up to 2016 (registration into EQAR and admission to ENQA).

The Agency is listed in the register of trustworthy European agencies, EQAR [www.eqar.eu](http://www.eqar.eu) (October 2013 to 31 July 2018), and is now a full member of ENQA [www.enqa.eu](http://www.enqa.eu) (March 2015 to 6 March 2020).

The details about the decisions are included in the attached two documents:  
[http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/agencyreports/2013\\_05\\_SQAA\\_ApprovalDecision.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/agencyreports/2013_05_SQAA_ApprovalDecision.pdf)  
[http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Letter-ENQA-to-SQAA\\_180315.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Letter-ENQA-to-SQAA_180315.pdf)

The full report on the external evaluation of the Agency with recommendations are in the documents:  
[http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/agencyreports/SQAA\\_External\\_Review\\_Report.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/agencyreports/SQAA_External_Review_Report.pdf)  
<http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Review-report-of-the-SQAA.pdf>

Both external evaluations provide an opinion on the operation of the Agency by fulfilling 16 required European standards (ENQA ESG Part 2 and 3). Fulfilling the standards is rated as follows: - fully compliant, substantially compliant, partially compliant, non-compliant. The majority of the "compliance with conditions" must be marked as "substantially compliant".

The rankings of external evaluations of the Agency for the 16 standards were:

	EQAR evaluation (2013)	ENQA evaluation (2014)
fully compliant	7	10
substantially compliant	8	6
partially compliant	1	1
non-compliant	0	0

Both reports include well-meaning recommendations to the Agency for better operating, but it is worth mentioning the standards which the Agency complies with only partially. The EQAR requirement has already been met and we have published all final experts' reports. We will soon start publishing the decisions on accreditation. Problematic is the

fulfillment of the standard 3.4, which requires from the Agency to display long-term stable financing and is related to the staffing structure of the Agency. We have been planning with MISS, the National Assembly (the SMC Party) and the Ministry of Finance. The talks are ongoing in 2015 as well. But time is slowly running out.

#### **D) UPDATE OF THE AGENCY STRATEGY AND THE OBJECTIVES FOR 2014-2016**

The tasks in the Work Plan for 2014 have been defined by taking into consideration the strategic objectives of the Agency from the Strategy of the Development of the Agency for the Period 2011–2016, which was adopted by the Agency Council in November 2011. The operation of the Agency was mostly directed towards:

1. the establishment and further development of a quality assurance system of the Agency (mainly the establishment of an information system)
2. transformation of the quality assurance system in higher education and
3. cooperation in the development of higher education in Slovenia
4. international recognition of the Agency.

The present activity as well as those in items E) and F) were planned for the second half of 2014 and were not achieved in full.

In the four years of the operation of the Agency we concluded that we set too many activities and objectives in the action and work plan. In the operations of the Agency itself there are sometimes also additional time-consuming obligations (fulfilling the letters of request by the Court of Audit, changing the Higher Education Act - twice). Since the Agency does not already have an information system, we prepared, solely for the purposes of the Court of Audit, for example, 16 chapters, 38 pages of text and 330 attachments, and there are 4 smaller similar letters of request.

Therefore, we postpone the possible update of the Mission and Vision of the Agency and the defining of the strategic goals of the Agency for the period 2014-2016 by taking into consideration the ReNPVŠ11-20 to 2015.

#### **E) SYSTEM FOR NOTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE AGENCY**

Similar goes for this chapter as well. The establishment of an efficient system for notifying the stakeholders about important events, good practices and the changes of the Agency's documents shall be postponed to 2015.

But it should be noted that the Agency regularly and promptly answers all current questions it receives at the e-mail [info@nakvis.si](mailto:info@nakvis.si). These are not only questions posed by stakeholders but also of the broader public. One of the employees of the Agency is responsible for providing the answers.



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The Agency schedules press conferences about important events.

Last but not least, the Agency manages its own Twitter profile, @nakvis, where it connects with other institutions, such as @ceenqa @ENQAtwt @ESUtw @ECA\_association. The Twitter profile currently features 692 posts (tweets), we follow 292 users and the tweets by @nakvis are read by 89 followers – including three former ministers.

## F) TRAINING OF COUNCIL MEMBERS AND EXPERTS

“You cannot teach a man anything, you can only help him find it within himself.” - G. Galilei

“I never teach my pupils, I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.”- A. Einstein

The opinions are divided on the training of Council members, while the training of experts is a standard practice of the Agency and is described in the chapter on the operation of the Agency Council.

