

SELF-EVALUATION REPORT OF THE AGENCY FOR 2018 AND 2019



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Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije
za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

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All Agency employees, Director, members of the Agency Council and representatives of external stakeholders participated in the preparation of the self-evaluation report.

The self-evaluation report was approved by the Director of the Agency on 28 February 2020.

The Agency Council granted consent to the self-evaluation report at its 148th session on 27 February 2020.

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1. DEFINITIONS

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

ECA – European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education

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

ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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

ESU – European Student Union

EUniQ - Developing a European Approach for Comprehensive QA of (European) University Networks

EQAR – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

eVŠ – Record and Analytical Information System for Higher Education in the Republic of Slovenia

NKKVŠ - National Commission for the Quality of Higher Education

SEP – self-evaluation report of the Agency

ŠOS – Student Organisation of Slovenia

SVŠ – Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education

VTI – higher transnational education

ZViS – Higher Education Act

ZVSI – Higher Vocational Education Act

ZUP – General Administrative Procedure Act

2. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency) underwent the second external evaluation. The external evaluation was carried out by a group of experts of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA. Most of the activities in 2018 were therefore focused primarily on the preparation for the external evaluation and, after receiving the evaluation report, on the elimination of identified (partial) inconsistencies. In February 2018, a new president of the Agency Council was elected, and in early April, shortly before the visit of the ENQA group of experts, a new Director of the Agency was appointed as well.

The composition of the self-evaluation group preparing the self-evaluation report for 2018 and 2019 was slightly different than in previous years. This is mainly due to the findings of the ENQA group of experts, which stressed during the external evaluation that external stakeholders were not sufficiently involved in the preparation of the self-evaluation report. Therefore, the Agency amended the Rules of Procedure in May 2019, inter alia by stipulating that the self-evaluation group shall include a member of the Agency's Council, and that the extended composition of this group shall also include representatives of external stakeholders.

Compared to previous self-evaluation reports, this report takes into account a different self-evaluation period, which is now bound to a calendar year, mainly due to the harmonisation of data with the work report to be drafted each year for the previous calendar year.

Since the previous self-evaluation period ended in February 2018, this report covers the period from 1 March 2018 to 31 December 2019.

3. DESIGN OF THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

As there were many comments on the structure of the self-evaluation report in the Agency's external evaluation process, claiming that it was not prepared in accordance with the Guidelines for ENQA agency reviews (hereinafter: the ENQA Guidelines), the Agency took these comments into account when drawing up the amended Quality Manual. The composition of this report is therefore adapted to the ENQA Guidelines.

Following the visit in the context of external evaluation, the Agency started to prepare an action plan for 2018 and then for 2019, taking into account the findings of the Agency's external evaluation and planning tasks that the ENQA group of experts considered to be not fully in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Many tasks and documents pointed out by the ENQA group of experts were performed or prepared by the Agency before submitting the response to the report in August 2018 (adopted communication plan, human resource development plan, publication of reports, etc.). Tasks that require more time and corresponding preparation were envisaged in the action plan for 2019.

To assess the situation and quality of the Agency's operation, two surveys among stakeholders were carried out in this self-evaluation period. A survey among all stakeholders in higher education and higher vocational education was made in July 2019 (2019 self-evaluation survey). The survey was completed by 978 respondents; 380 survey questionnaires were completed in total. The survey was structured on the basis of a five-point rating scale. In September 2019, a survey on satisfaction and integrity was carried out among experts, Agency Council members and a Agency employees.

The analysis of the results of the surveys is presented in this report: the results of both surveys are presented throughout report, and the analyses are attached to the report as well. The analysis of the results of the surveys contributed to the quantitative assessment of the state of quality in all areas of the Agency's operation and showed areas that could be further improved in the coming years.

The self-evaluation group consisted of four employees and one Agency Council member; also participating was the head of the Department of Analytics, International Cooperation and Information Technology as a coordinator. Representatives of external stakeholders appointed at the Agency's invitation by the Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Slovenia, the Union of Independent Institutions of Higher Education, the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges and Student Organisation of Slovenia also participated in the preparation of the report. The core group met at several meetings and coordinated the work electronically. The extended group including representatives of external stakeholders participated in the preparation of the survey questionnaire, the analysis of the results and the text of the draft self-evaluation report.

In preparing the self-evaluation report, findings from the report on the Agency's work and operation for 2018 and information on the Agency's operation obtained at meetings with various stakeholders, monthly Agency Council sessions, consultations or training sessions, management college meetings etc. were taken into account.

4. TERTIARY EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA

According to the Higher Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia (Uradni list RS), Nos. 32/12-UPB7, 40/12-ZUJF, 57/12-ZPCP-2D, 109/12, 85/14, 75/16, 61/17 ZUPŠ and 65/17; hereinafter: the ZViS), the Agency is established as a public law entity for quality assurance in higher education and for development and advisory work in the field for which it has been established.

Tertiary education in the Republic of Slovenia consists of higher education and higher vocational education. The Agency assesses the quality of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges in the framework of procedures of accreditation (of higher educational institutions and study programmes) and external evaluation (of higher educational institutions and study programmes and higher vocational colleges).

Slovenia has 47 higher education institutions, of which 7 are universities and 40 are independent higher education institutions; the list is available on [the Agency website](#). The total number of study programmes in the Republic of Slovenia is 953.

The Republic of Slovenia has 48 higher vocational colleges: 29 public and 19 private.

Higher education institution	Number of study programmes
University of Ljubljana	445
University of Maribor	204
University of Primorska	97
University of Nova Gorica	27
New University	17
University of Novo mesto	22
Independent higher education institutions	141
Total	953

*on 31 December 2019

The Agency shall be responsible for the following accreditation procedures:

- initial accreditation of a higher education institution,
- accreditation of a study programme,
- re-accreditation of a higher education institution,
- accreditation of transformations of a higher education institution.

The Agency also performs the following external evaluations:

- regular evaluation of a higher education institution,
- extraordinary evaluation of a higher education institution,
- extraordinary evaluation of a study programme,
- evaluation of a sample of study programmes,
- evaluations of higher vocational colleges.

The initial accreditation shall be granted to a higher education institution for five years. On the basis of evaluation, re-accreditation is granted to a higher education institution for five years or for a shorter period which should not be longer than three years if major flaws or inconsistencies have been discovered in the institution's operation or its quality assurance system, and a deadline for its remedy is set.

Accreditation to a study programme shall be granted for an indefinite period. This may be terminated if the accreditation of the higher education institution is terminated, if so decided in the procedure of extraordinary evaluation of a study programme or higher education institution, or if this is requested by the higher education institution.

A novelty brought by the 2016 amendment to the ZViS is evaluations of a sample of study programmes. The Agency annually performs evaluations of a sample of study programmes with the purpose of counselling higher education institutions in study programme quality assurance. The sample is determined by the Agency Council in an annual plan in the following way: each year the sample contains at least 2% of accredited study programmes implemented by higher education institutions in the Republic of Slovenia at the time.

4.1 Higher vocational education

Higher vocational education in the Republic of Slovenia is governed by the Higher Vocational Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, Nos. 86/04 and 100/13; hereinafter: the ZVSI). It is provided by public and private higher vocational colleges. Public colleges shall be established by the Republic of Slovenia as public educational institutions or as organisational units of educational institutions. Private colleges may be established by Slovenian and foreign natural or legal persons. They may be established as educational institutions or as commercial companies, or organised as organisational units of institutions, commercial companies or other legal persons¹.

The procedure of adoption of higher vocational study programmes is not within the competence of the Agency. In accordance with Article 51t of the ZviS, the Agency is competent for carrying out external evaluations of higher vocational colleges in accordance with criteria and procedures determined by the Agency Council.

¹ Article 6 of the ZVSI

4.2 Higher education

Higher education is governed by the ZViS. Higher education institutions in the Republic of Slovenia comprise universities, faculties, art academies and professional colleges that may be established as public or private higher education institutions. They may provide study programmes as independent higher education institutions or as university members.

Universities shall be autonomous, scientific research, artistic and educational higher education institutions with a special status that ensure the development of science, expertise and art and, through faculties, art academies and professional colleges in the education process, transfer knowledge from several scientific or artistic fields and disciplines. For the establishment of a university, study programmes at all three cycles for at least four scientific research disciplines according to the Frascati classification and at least five fields of education according to the KLASIUS levels of classification must be accredited².

Faculties shall predominantly perform scientific research and educational activities in the areas of one or more related or interconnected scientific disciplines and shall foster the development thereof. For the establishment of an independent higher education institution that is a faculty, the conditions for the provision of study programmes for at least two cycles shall be met³.

Art academies shall predominantly perform artistic and educational activities in the areas of one or more related or interconnected artistic disciplines and shall foster the development thereof. For the establishment of an independent higher education institution that is an art academy, the conditions for the provision of study programmes for at least two cycles shall be met⁴.

Professional colleges shall perform educational activities in the areas of one or more related or interconnected professions and shall foster the development thereof. For the establishment of an independent higher education institution that is a professional college the conditions for the provision of at least the first cycle shall be met. Professional colleges may also perform research work if so defined in their memorandums of association⁵.

4.3 Tertiary education in detail

An amendment to the ZviS that introduced the Bologna Declaration in Slovenia's higher education area was adopted in May 2004.

Upon the adoption of the aforementioned amendment to the ZViS, the question remained as to the relationship between graduates of study programmes adopted before the entry into force of the amended Act and graduates of study programmes under the Bologna Declaration. This was regulated by the [ZViS amendment of 2006](#)⁶.

The implementation of the first Bologna study programmes began in the 2005/2006 academic year. Gradual introduction of the Bologna reform was completed in the 2009/2010 academic year. The last students of pre-Bologna study programmes completed their studies in the 2015/16 academic year.

ZviS classifies educational study programmes into three cycles:

² Articles 3, 6 and 14 of the ZViS

³ Articles 4 and 14 of the ZViS

⁴ Articles 4 and 14 of the ZViS

⁵ Articles 5 and 14 of the ZViS

⁶ Article 15 of the transitional and final provisions of the ZViS-E

- a) first cycle:
 - academic study programmes,
 - professional higher education study programmes,
- b) second cycle:
 - master's study programmes,
 - integrated master's study programmes,
- c) third cycle:
 - doctoral study programmes.

Study obligations in study programmes are evaluated by credits according to the ECTS. 60 credits are allocated to each individual year of a study programme. Professional higher education study programmes and academic study programmes (first cycle) comprise 180 to 240 ECTS credits and last between three and four years.

Master's study programmes comprise 60 to 120 credits and have a duration of between one and two years, where the total duration of programmes in the same field, including the first-cycle study programme, is five years. Master's study programmes comprising 60 credits allow students who have completed first-cycle studies comprising 180 credits an additional year in order to obtain the total 120 credits necessary to complete the master's programme. The duration of study under study programmes that provide education for professions regulated by European Union directives must be in line with such directives. Integrated master's study programmes for other professions in the Republic of Slovenia comprise 300 credits and last three years.

Doctoral study programmes comprise 180 to 240 ECTS credits and last between three and four years.

The 2016 amendment to the ZViS included in the process of accreditation of educational study programmes for regulated professions the ministries responsible for professions that will be acquired by graduates after completing study programmes that educate for regulated professions. The responsible ministry shall grant its consent in the accreditation procedure; otherwise, an accreditation of such a programme is not possible.

In addition to educational study programmes, there are also study programmes for advanced training, which are a form of lifelong learning and are intended primarily for improving, supplementing, deepening and updating knowledge. These comprise a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 60 credits.

The Republic of Slovenia also provides transnational education, which includes all forms and methods of higher education in which an officially recognised study programme is carried out entirely or in part in a country other than that in which the institution responsible for the higher education programme has its registered office.

Universities, faculties and art academies may implement all types of study programmes. Professional colleges as a rule implement first-cycle higher education vocational study programmes and study programmes for advanced training and, if they comply with special conditions, also second-cycle study programmes.

Graduates obtain a diploma and a professional or academic title determined in accordance with the Professional and Academic Titles Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, Nos. 61/06, 87/11 – ZVPI and 55/17). Along with a diploma, a diploma supplement has also been issued since 2000; it is free of charge and issued in the Slovenian language and one of the official EU languages.

At the beginning of 2016, the Slovenian Qualifications Framework Act entered into force, which regulates, inter alia, the placement of qualifications levels in the Slovenian Qualifications Framework, the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Higher vocational study programmes comprise 120 credits and have a duration of two years. Accreditation of higher vocational study programmes and higher vocational colleges is not within the competence of the Agency, but within the competence of the ministry responsible for education (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport; hereinafter: the MIZŠ). The Agency only carries out the procedures of external evaluation of higher vocational colleges implementing higher vocational study programmes.

Subject to the fulfillment of certain conditions, graduates of higher vocational colleges may transfer to the second year of first-cycle study programmes implemented by higher education institutions.

5. HISTORY, PROFILE AND ACTIVITIES OF THE AGENCY

5.1 Short history of the Agency's operation

The Agency was established on the basis of the amended ZviS in 2009 by the Decision establishing the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, Nos. 114/09 and 57/15) as a public body for the assurance of quality in higher education and for development and advisory work in this field. It is a direct non-governmental budget user. It started operations on 5 March 2010, and the constitutive session of the Agency Council as the highest decision-making body of the Agency was held on 14 April 2010.

It assumed the competences from the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia (SVŠ) which operated through three senates – accreditation, habilitation and evaluation senate. The evaluation senate assumed the competences for evaluation from the National Commission for the Quality of Higher Education (NKKVŠ). The Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education was established within the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology to provide administrative and operational support to the operation of the SVŠ and all three senates; in August 2008, its competences were assumed by the Secretariat at the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education.

Although the SVŠ, whose work is continued by the Agency, did not have formally established procedures for regular monitoring, identification and assurance of its own quality, it surveyed stakeholders, especially in external evaluation procedures, and collected the opinions of experts (evaluators) on the course of evaluations, thus improving the quality of its work. The Meta-report of the Senate for Evaluation for 2007 was prepared, as well as the report on the work of the Senate in 2009. Both were published on the Agency website.

All these bodies emphasised compliance with the ESG, the implementation of evaluations in line with the ESG, and independence. A systematic analysis of external evaluation reports and an analysis of the results of self-evaluation reports were also prepared for the period from 2010 to 2013.

Since 2013, the Agency has been included in the European Register of Agencies (EQAR) and is a full member of the ECA Accreditation Consortium, CEENQA Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies, the International Association of Quality Assurance Agencies (INQAAHE) and, since 2015, a full member of the ENQA, its membership having been extended in April 2019.

5.2 Composition and activities of the Agency

5.2.1. General

At its 124th meeting, on 15 March 2018, the Agency Council adopted the new mission and vision of the Agency, which consolidates its commitment to the development and operation of the quality system in Slovenia's higher education.

Mission

The Agency provides for comparability and international recognition of Slovenian higher education area and strives for continuous improvement of its quality. It operates with substantive and formal responsibility, in expert, professional and independent manner, and provides counselling for all stakeholders in tertiary education in accordance with the European and global development orientations.

Vision

Through active involvement in the implementation of processes in the field of quality assurance and improvement in higher education, the Agency will influence the national and international higher education area.

Strategic goals of the Agency set by 2020 are the following:

- a) improving the professional work of the Agency,
- b) strengthening the independence and authority of the Agency,
- c) strengthening the quality culture,
- d) renewal of criteria and other acts of the Agency,
- e) establishing an efficient and user-friendly information system of the Agency,
- f) extending membership in ENQA and EQAR and strengthening the international cooperation of the Agency,
- g) reorganisation of the Agency work,
- h) development work.

Since the Agency's strategy adopted in early 2017 was prepared for the period up to 2020, it is necessary to review the fulfillment of the strategic goals and prepare a new medium-term strategy for the next period.

The proposal of the stakeholders is that the Agency should play a more active role in the development of policies in the higher education area, and that it should start actively connecting stakeholders, especially in the field of employability.

The Agency's tasks are set out by the ZviS:

- to oversee the functioning of the system of quality assurance in higher education and higher vocational education,
- to determine the procedures and criteria for external evaluations and accreditations and other criteria and regulations,
- to determine minimum standards for appointment to titles of higher education teachers, scientific staff and higher education staff at higher education institutions,
- to carry out procedures of:

- external evaluation (of higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges),
 - initial accreditations of higher education institutions,
 - accreditations of study programmes,
 - re-accreditations of higher education institutions,
 - accreditations of transformations of higher education institutions,
- to establish and update the register of experts, appoint groups of experts and provide the training of experts,
 - to review the modifications of mandatory components of study programmes,
 - to make public the decisions of the Agency, evaluation reports, annual evaluation and accreditation reports and analyses,
 - to keep publicly accessible records on the basis of the ZviS,
 - to cooperate with higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, advise them, and promote the implementation of self-evaluations,
 - to cooperate with international institutions or bodies for quality assurance in higher education,
 - to oversee the conformity of the Agency's operation with EU standards and international principles in the field of quality assurance,
 - to collect and analyse self-evaluation reports and reports of external evaluations of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges,
 - to perform development tasks in the field for which it has been established.

The bodies of the Agency are the Agency Council, the Director and the Appeal Committee.

5.2.2 Agency Council as the first-instance decision-making body

The Agency Council is the highest decision-making body. [It consists of 11 members:](#)

- 3 members are appointed by the Rectors' Conference,
- 1 member is appointed by the representative association of independent higher education institutions,
- 1 member is appointed by the representative association of higher vocational colleges,
- 2 members are appointed by the representative organisation of students in cooperation with student councils,
- 1 member is appointed by representative employers' associations by agreement,
- 1 member is appointed by representative trade unions in the field of higher education by agreement,
- 2 members are appointed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia based on public invitation, namely one from among the experts in the field of higher education or its quality assurance who study or work in the Republic of Slovenia, and the other one from among the experts in the field of higher education or its quality assurance who study or work abroad.

During this self-evaluation period, the composition of the Agency Council changed several times. Ten members' term of office expired; three of them were students. The last two

new members of the Agency Council were appointed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia in October 2019.

During this self-evaluation period, the Agency Council held two elections of the president of the Agency Council: first in March 2018 due to the resignation of the former president of the Agency Council and second in May 2019 due to the expiration of the term of office of the president of the Agency Council. For the same reason, the new deputy president of the Agency Council was elected in May 2019.

The Agency Council tasks are defined in Article 51 h of the [ZViS](#).

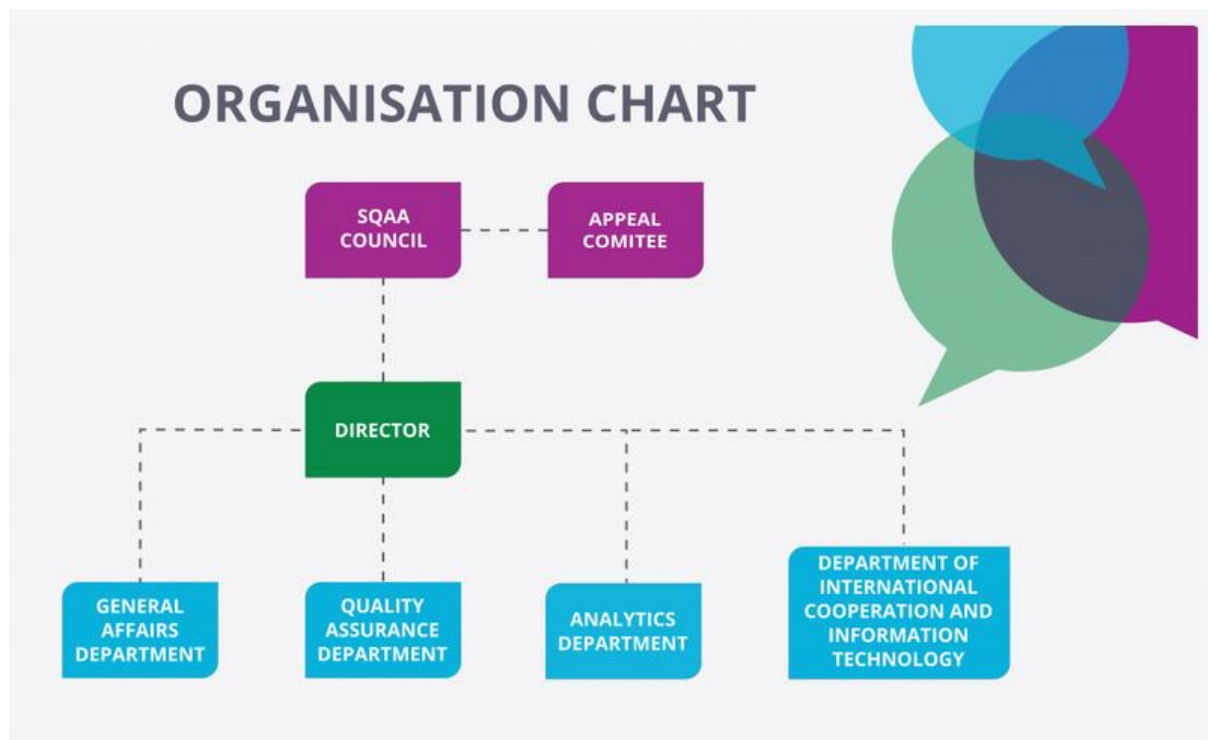
The information on the Council decisions are presented in the following chapter (5).

5.2.3 Director of the Agency

The Director represents and acts on behalf of the Agency and organises and directs its work and operations. The Director shall be appointed for the period of five years by the Agency Council on the basis of a public call for applications. The deputy will substitute for the Director in their absence.

At its 124th session, the Agency's Council appointed a new Director, who began his five-year term on 2 April 2018.

The professional service of the Agency consists of three departments: Quality Assurance Department, General Affairs Department and Analytics, International Cooperation and Information Technology Department. The latter was established in 2018 when the Agency was reorganised. The work of departments is led and coordinated by heads of department, who have their alternates.



5.2.4 Appeal Committee

The Appeal Committee shall be appointed by the Agency Council on the basis of a public invitation. It is composed of three members; each member has an alternate. The Appeal Committee shall decide on appeals against decisions adopted by the Agency Council in the procedures for accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes. If the Appeal Committee grants an appeal, it shall remand the case to the Agency Council for reconsideration. The decision of the Appeal Committee shall be final. An administrative dispute before the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia is possible.

Since the second four-year term of office of the Appeal Committee members had expired in December 2018, the process of appointing new members had to be carried out. Since the number of eligible candidates who applied for the first public call in September 2018 had not been sufficient, the public call was repeated in November. In June 2019, the Agency Council appointed three new members of the Appeal Committee and one alternate.

Two more alternates must be appointed to the Appeal Committee. Our conclusion is that the Agency finds it difficult to obtain candidates for members and alternate members of the Appeal Committee, so we suggest that the public call be sent to institutions where lawyers who could meet the conditions of the call are employees, members or associates (e.g. law faculties, Bar Association, courts) to forward the public call to potential candidates.

6. QUALITY ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE AGENCY

6.1 Areas of assessment by types of accreditations or external evaluations

The areas of assessment by which the Agency assesses higher education institutions and study programmes are set out in the Accreditation Criteria.

The quality standards and the content of the assessment of achieving these standards shall be defined according to individual areas of assessment. The content of the assessment of achieving these standards and detailed instructions for filling in an application are defined in forms that are an integral part of the [Accreditation Criteria](#) (Articles 51 to 54).

The procedure of initial accreditation of a higher education institution shall assess the following:

1. functioning of the higher education institution,
2. human resources,
3. material conditions.

The procedure of re-accreditation of a higher education institution (with a regular or extraordinary evaluation) shall assess the following:

1. functioning of the higher education institution,
2. human resources,
3. students,
4. material conditions,
5. internal quality assurance and improvement, transformation, update and implementation of study programmes.