The Court of Audit also posed questions about the training of Council members. Since it was not formally executed, the Director violated paragraph ten of the article 51.h of HEA. The new Council members are trained through their work. While it is true that they did not attend any formal training, I do believe that stakeholders themselves ensure that they choose with their procedures the candidates for Council member who are suitable for the position, who know what the Agency does. Among the members of the Council are four former rectors, ministers and other distinguished citizens. In June 2013, only 4 Council members were replaced.

Upon the commencement of their term, every Council member received instructions for the work at the Agency – June 2013 and they occasionally receive current documentation regarding evaluations and accreditations. This was also forwarded to the Court of Audit. Every year the work of the Agency Council and individual members is evaluated.

## FINANCIAL RESOURCES

### OUTTURN OF TOTAL STATE BUDGET OF THE AGENCY FOR 2014

PP	Policy / Main programme / Sub-programme / Budget heading	2014 adopted budget (in EUR)	2014 established budget (in EUR)	2014 budget outturn (in EUR)	Share of budget outturn in the established budget
1	2	3	4	5	6 = 5 / 4
	<b>02 – Higher education, science, technology, and</b>				



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PP	Policy / Main programme / Sub-programme / Budget heading	2014 adopted budget (in EUR)	2014 established budget (in EUR)	2014 budget outturn (in EUR)	Share of budget outturn in the established budget
1	2	3	4	5	6 = 5 / 4
	<b>information society</b>				
	<b>0201 – Higher education</b>				
	<b>020101 – Higher education</b>				
9885	Salaries	314,366.38	306,356.55	304,464.57	99%
9886	Material costs	143,221.27	133,878.12	133,878.12	100%
9887	Investments	2,000.00	1,157.07	1,157.07	100%
9888	Higher education quality	34,391.76	32,663.77	32,079.35	98%
9889	Quality, competitiveness and responsiveness of higher education – ESF – 07-13 – EU	*794,106.55	*794,106.55	626,907.76	78.95%
9890	Quality, competitiveness and responsiveness – ESF – 07-13 – Slovenian part	*140,136.45	*117,136.45	110,535.81	94.36%

\* At the beginning of 2014, the adopted and established budget with the ESF amounted to EUR 1,332,500 (9889 = EUR 1,132,625 and 9890 = EUR 199,875). After the 2014 state budget had been revised, the adopted and established budget was reduced to EUR 934,243 (9889 = EUR 794,106.55 and 9890 = EUR 140,136.45). Subsequently, the funds for the budget heading 9890 were reduced to EUR 117,136.45 with the reallocation of resources to the general budgetary reserve in the amount of EUR 23,000. The adopted budget at the end of 2014 was therefore EUR 934,243 (9889 = EUR 794,106.55 and 9890 = EUR 140,136.45), and the valid budget amounted to EUR 911,243 (9889 = EUR 794,106.55 and 9890 = EUR 117,136.45).

The **available budgetary resources** outturn (salaries, material costs, investments, and the quality of higher education) of the adopted budget of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education amounted to **99%** in 2014 (in 2013 it was 100%).

**99%** outturn of the available budgetary resources is a result of the following:



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- the Act Amending the Public Sector Salary System Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 46/2013, 25/2014 – ZFU, 50/2014 and 95/2014 – ZUPPJS15)
- revised state budget in October 2014,
- the efficient use of the lump sum – certain costs were considered as indirect costs within the implementation of the ESF project.

The outturn of the resources available from the ESF European funds amounted to **78.95%** at the budget heading 9889, and to **94.36%** at the budget heading 9890 in 2014.

Such outturn of the ESF resources is a result of the following:

- unfinished informatisation of the Agency.

**If, in addition to the available budgetary resources, the ESF funds are taken into account, the established budgetary outturn in 2014 amounted to 87% (in 2013 it was 91.8%).**

The Agency performed the majority of the most important tasks specified in the Work Plan for 2014 in accordance with the strategic objectives and considering descriptive indicators set out in the explanation of the amending budget:

- implementation of accreditation and evaluation procedures for higher education;
- implementation of external evaluations of higher vocational colleges;
- maintenance of membership in representative European organizations;
- admission to EQAR and performance of the external evaluation for ENQA and
- active work aimed at establishing a uniform information system of the Agency - partially
- active participation in the development of the Slovenian higher education.

In 2014, the Agency continued to intensively examine the efficiency and applicability of the established external quality system for higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, and was assessing the suitability and applicability of accreditation and evaluation procedures and criteria in relation to stakeholders even in the process of self-evaluation. Based on the findings, proposals for revised and consolidated criteria for accreditation and evaluation were drafted, and the system for the training of experts was revised.