The procedure of accreditation of a study programme shall assess the following:

1. composition and content of the study programme,

2. concept of the implementation of a study programme.

The areas of assessment in the process of extraordinary evaluation of a study programme or evaluation of a study programme within the evaluation of a sample of study programmes are the following:

1. internal assurance and improvement of quality of the study programme,
2. transformation and update of a study programme,
3. delivery of the study programme.

The areas of assessment of higher vocational colleges are determined in the Criteria for the external evaluation of higher vocational colleges (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, Nos. 21/18 and 69/18; hereinafter: External Evaluation Criteria):

1. functioning of the college,
2. human resources,
3. students,
4. material conditions,
5. internal quality assurance and improvement, and implementation of study programmes.

6.2 Electronic submission of applications

The Accreditation Criteria adopted on the basis of the 2016 ZviS amendment entered into force on 5 August 2017. They determined the electronic submission of applications on forms prepared through the eNakvis information system.

In order to ensure the highest level of data security, ENakvis uses state infrastructure (it is hosted by the server infrastructure of the Ministry of Public Administration (MJU)). In September 2017, when the launch of eNakvis was scheduled, the MJU introduced a stricter security check system for the installation of applications. Security check was completed as late as in February 2018. The MJU stated that the main reason for the long duration was a high load of the system (quite a few "larger" applications, such as the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, were to be installed) and the fact that the Agency was the first to undergo stricter clearances. After the completion of the first checks, the application was adjusted to eliminate security risks. After a successful re-check, the application was installed on the production environment in April 2018.

Since the operation of the eNakvis information system was enabled only on 1 June 2018 for reasons beyond the Agency's control (change of legislation, change of security scheme, connection of various information systems, testing, etc.), applicants submitted applications in accreditation and evaluation procedures on an electronic data carrier (USB stick) from 1 March 2018 to 31 May 2018, and the Agency later transferred the data to eNakvis. From 1 June 2018, applicants were able to submit applications in electronic form through eNakvis.

6.3 Decisions in accreditation procedures

From March 2018 to December 2019, the Agency Council had 25 meetings, of which three were correspondence and one was extraordinary.

During this self-evaluation period, the Agency Council decided on 65 applications for accreditation or re-accreditation of study programmes, 4 applications for the initial

accreditation or re-accreditation of a higher education institution and 7 applications for accreditation of a transformation of higher education institutions; it also issued an opinion on 24 colleges. It also took note of 986 modifications of study programmes. Some procedures were completed according to the provisions in force earlier.

Table: ACCREDITATIONS AND EVALUATIONS (situation on 31 December 2019)				
Accreditations in higher education				
Task	Positive decisions on applications submitted prior to the ZviS-K amendment	Positive decisions on applications submitted after the ZviS-K amendment	Number of rejected applications or negative decisions of the Agency Council	Total
Study programmes				
Initial accreditation of study programmes	4	34	2 (rejected) 4 (refused)	44
Re-accreditation of study programmes	20	/	1 (before the ZViS-K amendment)	21
Sample evaluations of study programmes	/	12	/	12
Extraordinary evaluations of study programmes	1	1	0	2
TOTAL	25	47	7	79
Higher education institutions				
Initial accreditation of higher education institutions	0	0	2	2
Re-accreditation of higher education institutions	0	2	0	2
Accreditation of transformations of higher education institutions	0	7	0	7
TOTAL	0	9	2	11
Evaluations in higher education				
Task	Opinions that higher vocational colleges meet	Opinions that higher vocational colleges meet	Opinions containing established irregularities	Total

	the quality standards prescribed by law and criteria (previous criteria for higher vocational colleges ⁷)	the quality standards prescribed by law and criteria (new criteria for higher vocational colleges ⁸)		
Higher vocational colleges				
External evaluation of higher vocational colleges	8	15	1	24

The Agency Council **accredited** 44 new study programmes and **refused** applications for the accreditation of 4 study programmes. The reasons for the negative decision were the following:

- the applicant failed to demonstrate active research projects or programmes in the context of the institute's operation,
- the applicant failed to meet the conditions from the Accreditation Criteria in the field of human resources,
- the programme was not appropriately classified into fields and disciplines,
- the study programme in its structure and content does not offer the students comprehensive knowledge and does not help them achieve the objectives set and the planned competences or learning outcomes in view of the requirements of Standard 1 of the Accreditation Criteria. Admission requirements for some subjects do not reach the level of difficulty of the study cycle, there is inadequate syllabus, lack of basic subjects,
- the conditions for the participation in work in some subjects do not comply with the enrollment conditions.

The Agency Council **rejected** the application for accreditation of 2 study programmes because it considered that it was not competent for them. Since the Appeal Committee granted the appeals, the Agency attempts to regulate the procedure for accreditations of such study programmes with the MIZŠ.

In the procedures initiated prior to the introduction of institutional evaluation, the Agency Council **re-accredited** 20 study programmes for an indefinite period of time. It did **not re-accredit** one study programme entered in the procedure before the 2016 ZviS amendment because:

- the composition of the study programme in connection with methodological subjects was not appropriate for the third-cycle doctoral studies according to Article 33 of the ZviS,
- the scientific-research activity through projects and programmes and publications was not continuously demonstrated throughout the accreditation period,
- no procedure for determining the suitability of a title obtained abroad has been carried out for higher education teachers from abroad; doctoral studies graduates whose

⁷ Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 9/11)

⁸ Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 21/18)

mentors were elected to titles in higher education institutions abroad thus obtained an academic title without their mentors demonstrating that they had been appropriately elected to titles.

The Agency Council **re-accredited** 2 higher education institutions and accredited 7 transformations of higher education institutions: 2 transformations of higher education institutions and 5 changes of locations.

Agency Council **refused** two applications for the initial accreditation of a higher education institution for the following reasons:

- due to the inadequate human resource structure and the lack of scientific- research references of the founders for the field in which the higher education institution wanted to be accredited,
- because the founder did not meet the conditions in the field of integration into the environment, because it did not submit appropriate professional analyses of employment opportunities for graduates and the field of operation of the higher education institution, because it did not demonstrate appropriate professional and development work in the fields of education and professional work of the higher education institution.

3 universities and 9 independent higher education institutions submitted applications for re-accreditation at the end of September 2019.

Termination of procedure

During this self-evaluation period, a trend of withdrawal of applications from procedures emerged, which resulted in the termination of procedures. Namely, applicants withdrew their applications for accreditation of study programmes in five procedures, after it was established at a Council meeting that the conditions or quality standards from the Accreditation Criteria were not fully met.

In one case, the withdrawal of an application stayed the procedure of transformation of a higher education institution.

In one case, the process of re-accreditation of a higher education institution was stayed because the institution ceased operating.

Regulated professions

After some completed procedures, the Agency found that ministries were not sufficiently aware of their responsibilities under the ZViS. To this end, it proposed to ministries to prepare and publish the criteria according to which they will assess whether to grant their consent to the study programme or not. Ministries are not responding to the Agency's proposals, so the Agency will have to pay even more attention to this area in the future.

6.4 Decisions in evaluation procedures

Extraordinary evaluation of a higher education institution or a study programme:

During this self-evaluation period, the Agency Council received 8 initiatives for the implementation of an extraordinary evaluation procedure.

With regard to these initiatives, the Agency Council took the following decisions:

- in one case, it included the study programme in the Evaluation Plan of the sample of study programmes for 2019;
- in one case, it initiated extraordinary evaluation of two study programmes; in the continuation of the procedure, however, it stayed the procedure of initiated extraordinary evaluation for one study programme, as it found that the institute did not implement one of the programmes;
- in three cases, it did not initiate the procedure of extraordinary evaluation. In two initiatives, the Agency Council decided, after receiving the responses of the higher education institutions, that there was no justified suspicion of major and systematic deficiencies, while the second initiative referred to issues that do not fall within the competence of the Agency.

The Agency Council submitted three initiatives to higher education institutions. The Agency Council did not yet receive the response to two initiatives by the end of 2019. The response to one initiative has been sent by a higher education institution, so the Agency Council will decide on the initiative next year.

Evaluation of a sample of study programmes:

The 2016 amendment to the ZviS eliminated programme evaluations and introduced the procedure of evaluation of a sample of study programmes. Such evaluation procedure does not conclude with a decision but with recommendations to a higher education institution. The Agency has included in the evaluation plan of the sample of study programmes for 2019 study programmes which had not been re-accredited before, and for study programmes that have dislocated units outside Slovenia. Higher education institutions were acquainted with the selection criteria and had an opportunity to submit remarks to the proposed plan. The Agency Council adopted the evaluation plan of the sample of study programmes at its 133th session.

By the end of 2019, the Agency Council addressed 12 study programmes included in the sample. As it identified major deficiencies or inconsistencies in four procedures, it set a deadline for higher education institutions to report to the Agency Council on the implemented measures, which were part of the recommendations. If major deficiencies or inconsistencies were not eliminated, the Agency Council would, in accordance with Article 51t of the ZViS, decide on the implementation of an extraordinary evaluation of the study programme. This happened in one procedure, so the Agency Council again invited the higher education institution to respond in detail to the identified inconsistencies. After the receipt of the report and evidence of the higher education institution, the procedure was completed.

At its 143th session, the Agency Council confirmed the Sample Evaluation Plan for 2020. The Plan included study programmes that were not yet in the re-accreditation procedure, as well as joint study programmes and programmes that are implemented through contracts for the implementation of transnational higher education (hereinafter: VTI).

6.5 Appeal procedures

In 2018, the Appeal Committee met at three sessions where it decided on six cases. In 2019, it met twice and decided on two cases.

Overview of the Appeal Committee decisions:

Year	Number of rejected applications or negative decisions of	Number of appeals addressed by the	Number of granted appeals (remanded for reconsideration)	Number of refused appeals
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	the Agency Council	Appeal Committee		
2016	12	3	0	3
2017	3	1	0	1
2018	8	6	5	1
2019	4	2	1	1

In 2018, the Appeal Committee made three decisions on the appeals against the Agency Council decisions, by which the latter declared itself incompetent for deciding. In all three cases it decided that the appeal was well-founded and that the competence of the Agency Council to decide on the matter is established. In two cases, it wrote that, if the Agency Council deems it necessary, the Agency Council should adopt or change its decision criteria. The Council of the Agency has not yet decided on these two matters in new procedure; it is a question of the competence to decide on the accreditation of study programmes of the international federation of universities (EMUNI). In order to regulate the basis for decision-making, the Agency, in agreement with the MIZŠ, proposed an amendment to the ZViS, which is in the process of being amended.

In one case, the Appeal Committee decided three times: first, it remanded the case to the Agency Council for reconsideration due to incomplete establishment of facts and provided instructions for the Agency Council to observe in reconsideration (to assess all remarks and supplement the report of the group of experts); second, it remanded the case to the Agency Council for reconsideration with the instruction that it should establish the correct and complete facts, and instructed the Council to remand the case after completing the procedure. Upon receipt of the amended case, it decided that the appeal was well-founded and remanded the case to the Agency Council, instructing it to review in detail the amended final report of the group of experts and the response to the Agency Council's invitation and verify whether the group of experts had indeed examined the data which were the subject of the complaint with due precision and diligence.

The reason why the applicant lodged an appeal twice in the same procedure was that the facts were incompletely established by the group of experts. The latter must assess all the applicant's comments in their final report, which means that they must determine whether the standards and criteria are met and justify why they are not. The Appeal Committee found that they had not done their job properly, so, following the instruction of the Appeal Committee, the Agency Council remanded the case to the group of experts, who then supplemented their report.

In 2018, applicants did not file any appeals against two negative decisions of the Agency Council, while in 2019, they filed an appeal against every negative decision of the Agency Council. The comparison with 2016 and 2017 shows an increase of the number of appeals in the last two years. One of the reasons is certainly that in 2017, due to the preparation of new criteria harmonised with the ZViS amendment from 2016, it was not possible to submit applications in accreditation procedures, so there were fewer decisions and consequently fewer appeals.