At the beginning of 2014, the Agency carried out the second training of candidates for the admission to the register of experts under the revised training programme. 36 candidates participated at the training. The general opinion on the execution of the training was very good. The training providers took the advice and remarks of the Agency Council into consideration, only one foreign expert was invited and there was no duplication of contents.

The Agency staff also regularly participates in the training of students-quality assessment evaluators at the SSU headquarters and respond to the invitations from higher education institutions.



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In 2014, the Agency received a negative assessment from the Court of Audit about its operation in 2011 and had to implement 3 corrective measures. In the post-audit report the Court of Audit deemed 2 out of 3 measures as suitable, and one was not suitable according to the Court. A violation of good business was determined and the Agency Council was ordered to implement an additional corrective measure. It occurred because of a collision in the legislation – it is an inconsistency of the Higher Education Act and the Decision on the Establishment of the Agency. The Court of Audit also instructed the Government of the Republic of Slovenia to harmonize the legislation to avoid false interpretations.

In 2014, the Court of Audit initiated a new audit at the Agency aimed to assess the efficiency of the procedures of evaluation, accreditation and granting concessions in the quality assurance and the diversification of study programme from 1 January 2010 to June 2014.

The postponement of the final establishment of a comprehensive information system of the Agency to 2015 will not have a negative effect on the work process of the Agency and we therefore do not expect any major difficulties in the work. However, we are aware of the importance of the information system for the future operations of the Agency, especially because it shall be harmonized with eVŠ at MESS and MPA and there will not be any duplication of entering data.

The table below shows the data on the resources that the Agency received as a direct non-governmental budget user in 2012, 2013, and 2014.

Integral resources: cover salaries for the Director and 9 employees employed for an indefinite period.

ESF funds (until 31 October 2015): cover salaries for 13 employees employed for a definite period and costs of all evaluations (accreditations) and appeals.

#### **COMPARISON OF THE RESOURCES SPENT BY THE AGENCY IN (in EUR) 2012, 2013, 2014**

		<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>
	<b>INTEGRAL RESOURCES</b>			
<b>1</b>	<b>Salaries</b>	<b>343,976</b>	<b>295,849</b>	<b>304,464</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Material costs</b>	<b>174,151</b>	<b>130,770</b>	<b>133,878</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Investments</b>	<b>12,525</b>	<b>1,828</b>	<b>1,157</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Council meeting fees</b>	<b>75,300</b>	<b>38,000</b>	<b>32,079</b>
	<b>1+2+3+4</b>	605,952	466,447	471,578
	<b>ESF RESOURCES</b>			



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		2012	2013	2014
5	Salaries	253,379	287,700	307,211
6	Accreditation costs	432,369	539,618	425,246
7	Investments	3,747	7,349	4,987
	5+6+7	689,495	834,667	737,444
	<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>1,295,447</b>	<b>1,301,114</b>	<b>1,209,022</b>
	<b>1+2+3+4+5+6+7</b>			

**The National Higher Education Programme 2011-2020** imposes on the Agency a very high number of duties, while stating in action no. 20: "the Agency shall develop and constantly update the external quality assurance system, including all higher education stakeholders

- Explanation: the Agency will create and update the external quality assurance system in full compliance with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.
- Financing of the action: From 2015, when the (co)funding of the Agency from the European Structural Funds expires, approximately 6 million of budgetary funds annually shall be earmarked for the Agency, increasing in line with the extent of work and complexity of operation." – end of quote.

**The Agency currently finances all its activities (salaries, accreditations, material costs, external experts, minimal investments, Agency Council, Appeal Committee) with approximately EUR 1.2 million annually. If the Agency received only a third (EUR 2 million) of the EUR 6 million planned in the NHEP 2011-2020 in 2015 (when the ESF funds expire), this would enable it to continue with quality work. If there are no funds, the Agency will not be able to pursue such work.**



## Preparation of the financial plan for 2014 and 2015

On 25 July 2013, the Government issued a decision including indicative limits to prepare the proposed revised budgets of the Republic of Slovenia for 2014 and the proposed budget of the Republic of Slovenia for 2015. After reviewing the financial situation and the indicative limits, it was established that the indicated distribution of budgetary expenditure for 2014 and 2015, the Agency's operation would be significantly affected, of which MF was then informed. The anticipated integral budgetary resources of the Agency for 2014 were additionally reduced by 8% compared to the revised 2013 budget. These resources sufficed in 2013 because certain costs were considered indirect costs within the project implementation (ESF resources). The ESF project was supposed to expire on 31 October 2014; fortunately, in June it was extended to 31 October 2015. At the same time, all contracts with the staff employed for a definite period were signed until August 2015.

In accordance with the general financial situation in the Republic of Slovenia, the Agency adopted a series of measures to reduce the use of integral resources in 2012, when the budget was revised, and again in the beginning of 2013 (payment of the essential monthly overheads only, no additional contracts were concluded, e.g. fire security, insurance of furniture, computer and other equipment, the Agency has no alarm system). The Agency does not have any resources in the integral part to execute an external revision of financial operation.

After the coordination meeting with the state secretary of MF and her team on 13 September 2013, and thanks to the fact that the ESF project funding had been extended until 31 October 2015, the Agency's budgets for 2014 and 2015 are now supposed to be financially sustainable, provided that the budget of the Republic of Slovenia is not further restricted which is hard to believe. Nevertheless, stable financing of the Agency's operation after 2015 will be put at risk if additional measures are not taken.

One of the conditions to become a member of ENQA is to meet ESG standard 3.4, stating that 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, which should be guaranteed long-term.

**In the Statement of the Estimate of Public Finance Internal Control, the Agency emphasized the risk it could not manage to a sufficient extent:** "The Agency is afraid of further reductions in funds for its operation, and will strive to preserve the funds for 2013, 2014 and to provide budgetary resources for 2015 and beyond, when the ESF project expires. Each revised and amended budget additionally increases the risk, even though the obligation of continuous financing of the Agency is stipulated in the HEA and the NHEP 2011-2020. The NHEP 2011-2020 even stipulates that the Agency will receive EUR 6 million from the budget; currently, the Agency operates with EUR 1.3 million per year (of which the integral resources are approx. 40% fewer each year). In 2013, the Agency was entered in



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EQAR; one of the conditions of admission is stable long-term funding – if this condition is no longer met, it might be removed from the register. A similar remark goes for the admission to ENQA, the ENQA ESG 3.4 standard is met only partially and it will have to be reported to ENQA in March 2016”.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

Employments financed from the budget funds are planned in the staffing plan of the Agency, while the ESF project documentation includes the plan for employment financed from the ESF funds.

At the end of 2014, there were 24 employees at the Agency: the Director and 6 employees in the General Affairs Department, and 17 employees in the Quality Department. In 2014, the number of staff was increased by one member compared to 2013 (to temporarily replace the employee on maternity leave).

At the end of 2014 two employees left the Agency.

The Agency accomplished almost all tasks specified in the Work Plan for 2014, but to achieve these objectives the staff was too burdened at many occasions.

In the future, continues efforts should be made to increase the number of employees, and to improve work organization, new systemization, and an amendment of HEA for promotions (particularly regarding a transition to institutional evaluation), so that the Agency will not have to conduct accreditation and evaluation procedures for a large annual number of study programmes.

The current staffing, in addition to other urgent tasks – international cooperation, cooperation with stakeholders, work regarding development, a significant number of appeals etc. – almost impossible to perform as much work, and not to overburden the staff in the process. Efforts should be made to obtain integral budgetary resources for the salaries of those employees who are employed under the ESF project until October 2015, which was announced and explained already in the Staffing and Financial Plan for 2013 and 2014, which had to be submitted by the Agency to MF.

In 2014, there were intensive talks with SMC parliamentary group in the National Assembly and with the Ministry of Finance.

At the beginning of 2015, the Director carried out annual work interviews. It arises from the interviews and the filled-out questionnaires that the responses can generally be divided into two larger groups – to the responses of employees employed for an indefinite period and to the responses of employees employed for a definite period and financed from the ESF resources. Even though regular Monday meetings are intended to asking questions and informal discussions, these exchanges are virtually non-existent at the meetings.

## **Integrity Plan**

On 12 February 2014, the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (CPC) adopted the new Guidelines for the Preparation, Implementation and Execution of Integrity Plans (hereinafter: the Guidelines). They entered into force on 7 March 2014. In accordance with the new Guidelines the persons liable are no longer

required to create an integrity plan every two years, but those persons liable who already have an integrity plan implemented, in accordance with Article 23 of the Guidelines, are included in the electronic register of risks, which also includes possible changes of risks along with a change of circumstances. The new Guidelines foresee for all persons liable obligatory annual reporting to the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption about the executed measures from the Integrity Plan (Article 24).