We note that some experts do not establish the facts accurately enough and do not assess all applicant's comments. The Agency should therefore pay more attention to guiding and monitoring experts in the preparation of reports, which is the task of the staff in charge of the procedures and of the Agency in training and consultation sessions intended for experts.

The Agency Council also decided on the request to exclude staff from the re-accreditation process of 4 higher education institutions due to bias. The Agency Council refused the request as ill-founded, the applicant appealed, and the appeal will be decided on by the Appeal Committee.

The Agency Council also considered a proposal to reopen the procedure of re-accreditation of a study programme that it initially rejected as unauthorised, but the Appeal Committee

found, after the filed appeal, that the Agency Council should decide on it. The Agency Council allowed the reopening, the higher education institution was invited to submit evidence, but the procedure is not yet completed.

6.6 Groups of experts

In accordance with the ZviS, the Agency keeps a register of experts containing Slovenian Agency experts that participate in accreditation and external evaluation procedures.

In May 2018, the Agency Council adopted the new Criteria for experts of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency in the field of Higher Education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 21/18; hereinafter: Criteria for Experts) that amend the conditions to be met by candidates to be entered in the register of experts, and the process of their training.

The Agency council appointed 82 groups of experts in accreditation and evaluation procedures.

In this self-evaluation period, the Agency Council entered 30 new experts in the register of experts. 19 experts were re-entered in the register after five years, while 17 did not meet the conditions for re-entry, mainly because they did not participate in consultations and trainings or because they did not participate in assessments.

Due to the shortages in individual areas in the register of experts, the Agency Council issued two public calls for the entry of experts in the register, namely in January and September 2019. Even after the expiration of the public call deadlines, there is still a shortage of experts in law in the register.

There are 195 experts currently entered in the Agency register, 16 of whom are students.

In the last self-evaluation period, the Agency carried out 6 training courses for experts, the last in November 2019: it was a consultation for experts with an emphasis on assessing quality standards and exchanging good practices in writing accreditation and evaluation reports.

6.7 Types of procedures in accordance with the criteria for international cooperation

In accordance with the Criteria for international cooperation in higher education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 69/17; hereinafter: Criteria for international cooperation), the Agency decides on the following:

1. accreditations of joint study programmes of Slovenian and foreign higher education institutions (hereinafter: international joint study programme),
2. notifications of international joint study programmes accredited abroad,
3. entry of a VTI contract in the public records,
4. notifications of study programmes of the international federation of universities.

The accreditation of an international joint study programme is carried out when a Slovenian higher education institution intends to implement it together with a foreign higher education institution that is not accredited by the agencies on the EQAR list. Such a programme is assessed according to quality standards by the areas of assessment referred to in Articles 17 and 18 of the Accreditation Criteria (composition and content of a study programme and the concept of the implementation of a study programme).

If a higher education institution with a registered office in the Republic of Slovenia intends to implement a study programme with a foreign higher education institution accredited by

an EQAR-listed agency and the accreditation of this programme was performed by an EQAR-listed agency, such a programme shall be notified to the Agency.

VTI may be implemented or organised on the basis of a VTI contract or without a contract.

The conditions for the notification of study programmes of the international federation of universities are determined in Paragraphs 8 and 9 of Article 32 of the ZviS.

During this self-evaluation period, the Agency Council accredited one international joint study programme and entered one contract on the implementation of transnational higher education in the VTI public records.

The sample of study programmes to be evaluated in 2020 covers international joint study programmes and VTI.

INTERNAL QUALITY OF THE AGENCY

In May 2019, the Agency amended the Rules of Procedure, especially in the areas of improving communication with stakeholders. The Rules of Procedure determined the inclusion of stakeholders in self-evaluation procedures and the extension of the composition of the self-evaluation group by an Agency Council member and representatives of external stakeholders. The Agency tested the opinion of stakeholders about different areas of the Agency's operation by the 2019 self-evaluation survey.

Management of the Agency

The need for reorganisation of the Agency by introducing a new sector was identified already in the previous self-evaluation period. This was finally realised in September 2018. The change in classification divided employees in three departments: Quality Assurance Department, General Affairs Department and the newly established Analytics, International Cooperation and Information Technology Department. The post of Deputy Director was systemised. An IT specialist was employed in September 2018. An overview of tasks by departments was prepared, and heads of departments were appointed who directly determine the tasks of employees in their departments. However, as tasks performed by the Agency are partly interconnected (accreditation and evaluation procedures, self-evaluation of the Agency, participation in working groups, etc.), employees cooperate with one another and also perform tasks outside their sector.

The results of the survey on satisfaction and integrity of employees (September 2019) showed that two thirds of employees are satisfied with the reorganisation, which is expected to have a positive impact on the work of the Agency. This is especially evident in the more specified duties of individual employees, stronger bonds between employees, better flow of information relevant to individuals' work, and greater transparency of the Agency's work. On the other hand, the Agency still has some room for improvement, as employees are not satisfied with the work organisation according to which they still perform tasks that belong to another department; they receive work instructions from the head of their own and another department as well as directly from the Director, while their superiors do not have a complete overview of their work and workloads.

The management introduced **weekly college meetings**, where the Director, Deputy Director and heads of departments are acquainted with the latest developments in the field of work and examine important issues related to the Agency's work. Although the minutes of these meetings are sent to all employees, the latter think that they contain too little information. If necessary, meetings of managers and employees by individual departments are convened after college meetings, where the manager reports to employees on the content of college meetings. At the end of August 2019, weekly thematic meetings were introduced, at which employees report on current content in the field of the Agency's work and on the events they have attended.

The **standardisation of work** in the Agency continues. To this end, meetings are organised at which the staff members involved in a particular field resolve any dilemmas and issues that arise in their work. In connection with this, the Agency has made several requests to the MIZŠ to explain individual provisions of the ZViS that are important for the proper work of the Agency. The interpretations of the Act as well as the interpretations of the Agency Council criteria are published on the [Agency website](#). The described manner of standardisation of work has proven positive, which is also acknowledged by stakeholders. Respondents, namely, gave a very high score to the Agency staff, especially their work in accordance with regulations. Counseling and professional conduct at work were highly rated, while coordination and uniformity at work received a slightly lower, but still high score (3.6).

In the survey on satisfaction and integrity, employees were asked if they were well enough **acquainted with the information** concerning their work. Two thirds of employees are well informed, while on the other hand, a third of employees believe that information is not provided adequately. Due to the division of work into departments and the intertwining of work in several departments, employees believe that a certain department is not familiar with the current important tasks of another department.

We note that the reorganisation of the Agency has consolidated and strengthened some activities that were not so well organised and developed before (international cooperation, information technology, etc.). The overview and supervision over the conduct of accreditation and evaluation procedures have strengthened. On the other hand, several employees still carry out tasks from the field of several or even all departments. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the involvement of department heads and to monitor activities spread across several departments.

The introduction of departments has resulted in a pyramid structure of the Agency management. The advantage of this change is a better overview of the management over the Agency's work, while an opportunity for improvement is to increase the employees' autonomy and inclusion in the process of adopting decisions (policies, plans and regulations). Professional and practical experience of all employees is, namely, of key importance for the Agency development.

In addition, the division of the collective occasionally disrupts the flow of information among departments, which may have a negative impact on the coherence and uniformity of work. The reorganisation has not yet brought a significant progress in the Agency's analytics activity that has remained sporadic. The latest announcement of a change in the Agency's Analytics, International Cooperation and Information Technology Department, from which the independent analytics department will be split, promises the consolidation and steady development of this activity.

We estimate that the Agency still has considerable reserves in improving the provision of information to employees, especially in the field of conducting procedures. We suggest that each thematic meeting should begin with the topics discussed at the latest college meeting, so that employees are better informed and have more opportunities to participate in making important decisions.

During this self-evaluation period, the management paid a lot of attention to **coordinating open issues between different stakeholders** (accreditation of a university member, finding solutions for students in case a higher education institution is not re-accredited, accreditation of own study programmes of the international federation of universities, etc.). Solutions have been agreed for some issues, while some have remained open. These open issues are also one of the reasons for the preparation of an autonomous **Agency Act**, which the Agency drafted for the most part of 2019. The idea for an independent act arose mainly from the desire to simplify procedures and try to at least partially exempt them from the ZUP, increase the autonomy of the Agency and expand its competences in relation to international cooperation. The draft act was prepared in the summer, then the preparation of interpretations of individual articles began. After talks with representatives of the MIZŠ in December 2019, it was agreed that the content of the Agency Act should

be included in the ZViS amendment; if this is not possible, the Agency will propose the adoption of an autonomous Agency Act.

The idea of a special Agency Act elicited a positive response from different stakeholders. Gathering all provisions governing the Agency work in a single document would make the Act more transparent. It would also facilitate any systemic changes whose implementation is more difficult with amendments to the ZViS. According to the latest agreement with the representatives of the MIZŠ, it will be necessary to try to change the ZViS provisions relating to the Agency in the next year, and if this fails, submit the draft Agency Act to the legislative procedure.

As in previous self-evaluation periods, the Agency dealt with problems regarding **business premises** (frequent ingress of water) in 2018 and 2019. In January 2019, the Agency Council was notified of the problem of rented premises. The Agency management alerted the owner to submit a renovation plan and regularly report to the Agency on completed renovations.

We note that the employees' work was frequently disturbed. In view of the renovation plan, which is expected to be implemented over a longer period of time, and given the fact that the lease will expire in autumn 2021, we suggest that the management timely start activities to rent other suitable premises, where the Agency could move after the current lease agreement has expired. When looking for new premises, the suggestions and possible wishes of employees should be taken into account, so that the work will take place in the premises where the employees feel comfortable.

Human resources

In accordance with the adopted human resource plan, the Agency has 20 employees: Director, Deputy Director, 7 employees in the Quality Department, 6 employees in Analytics, International Cooperation and Information Technology Department, and 5 employees in the General Affairs Department.

In accordance with the ENQA report, the Agency adopted the **Human Resource Development Plan** in August 2019. To this end, a survey was conducted among employees in August 2018 which showed their wishes and needs for professional development and training, as well as satisfaction with past professional development.

In 2018 and 2019, employees participated in 41 education and training courses, workshops and consultations in Slovenia and abroad. They regularly report on the participation at individual events at joint meetings. Employees also have the opportunity to express on their own initiative their wishes and ambitions regarding work and professional development to the head of the department and the Director during the year. Each year, a survey is also conducted to prepare an education plan for the following year, in which employees state their suggestions for professional education and training. Their proposals are implemented taking into account the available financial resources, which increased significantly in 2019 compared to the previous year.