In 2014, the Agency included its integrity plan, adopted already in 2012, into the electronic register of risks and sent to the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption the report on the performance of measures from the integrity plan for the period 2011-2014. In November 2014, the Agency also appointed a new guardian of the integrity plan (who is also a member of the working group for the integrity plan), and in December a new member of the working group for the integrity plan was appointed. Therefore, on 8 December 2015, a new working group for the integrity plan was appointed with the Decision No. 010- 1/2012/1, and the decision for the appointment of the previous working group was cancelled. By appointing a new working group, the Agency fulfilled the requirement of Article 9 in the Guidelines, under which a third of the members of the group are to be replaced each year, as only by circulating the employees in the composition of the working group it is possible to ensure knowledge transfer when creating and implementing the integrity plan.

## CONCLUSION

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education SQAA (hereinafter: the Agency) has performed its mission in 2014: "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."

In addition to the tasks which the Agency must perform in accordance with the law and other acts, striving for a better and more supportive working environment in order to be able to make numerous and challenging tasks from the Work Plan. There were 102 higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges in the register of the Ministry with 937 accredited study programs in January 2015.

The Agency achieved in 2014/2015 the second most important strategic objective. It gained the full membership in ENQA. According to the report by international evaluators, the executive committee of ENQA granted SQAA full membership in ENQA. The work of the Agency is fully compliant with 10, substantially compliant with 6 and partially compliant with 1 standard out of 17 ESG standards (Parts 2 and 3). The Agency is partially compliant with standard 3.4 - sustainable financing of the Agency.

Thus, the Agency was entered in the register of trusted agencies EQAR <http://www.eqar.eu> (2013) and is now a full member of ENQA <http://www.enqa.eu> (2015).

The Agency acquired greater recognition among higher education institutions and among stakeholders in higher education as well as in the general public, and also achieved greater visibility in the Slovenian area and internationally. It continuously sought to improve its quality, which is the basis for an efficient, universally accepted system of external quality assurance in higher education agreed by all stakeholders. Unfortunately, the general public often learns about the activities of the Agency only in connection with negative events in our higher education system (eg. non-accredited programs, plagiarism).

In 2014, the Agency entered the fifth year of its activities.

## POVZETEK

Leto 2014 je agencija udejanjala svoje poslanstvo: "Agencija skrbi za razvoj in delovanje sistema zagotavljanja kakovosti v slovenskem visokem šolstvu. Deluje vsebinsko in formalno odgovorno ter svetovalno do vseh deležnikov in udeležencev v terciarnem izobraževanju v skladu z evropskimi in svetovnimi smerni razvoja."

Poleg opravil, ki jih mora agencija opravljati v skladu z zakonom in drugimi akti, je stremela k vzpostavitvi boljšega in spodbudnejšega delovnega okolja, da bi lahko opravila številne in zahtevne naloge iz delovnega načrta. Januarja 2015 je bilo v Sloveniji 102 visokošolskih zavodov in višjih strokovnih šol, v razvid ministrstva pa je bilo vpisanih 937 študijskih programov, ki se izvajajo na visokošolskih zavodih.

Agencija je v letih 2014/2015 dosegla drugega izmed pomembnih strateških ciljev. Pridobila je polnopravno članstvo v ENQA. Od 17 ENQA ESG standardov (2. in 3.del) agencija po mnenju mednarodnih presojevalcev in izvršnega odbora ENQA deluje popolnoma (10), pretežno (6) in delno (1) v skladu z njimi. Problematičen je standard 3.4 - dolgoročno stabilno financiranje agencije.

Tako je agencija vpisana v register zaupanja vrednih agencij EQAR (2013) [www.eqar.eu](http://www.eqar.eu) in je polnopravna članica ENQA (2015) [www.enqa.eu](http://www.enqa.eu) .

Agencija si pridobiva večje zaupanje visokošolskih in višješolskih deležnikov in širše javnosti ter tudi dosega večjo prepoznavnost tako v slovenskem kot v mednarodnem prostoru. Nenehno si je prizadevala za izboljševanje lastne kakovosti, kar je temelj za učinkovit, z vsemi deležniki dogovorjen in splošno priznan sistem zunanjega zagotavljanja kakovosti v visokem in višjem šolstvu. Na žalost širša javnost spoznava dejavnost agencije ob slabih dogodkih v našem visokem šolstvu (neakreditirani programi, plagiatorstvo).

Leta 2014 je agencija stopila v peto leto svojega delovanja.

**Additional sources:**

(available at the website of the Agency)

Work and Financial Plan for 2014

Business Report for 2014

Self-evaluation Report for 2014

Minutes of internal meetings of the Agency staff in 2014

ENQA Report 2015

Letter to the president of ENQA 2015

The Agency Council has concurred with the Report on the Work and Operation of the Agency for 2014 at its meeting on 21 May 2015.

I would like to thank everybody who participated in preparing this report on work and operation of the Agency in 2014.

Dr Ivan Leban,  
May 2014.