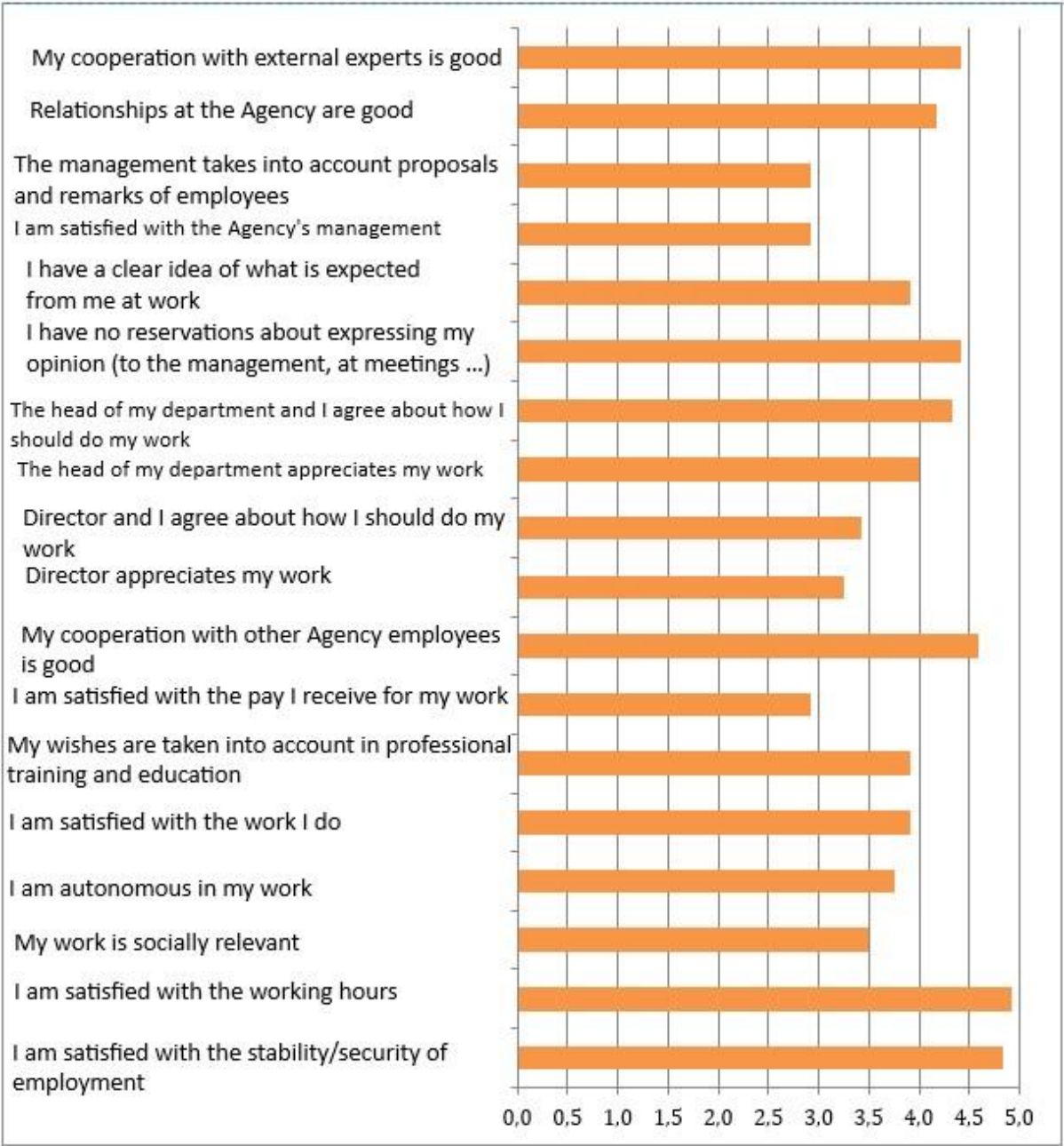
The results of the survey among employees confirm that they feel that their opinions in this area are taken into account and are satisfied with the educational opportunities they have. The Director of the Agency is very much in favor of training and education of employees and encourages them to acquire higher education. One employee has completed his master's studies, while two employees have not yet completed education.

In the Human Resources Development Plan, the Agency stated its intention to hire employees for jobs that correspond to their acquired education. This was one of the reasons for the changed systemisation at the end of 2019, which realises the stated intention. The change will be gradually implemented next year.

The professional conduct of the staff was also noticed by the stakeholders, who commended their responsiveness at all stages of the procedure, organisation of visits, contacts with stakeholders and correct approach to the issue. Good survey results indicate the improvement of the professional work of the Agency.

Another survey was carried out to check employee satisfaction. The analysis of the survey on satisfaction and integrity showed the general satisfaction of employees with their work; they are most satisfied with working hours, job security, good relations between employees, the ability to express their opinions and influence on their work. They are slightly less satisfied with the Agency’s management and taking into account employees’ comments to the management, and with the payment for the work.

Diagram 1: Assessment of employees’ satisfaction



The results of the survey on satisfaction and integrity, as well as conversations among employees show the observations of the staff that they are not completely independent in conducting procedures. In their opinion, the latter are influenced by heads of departments and the Director. We point out that a person conducting the procedure must be

independent in their work, taking into account the instructions of the superior regarding the unification of work, as well as the deadlines and the rules of procedure.

Given the nature of the problem, we suggest that this should be addressed by the Agency's integrity working group.

Recognising the importance of the work-life balance of its employees, and seeking to increase their motivation and affiliation, the Agency applied for a [family-friendly company certificate](#). The contract was signed in November 2019 and the activities will begin in 2020.

***Annual interviews** were not conducted during this self-evaluation period. Since it is an important instrument for determining employee satisfaction, motivation and plans in the previous and following year, it would be useful to reintroduce it. Given the intertwined and interconnected nature of the Agency's work, the method of conducting annual interviews will have to be determined, as the direct superior who is supposed to interview an employee often does not have a complete overview of the latter's work; employees are, namely, assigned tasks also directly by the Director or head or another department. Our suggestion is that annual interviews with employees should be conducted by the Director and, if necessary, by the head of the department as well. We also suggest the management to introduce alternative mechanisms for rewarding employees or raising motivation, e.g. additional training courses, etc.*

During this self-evaluation period, there have been **changes in some internal acts of the Agency** governing the organisation of work and some rights of employees (changed working hours – the possibility of early arrival and later departure from work, human resource development plan, rules for concluding contracts, etc.). Proposals for changes were made and discussed by employees at joint meetings. The proposals were also harmonised with the trade union. The survey results show that employees are satisfied with the changes.

2018 and 2019 were marked by new European legislation in personal data protection, due to which the Agency began to intensively verify and harmonise the protection of personal data. It gave more training opportunities to employees and Council members, took care of adequate security of premises (fire alarm, burglar alarm, consistent locking of document cabinets, air-conditioned server room and replacement of the server with traceability software). As some of the measures have not been fully implemented, our estimate is that they will continue in 2020.

The Agency also regularly **promotes workplace health**. To this end, it carried out a survey in 2018, giving employees an opportunity to express their satisfaction and wishes regarding activities. During this self-evaluation period, 13 activities were carried out (joint cleaning of the refrigerator, taking paper to the collector, sports day – trip to Primorska region, hike to the Rožnik hill, joint healthy meal, basket of seasonal fruit, trip down the Ljubljanica river, etc.).

The promotion of care for health, which the Agency introduced a few years ago, has been well received at the Agency. The activities of the health promotion group are assessed as beneficial and stimulating for boosting the well-being of employees. Since well-being at work is of key importance for the satisfaction and good relationships both among employees themselves and between management and employees, our proposal is that such activities continue and that this area deserves increased attention. The introduction of measures contributing to this (flexible working hours, measures for obtaining the Family-Friendly Company certificate etc.) increases the employees' satisfaction and their motivation for successful work.

Financial resources

According to Article 51m of the ZViS, the funds for the work of the Agency are provided from integral resources. About EUR 1,350,000 are annually earmarked for its operation (about EUR 1,457,000 in 2020).

As a budget user, the Agency is obliged to manage the budget funds in a cost-effective, rational and transparent manner. The Agency's operation is also subject to an internal audit, which must be carried out every three years by the Agency. The contractor selection process started in autumn 2019, and in early December an external contractor for performing internal control was selected, which must prepare a review and report on the performed internal audit by the end of February 2020.

Our estimate is that the budget resources are fully sufficient for a smooth performance of all Agency's activities.

Agency Council

At its 129th session, the Agency's Council introduced the item of **thematic discussions** at its sessions, so as a rule, it discussed at each session a new topic or issue, which was presented either by external contractors or employees of the Agency.

As this encourages cooperation between employees and Council members, this innovation has proven to be well received. The Council members are thus better acquainted with the work of the professional service, and they are presented with analyses that help to ensure the consistency of decisions and the unification of procedures.

At its 132nd session, the Agency Council abolished the **Commission for Extraordinary Evaluations**, which had assessed the received initiatives for extraordinary evaluation. Instead of the Commission, the initiatives are now referred to the rapporteur of the Agency Council and forwarded to the higher education institution concerned for response. Based on the response of the institute, the Agency Council decides on the (non) initiation of an extraordinary evaluation procedure, or includes the subject study programme in the evaluation of a sample of study programmes to be evaluated in this period.

The Agency Council abolished the Commission because of the optimisation of procedures. The question remains, however, if the decision was justified enough. Prior to the abolition, the Commission assessed initiatives for extraordinary evaluation and proposed further action to the Agency Council. Now this is the task of the rapporteur of the Agency Council, who, in cooperation with the Agency professional service, proposes further action to the Agency Council. Responsibility is therefore shifted to an individual member of the Agency Council and staff members as well as to the Agency management, which does not seem a reasonable decision from the point of view of independence and the possibility of influencing the procedure. Our proposal to the Agency Council is to assess the soundness of this decision in view of the importance of the discussed topic, and possibly to include a member of the Council – a student – in the assessment of the soundness of an initiative for extraordinary evaluation.

In April 2018, the Agency Council adopted the amended **Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council** in order to harmonise it with the amended ZViS. Provisions on the role of the rapporteur, on the exclusion of members of the Agency Council in case of connections with the applicant, and on a correspondence session were amended, and the payment to experts was also slightly amended. The Rules of Procedure were later amended three times. The most important change is that in case of disagreement with the deficiencies identified in the final report, an Agency Council member must submit a written justification of their position to the meeting materials. Agency Council members have acted according to the mentioned provision of the Rules of Procedure several times. Namely, an Agency Council decision must be based on the criteria or provisions of the law, and the written justification of an Agency Council position in case of a decision differing from the findings of the group of experts also facilitated the writing of grounds for decisions.

Our estimate is that the amendment to the Rules of Procedure has achieved its purpose. Discussions at the Agency Council meetings are thus more substantive and well-founded.

If there are opposing views, the matter is postponed to the next meeting, when it is reconsidered with prepared written justifications. This also resulted in a higher number of stayed procedures, as applicants withdrew their application from the procedure before the next meeting. This results in fewer negative decisions by the Agency Council, and gives higher education institutions an opportunity to properly prepare a new application and re-submit it to the accreditation procedure. On the other hand, withdrawal of applications from accreditation procedures incurs costs in procedures that are borne by the Agency. In view of the above, it would be appropriate to consider a change in the funding of accreditation procedures so that the costs of experts in the event of withdrawal of the application would be borne by the applicant. Similar regulation should apply to other cases where a change in the applicant's application has additional financial consequences for the Agency.

Agency Council members were excluded from procedures 94 times. This is due to the amendment to the Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council, which sets out the cases in which an Agency Council member must be excluded, and due to which, when preparing the material for an Agency Council meeting, it is checked in advance if there are any reasons for the exclusion of any Agency Council members.

The 2019 self-evaluation survey brought a slightly lower score of the impartiality of the Agency management (3.3). Independence and transparency, inclusiveness and efficiency and effectiveness received higher scores, while the professional conduct of the management received the highest score (3.6). These results were one of the reasons why the Agency intended to organise training in integrity for employees, Agency Council members and the Appeal Committee members provided by the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption on the topic of integrity in November 2019. Due to the lecturer's illness, the training was postponed to the beginning of 2020. The Integrity Plan Working Group, which meets several times a year to discuss and consider the matter, plays an important role in raising awareness of and pointing out potential risk factors. It regularly submits the measures and the report on the implemented measures from the Integrity Plan to the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption.

Since the Working Group has not yet discussed the results of the integrity-related survey, our suggestion is that it should meet as soon as possible and prepare possible starting points for training and any further measures.

External stakeholders

In the 2019 self-evaluation survey, the Agency also checked the satisfaction of stakeholders from various aspects of the Agency's operation. The results of the analysis of the survey showed that stakeholders are satisfied with the content offered by the Agency at events such as trainings, consultations and conferences. They believe that the Agency takes into account the expectations, initiatives and rights of stakeholders, but there remains an opportunity to strengthen cooperation with representatives of the wider intellectual or cultural community. These comments refer mainly to the strengthening of cooperation with higher education institution libraries and the academic community, as well as quality committees at institutions and colleges.

To this end, the Agency organised in November 2019 a consultation for quality committees and individuals involved in self-evaluation at higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. The consultation was well received, with participants expressing a desire for several similar consultations and trainings offering an opportunity to exchange good practices.

According to the written comments of the respondents of the self-evaluation survey, they want an agency that would listen to the real problems of higher education and higher vocational education, enable a better understanding of the state of various scientific disciplines and be better recognised especially among students. According to the respondents, specific opportunities to improve the Agency's work include increasing the usability and practicality of study programme contents and

checking the conformity of contents for market needs, increasing cooperation with foreign agencies, more user-friendly application forms, human resource development at all levels (especially professionals, staff as well as teachers at institutions and colleges together with checking the procedures of their habilitation) by reducing numerical indicators in the criteria, emphasising the morality of activities of all stakeholders in tertiary education, or, on the other hand, simply by increasing the autonomy of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges.

Our suggestion is that working meetings or workshops are organised with specific groups of stakeholders to discuss specific topics.

The findings of survey analyses monitoring satisfaction with practically all fields and segments of the Agency's operation are observed in the self-evaluation of the Agency and in the preparation of the action and/or operational plan. More detailed analyses of the surveys are attached as part of the self-evaluation report, and the stakeholder opinion report is also published on the Agency's website. The Agency acquaints all stakeholders with the findings of satisfaction monitoring.

8. INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE AGENCY

Through international activities in European and international networks, associations, international projects and bilateral partnerships, the Agency brings fresh knowledge and practices to its work, thus helping to strengthen the culture of quality and ensuring the comparability of the Slovenian and European higher education areas.

In 2019, the Agency drafted the International Cooperation Strategy focusing on five key areas:

- strengthening international links through international events, meetings and memberships in quality assurance in higher education,
- strengthening international visibility of the Agency by active participation in different European and international projects,
- promotion of international partnerships and development of guidelines, trends and good practices in quality assurance in higher education,
- consideration and following of international documents and recommendations for an effective work of the Agency, and
- following cross-border education activities that include VTI.

Based on the strategy, the department in charge of international cooperation prepared a plan of international activities and determined the institutions and the envisaged time frame for the implementation of the planned activities.

In accordance with the plan, the Agency established and formalised cooperation with several related agencies (Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education – ASHE, National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NEAQA), established cooperation in international projects (EUniQ), participated in international meetings, consultations and sessions, and actively participated in executive committees, general assemblies and working groups of associations within ENQA, ECA, CEENQA and EQAR.

In October, two employees participated in the international committee for the selection of members of the council of the Moldovan Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ANACEC. It was the first such cooperation of the Agency in the international higher education area.

In October 2019, three employees participated in the international training for professionals according to the European approach, organised by the ECA in the framework of long-term cooperation.

We assess the exchange of professionals between agencies as positive, as this enables familiarisation with the methods of work at foreign agencies and adoption of good practices that have proven appropriate in other higher education systems.

The self-evaluation group assesses the establishment of strategic goals and activities in international cooperation as positive, and the Agency should, in accordance with the strategy and plan, continue its efforts to implement international activities leading to quality and internationally comparable work of various European agencies.

9. COMPLIANCE WITH ESG (PART 3)

Standard 3.1: Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

At its 124th meeting, on 15 March 2018, the Agency Council approved the new mission and vision of the Agency, which consolidates its commitment to the development and operation of the quality system in Slovenia's higher education in accordance with European development trends and is published in all key documents as well as on the website. In addition to regular external quality assessment in accreditation and evaluation procedures, the Agency regularly performs evaluations, which are, in accordance with its mission, based primarily on advising institutions in improving the quality of educational, research and professional work and/or study programmes.

The Agency Council includes a member working or studying abroad, and two members-students appointed by the representative organisation of students (in cooperation with student councils) that includes students of independent higher education institutions. Groups of experts for assessments in higher education always include a foreign expert. The exception is the procedures of evaluations of higher vocational colleges, where, on the basis of the initiative of the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges, there was a change in the criteria according to which the appointment of a foreign expert in these procedures is no longer mandatory.

Draft Agency Council acts are always harmonised with all stakeholders: higher education institutions, Union of Independent Institutions of Higher Education, higher vocational colleges, Agency experts, students etc. The course of coordination is as follows: the Agency Council first adopts a draft act, which is sent to stakeholders electronically. The Council may also meet with individual stakeholders. Stakeholders' comments on the draft document are examined by the Agency Council and the comments are taken into account in the preparation of the draft act. The latter is published on the Agency website and sent to stakeholders. The Agency Council takes into account the received observations and adopts the act at one of the following sessions. After the adoption, the act is published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia.

Another way to strengthen cooperation with stakeholders is the weekly visits of the Director and Agency staff to higher education institutions in Slovenia. The purpose of the visits is to review cooperation, examine the possibilities for deepening mutual relations and exchange general views on broader higher education topics. The introduction of visits is a clear step towards building trust of higher education institutions as the most important external stakeholders.

The amended quality manual brought an active involvement of external stakeholders in the Agency's self-evaluation process. External stakeholders, acting through their representatives, participate in the preparation of survey questionnaires, review of the analysis of surveys, and the preparation of a draft self-evaluation report. The opinion of external stakeholders and their view of the issue allows the Agency to make a report more

understandable and to include content that is relevant to stakeholders. Stakeholders' suggestions are written down in the report.

Together with the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Agency organised a conference on quality in higher education in May 2019, which was attended by many key stakeholders in higher education. For this occasion, a special annual publication was prepared containing an overview of the Agency work in one year, an analytical contribution of the Agency and a collection of papers presented at the conference. Such a conference, for which the Agency's annual publication will also be issued, will become an annual tradition.

Reorganisation of the Agency by establishing a new department for analytics, international cooperation and information technology, which enables more organised and controlled performance of tasks in the field of international cooperation, analytics, organisation of international and domestic meetings and conferences, implementation, development and updating of information system etc. will enable the deepening of analytical and development work and international cooperation in the field of quality assessment, which will help to improve all the activities of the Agency and also influence higher education policy.

In August 2018, the Agency prepared a Communication Plan, which determined the person responsible for communication with the public. The Agency updated its website, which was the first in the public sector to obtain the A3C web excellence certificate. The new website is more modern, more transparent and more useful – and above all, accessible to all groups of users, especially the blind and partially sighted and persons with reading disabilities. In January 2019, the Agency began publishing an e-newsletter, which is received monthly by electronic means by all who wish to be informed about the work of the Agency, and is also published on the Agency's website. Also important are the updated brochure of the Agency, publications on events, and the publication of consultation papers on the Agency's website. The Agency reactivated its Twitter account, where it regularly publishes the most important news related to its activities, established a Youtube channel with instructions for using eNakvis, presentation videos of higher education institutions, etc.

Stakeholders rate the realisation of the Agency's mission and strategic goals with a score of 3.5, which is slightly lower than the average score of all responses.

The flow of relevant information through an e-newsletter and through the Agency's website was highly rated among stakeholders. Higher scores are a reflection of the efforts made in the field of communication, to which the Agency paid more attention in 2018 and 2019.

Standard 3.2: Official status

The official status of the Agency is evident from the ZViS (Article 51e.) and the founding document. The Republic of Slovenia founded it as an entity of public law for quality assurance in higher education and with an advisory role in this area.

Standard 3.3: Independence

The Agency shall be independent and autonomous in its operation. The Agency is committed to the principles of professionalism, impartiality, legality and political neutrality, as provided in ZViS, the founding document and practice. The basis of the findings of assessments is the professional knowledge of assessors in the field, whereby every assessment in higher education always includes at least one field expert from abroad. The group of experts is independent in its work, and the Agency Council is independent in its

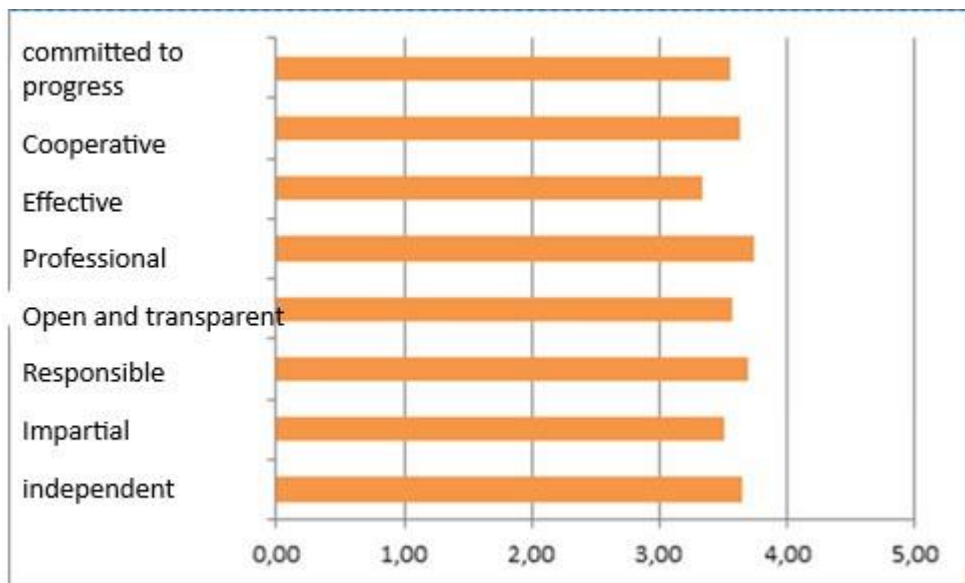
decision-making as well. The Agency Council includes a member working or studying abroad.

As a rule, the revised quality standards in the new criteria eliminate the difference in interpretations, as the provisions on their assessment are clearly defined and major deficiencies or inconsistencies are specifically listed. The forms and criteria are designed so that the investors, experts and the Agency Council are precisely governed and guided in the preparation, consideration, assessment and decision-making, which leaves less room for different interpretations.

The Agency has successfully consolidated its independence so far. It addresses the challenges of preventing conflicts of interest by establishing functioning mechanisms to prevent them on the part of the Agency (experts, staff, Agency Council) as well as on the part of investors and other stakeholders. Examples of this are the exclusion of experts, staff members and members of the Agency Council from management and decision-making (including the discussion at a meeting), awareness-raising and education of experts, staff and decision-makers, signing declarations of impartiality before entry in the register of experts, prior notification of an applicant of the composition of the group of experts, possibility of objecting to the composition of the group ... The Agency regularly takes an inventory of risks and organises training of employees on the prevention of conflicts of interest.

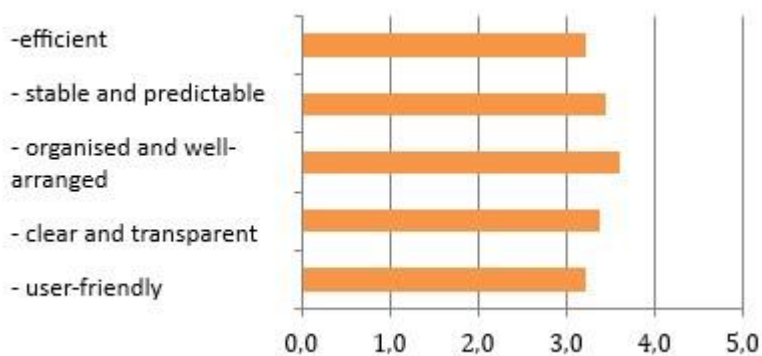
The Agency also asked stakeholders about its independence and the success of the implementation of values.

Diagram 2: Assessment of success of the implementation of Agency's values.



Respondents assess the procedures as clear and transparent and stable and predictable (3.4), and generally as well organised and regulated (3.6).

Diagram 3: Assessment of accreditation and evaluation procedures.



Standard 3.4: Thematic analyses

In September 2018, the Agency established a new sector with the aim of improving the analytics work of the Agency. It prepared the following documents in this self-evaluation period:

- *Methodology and Procedure for the Production and Dissemination of Thematic Analyses* (August 2018).
- *The 2014 –2017 Systemic analysis of the quality of staff in Slovenian higher education* (October 2018);

The preparation of the analysis took several months. It examined all self-evaluation reports of institutions and colleges, respectively, and expert reports in this period. The analysis was published on the Agency's website, sent electronically to higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, Agency staff members, teachers at higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, student councils of higher education institutions and the Student Organisation of Slovenia, and presented at the consultation for commissions for quality of higher education institutions in November 2019.

- *Proceedings of discussions on quality in higher education: from minimum standards to excellence* (May 2019);

The document was created as a collection of papers at a conference on quality in higher education, at which, in addition to doctoral students, foreign experts also participated.

- *Stakeholder Opinion Report on External Quality Assurance* (autumn 2019);

It informs the Agency, experts and the general public about the relevant assessments of the quality of accreditations and evaluations, and was also presented at the expert consultation, the consultation for quality commissions of higher education institutions and the meeting of the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges in November 2019.

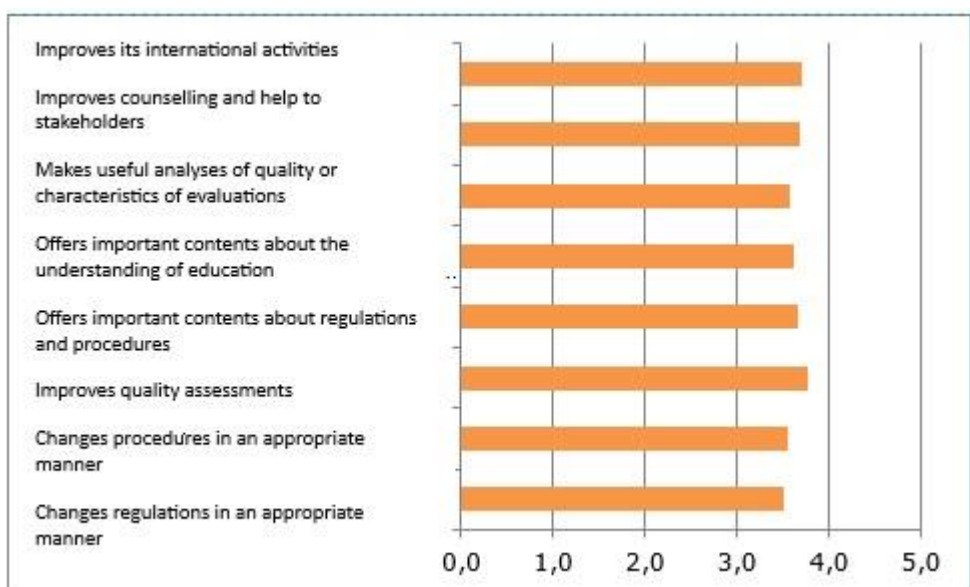
The 2019 self-evaluation survey has brought the Agency an extensive database of results that allows for a detailed analysis and comparing and combining different results according to different stakeholders and areas of study. The survey comprises 111 items that can be cross-referenced according to an individual group of stakeholders or other variables (professional conduct of respondents, public or private character of an institution, active involvement in quality in higher education, etc.). The survey allows for a comparison of different sets of Agency work and allows for a clear diagnosis of opportunities for improvement.

The document and individual analyses clearly define the target group of these analyses. The latest thematic analysis defines the process of work and methodology as well as its own purpose in great detail.

Thematic analyses are visible in the academic community, and the staff member responsible for their preparation is a doctoral student focusing on higher education quality in their scientific research work.

The diagram below shows that stakeholders scored the development of useful quality analyses or evaluation properties with 3.6, which confirms the above.

Diagram 4: Assessment of fields of Agency’s development.



The highest-rated item is the development of the Agency through the improvement of assessments (evaluation and accreditation procedures), and the lowest-rated item is the corresponding change of regulations.

Standard 3.5: Resources

FINANCIAL RESOURCES:

The Agency is a direct non-governmental budget user. The resources earmarked for the Agency’s operation are fully sufficient for a smooth performance of all its activities. The Agency disposes of funds rationally and transparently, in accordance with the principles of disposing of public funds. On 1 September 2018, the Agency employed a new staff member (IT specialist) without any additional funds. In the future years, no financial barriers for the implementation of the plans of the management are expected.

MATERIAL RESOURCES:

The Agency has leased the premises suited for a number of jobs that exceeds the number of its employees. Due to the expiration of the lease agreement (on 30 September 2021) and the problems that the Agency had throughout the lease in the existing premises (leaks, repeated ingress of water through the ceiling), it will be necessary to begin searching other suitable premises already in the second half of 2020.

HUMAN RESOURCES:

All Agency employees have permanent employment contracts. Opportunities for training and education have never been so great and each of the employees attends at least two trainings, seminars, consultations or education courses per year; some employees still study to obtain a higher level of education.

All employees have an opportunity to express their opinions in joint meetings and in self-evaluation procedures, to participate in discussions on proposals and amendments to the Agency's internal acts, and in the preparation of important documents and legal acts of the Agency.

Our conclusion is that in involving employees in decision-making (policies, plans and regulations), the Agency still has some room to design ways in which employees will have even more opportunities to cooperate.

The human resource development plan was based on the analysis of questionnaires completed by all employees. The questionnaires examined the workload of the employees, fields of work, wishes and expectations concerning their further professional and expert development, motivation and proposals concerning education and training. Staff members who conduct procedures are reliable and professional in their work, as they all have many years of experience in conducting procedures and are familiar with changes in the field as well as skilled in appropriate communication.

The findings of the analysis of employee satisfaction surveys are presented in Chapter 6.

Standard 3.6: Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

The basis for internal quality assurance is the self-evaluation report (the composition of the group and the course of self-evaluation are described in the introductory part). Chapter 6 describes the improvements and their evaluation in the field of the Agency organisation, information flow, and employee training and satisfaction.

Among the mechanisms of the flow of internal and external feedback, the following are highlighted (chronologically):

- communication plan (August 2018) with defined communication activity and schedule:
- 6 trainings of experts for sample evaluations (February 2019),
- self-evaluation survey (July 2019),
- three separate surveys on integrity and satisfaction (for experts, for employees and for Agency Council members, September 2019).
- director's visits to higher education institutions in the 2019/2020 academic year,
- consultation of experts (November 2019),
- consultation of the quality committee (November 2019),
- procedures for amending and adopting criteria (submitting draft criteria for comments, publication of draft criteria, adoption of criteria).

Highlighted among the definitions of the methods of appropriate communication is a professionally developed communication plan, which is published on the website and in the shared folder of the Agency.

Most data on feedback and the adequacy of providing information to stakeholders are obtained from the 2019 self-evaluation survey. The results for questions regarding the flow of relevant information (see survey results) were above average. Opportunities are analysed and described in detail in other parts of this report.

The Quality Manual was developed and harmonised with the management, all Agency staff members and the Agency Council, and revised in view of the legislative changes in May 2019. As always, it takes into account the ESG, the recommendations of the external evaluations of the Agency (regarding additional chapters on the history and system of tertiary education) and communication experts, and is the basis for the preparation of self-evaluation, which includes the implementation of tasks and activities from the action plan, analysis of questionnaires of all stakeholders with recommendations for improvement, proposal of activities for the future self-evaluation period and assessment of the compliance of the Agency's operation with the ESG.

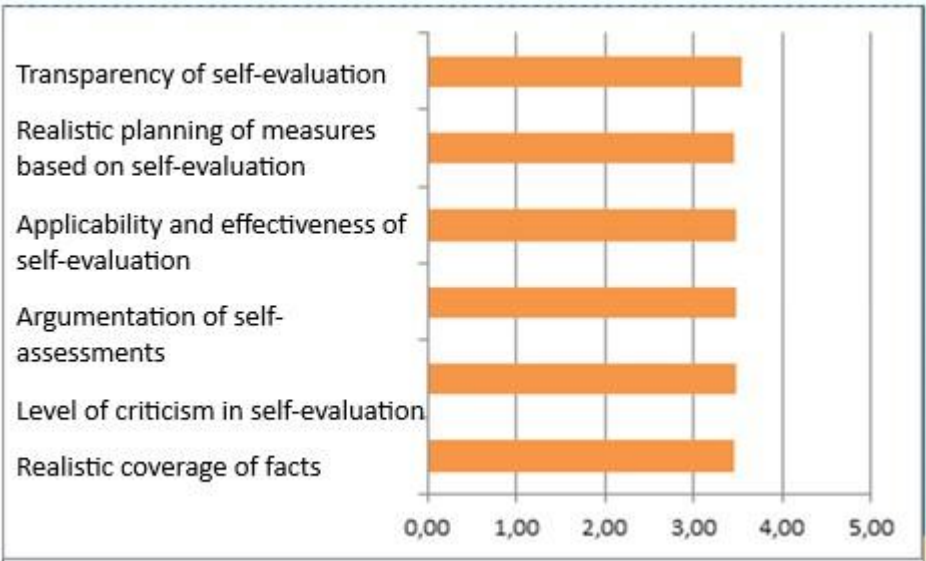
For the purposes of preparing a draft self-evaluation report, the Agency has engaged a member of its Council (core self-evaluation team) and external stakeholders (extended self-evaluation team) who, through their representatives, participate in the Agency's internal quality assurance procedures. They have the opportunity to make comments and suggestions, which are reasonably taken into account in the preparation of the self-evaluation report (they participate in the preparation of survey questionnaires, analysis of surveys, report). Some of their suggestions are written in the report. This increases the level of transparency and objectivity of the Agency self-evaluation. The Agency responds to stakeholder comments either in writing or orally at a meeting with them. Some stakeholders' suggestions are written down in the report. The draft report is also sent to employees for comments. The Agency Council adopts the proposed report, which is published on the Agency's website (third party call). The Agency Council discusses any stakeholders' comments at a session and grants consent to the report. The report is then adopted by the Director and published on the Agency website.

All surveys prepared by the Agency invariably involve all relevant internal and external stakeholders. Their analysis is accessible to all stakeholders in a clear and understandable manner as well.

The Agency Council discusses the self-evaluation report at several sessions (2 or 3 on average) before granting consent to it.

In order to optimise and increase the transparency of the conduct of procedures, the Agency started publishing on its website tables indicating the stage of individual procedures (since 2018) in addition to reports (since 2014) and decisions (since 2016).

Diagram 5: Assessment of the Agency self-evaluation.



The diagram shows that all items received a comparable score (3.5).

Standard 3.7: Cyclical external review of agencies

The Agency undergoes regular external review. The first such review was carried out in 2013 because of the entry to EQAR, the second at the end of 2014 because of the admission to ENQA, and the latest in June 2018 because of the renewal of the entry or membership in these organisations. On 13 December 2018, ENQA membership was extended for further five years, and on 3 April 2019, the period of the Agency's entry in EQAR was extended.

10. COMPLIANCE WITH ESG (PART 2)

Standard 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

In accreditation and evaluation procedures, the Agency consistently considers the criteria harmonised with stakeholders placing a particular emphasis on internal quality assurance at institutions/schools, which is evident from the regulation as a whole, specifically from the application forms. The table of compliance with standards in the Agency Criteria is in Enclosure 5.

Standard 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

The transition to institutional evaluation was successfully implemented and well received by the institutions; together with sample evaluations it constitutes an important transition to quality improvement. Flexibility of procedures is possible through the definition of the number of experts in the group for institutional evaluation, the number of days of evaluation and the selection of study programmes for more detailed assessment, as well as in the distinction in individual cycles and types of study programmes, for which there are special procedures and provisions.

Universities and independent higher education institutions, the Rector's Conference, students, Agency staff etc. are invited to participate in the development or amendment of the criteria. Before any adoption, the acts are published on the Agency website at least for a week.

The bureaucratisation of procedures is reduced mainly by the well-functioning eNakvis, which was upgraded in terms of data and processes in the last year.

Standard 2.3: Implementing processes

Transition to institutional evaluation was the key change in the quality assurance system. Respondents rated it quite high, seeing it as good for the autonomy of higher education institutions (score 4) and for the quality of overall tertiary education in general (score 3.7).

Our estimate is that the biggest challenge of the Agency is the procedures of re-accreditation of a university, where the Agency intends to assess individual members of a university and their study programmes through the institutional evaluation of a university.

The transition to institutional evaluation reduced the workload of higher education institutions, as until the introduction of this institute, the Agency (through staff members in procedures) visited higher education institutions several times a year or even month as part of study programme re-accreditation procedures. This meant a lot of effort for higher education institutions, which had to prepare for the visits and make available all the necessary documentation and appropriate staff. The Agency was aware of this and was therefore, like higher education institutions, eagerly awaiting the introduction of the institutional evaluation. However, we will be able to reasonably assess the efficiency of its implementation no earlier than after the completion of the university re-accreditation procedures.

The change made to the quality assessment system and the amendments to the ZViS and the Agency's criteria made it possible for the procedures of monitoring the implementation of recommendations to be included in the accreditation and evaluation procedures. The most important is the evaluation of a sample of study programmes intended for continuous monitoring of quality improvement, as well as for reviewing and assessing internal quality monitoring measures and counselling to higher education institutions. The objective of the sample evaluation is not re-accreditation of study programmes but their continuous monitoring and improvement. Higher education institutions are obliged to report within two years on the compliance with the recommendations given by the Agency Council after the completion of the study programme evaluation procedure within the framework of sample evaluations. Where major shortcomings or inconsistencies have been established, the aforementioned institutions must report to the Agency on the measures taken within a shorter time limit.

As the first evaluation procedures of the sample of study programmes were carried out only in 2019, it is difficult to assess their impact on quality. Following the procedures carried out so far we find that the Agency Council has made quite a few recommendations to applicants with regard to the study programmes included in the sample. Prior to the start of the new cycle (sample in 2020), it would be appropriate to develop good practices and the most adequate methods of conduct in cooperation with the higher education institutions and experts involved in these procedures.

Besides evaluating the sample of study programmes, the Agency continuously monitors the improvement of the quality of higher education institutions by collecting and analysing their self-evaluation reports, while the results of the analysis are published in the system analysis, which is presented to stakeholders in a suitable manner (consultations, website etc.). The progress and development of institutions/colleges is closely reviewed by the Agency also in re-accreditation procedures, for the entire period since the last accreditation.

In December 2019, the Agency Council formalised the progress reporting procedure by amending the Accreditation Criteria. A new Article 49a has been added, which stipulates that after two years from the finality of the decision granting accreditation to a higher education institution or study programme or re-accreditation of a higher education institution, or determining the adequacy of the study programme implementation, the higher education institution must report to the Agency Council on the progress and observance of the recommendations expressed in the decision or final report of the group of experts. The progress report may refer to the parts of the self-evaluation report that show the progress made and/or compliance with the recommendations. In this part, the Agency took into account comments of the higher education institutions expressing concern that the introduced reporting would impose an additional burden on them. By referring to the part of the self-evaluation report containing the progress description, the reporting requirements are met.

The Agency has prepared both, the rules of procedure for various procedures and proposals for drawing up reports by groups of experts. The latter also contain more detailed explanations and instructions regarding the quality standards to be followed in each procedure. The introduction of the rules of procedure has resulted in a better overview of the course of individual procedures, a shorter duration of procedures and the possibility of

a more precise procedure planning, also in case of involving experts in the relevant procedures. This was confirmed by survey results, as the respondents assessed the procedures as clear, stable and predictable, and generally well organised and designed. However, the respondents felt that the procedures were insufficiently efficient and user-friendly. This is probably due to many novelties as a result of the transition to institutional evaluation.

All relevant documents are also available in English.

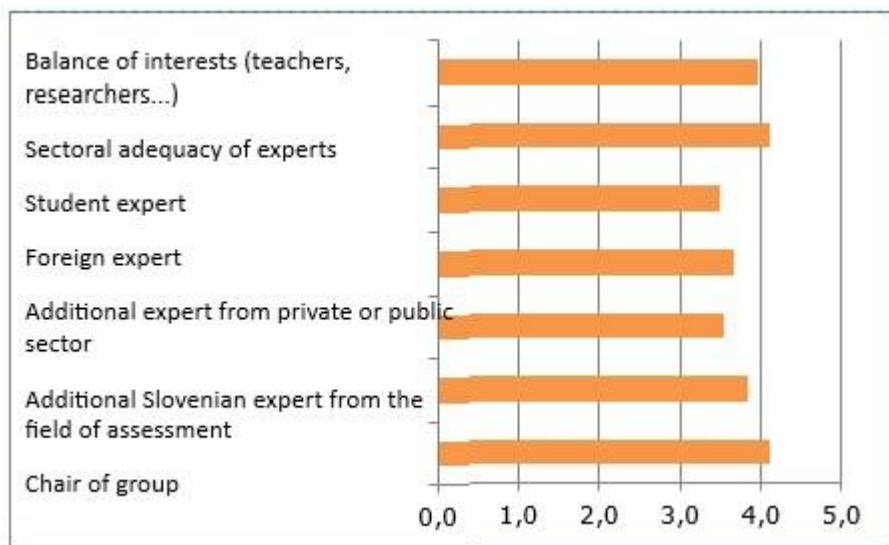
Standard 2.4: Peer-review experts

An independent assessment by groups of external experts is fundamental in all accreditation and evaluation procedures. In all groups, it is required by law that one member is a foreign expert and one a student. In the evaluation of higher vocational colleges, the appointment of a foreign expert following a proposal by these colleges is no longer mandatory.

Prior to the appointment of a group of experts, a higher education institution is informed of its composition and has the possibility to object.

According to the stakeholders, the chair of the group and the sectoral adequacy of experts contribute a predominant share to the quality, while a student expert and an additional expert from the private or public sector contribute the least.

Diagram 6: Assessment of factors of a quality assessment by a group of experts.



In March 2018, the Agency Council adopted new Criteria for Experts which, in addition to the conditions to be met by candidates for entry in the Agency's register of experts, also changed the method of their training. It has been envisaged that the candidates acquaint themselves with the legislation governing the Agency's activities and join one of the group of experts visiting a particular higher education institution. After the visit, the institution in question draws up a document, i.e. a draft report, while the group of experts and a member of the Agency staff evaluate the candidate. The final evaluation is submitted by a special commission for experts of the Agency Council. Nevertheless, the Agency regularly organised short trainings for candidates, at which it drew attention to specifics of assessing quality standards by types of accreditations and evaluations, types and levels of study programmes, accreditation and evaluation procedures, etc.

The survey results show that experts are satisfied with the topics submitted to them by the Agency at various trainings and consultations. Practical training also received a good score.

We find that the solution, according to which candidates for experts are trained only through practical training gained during a visit, has not proved to be optimal. Therefore, short trainings of candidates were also organised during the year. As experts express a wish for multiple exchanges of experience and good practice at consultations organised by the Agency, this will need to organise several thematic consultations and coordination meetings for experts in the future.

More attention should be paid to the formulation of the expert group reports also by the Agency staff, so that the reports are more comprehensive and contain fully established facts in accordance with the relevant criteria.

The Agency published the last two calls for experts on its website and sent them to higher education institutions and potential candidates electronically. The response of the candidates was positive, so the Agency should continue this practice.

The Agency should be more active in trying to involve foreign experts (publish a call for experts on the ENQA website, send it to foreign agencies or foreign higher education institutions), and at the same time consider more frequent organisation of thematic and coordination meetings for experts and training of foreign experts (online, at preparatory meetings, etc.).

The stakeholders propose that the Agency's activities in raising awareness and encouraging students to apply in greater numbers for the Agency's experts be increased.

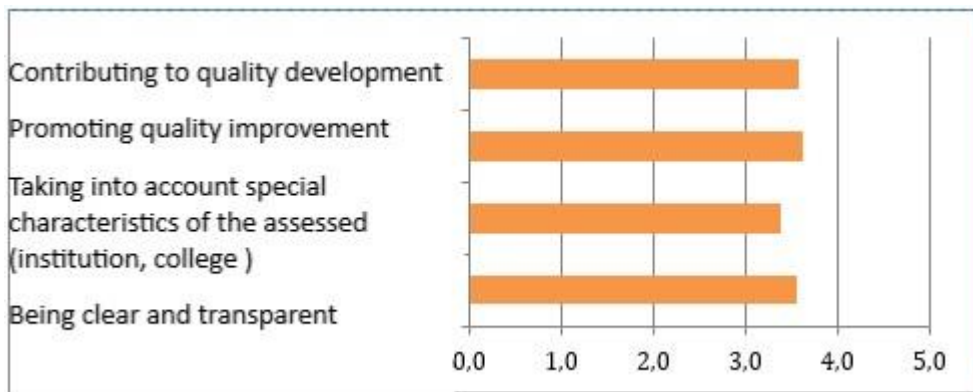
Standard 2.5: Criteria for outcomes

The Agency adopts the criteria used in its accreditation and evaluation procedures in accordance with the pre-established procedure. It first submits the draft criteria to stakeholders for comments, then, taking into account these comments, draws up a draft of the criteria which is considered by the Agency Council and then published on the website for at least 7 days. Only then the regulation is adopted by the Agency Council as the highest decision-making body of the Agency. In the new Accreditation Criteria adopted pursuant to the amendment to the ZVİS from 2016, the Agency clearly prescribed the quality standards that must be met for a positive decision. On the other hand, the application forms contain clear and precise instructions, including explanations, in order to make the completion of the application form for applicants as easy as possible.

The Agency promptly provides stakeholders with responses and clarifications regarding any questions on the application of criteria and as of October 2019, it publishes questions and answers relating to the interpretation of regulations (explanations of the ZVİS provided by the MIZŞ and interpretation of the criteria approved by the Agency Council).

The decision-making procedure in accreditation and evaluation procedures is provided for in the Rules of Procedure applying to the work of the Agency Council and the appointment of rapporteurs at meetings. The documents for a meeting of the Agency Council include a table which shows the strengths, opportunities for improvement, partial compliance and non-compliance or major shortcomings. The decision-making process, including the discussion and details, is documented in the minutes, which also list possible exclusions of members of the Agency Council. Accreditation procedures end with the adoption of a decision on granting accreditation or refusing an application for accreditation, on re-accreditation, denial of re-accreditation or re-accreditation for a shorter period, findings on (partial) adequacy of study programme implementation, recommendations of the Agency Council in the procedure of evaluation of a sample of study programmes, or by decision to stay the proceedings in the event of withdrawal of the application.

Diagram 7: Assessment of the Agency criteria.



According to respondents, the criteria encourage quality improvement, and most opportunities in their application are in taking into account the specifics of the assessed case, which can be understood as the desire of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges to be treated equally either according to their specifics (size of institution or school, informal organisation of internal communication...) or the specifics of an accredited study programme (distance learning, international programmes...). The new Accreditation Criteria clearly define the specifics for individual higher education institutions, namely according to the size of the assessed institution, the level and types of study, the methods of conducting the study, etc. However, the Agency cannot adapt most of the content to the specifics of a particular institution or college (e.g. enrolment conditions, material circumstances ...).

Standard 2.6: Reporting

Accreditation and evaluation reports of experts and the decisions of the Council in accreditation and evaluation procedures and the Agency Council's recommendations in the procedures of evaluation of a sample of study programmes are regularly published at the Agency's website. As to the aforementioned procedures, a report and a decision are published on the website, regardless of the outcome, except in the case of a negative decision in the procedure of initial accreditation of a higher education institution. This, however, does not create any legal consequences for an applicant.

Greater uniformity of reports was achieved by the Agency through the introduction of templates for drawing up reports that are used by experts and divided into strengths, opportunities for improvements and inconsistencies or major shortcomings. In addition to basic data (on the type of procedure, institution/college, analysis and assessment), they include a summary of findings for an easier and faster review and its translation into English. The possibility of establishing partial compliance with the criteria has also been added to the report templates under a heading, in which experts enter their findings in case of doubt. This new heading requires from the Agency Council to assess a specific area in more depth. An applicant has the possibility to comment on the report before it becomes final. In its final report, the group of experts must define its position on any comment received.

We find that the Agency staff members need to pay more attention to guiding and advising experts in writing reports, so that these reports include complete establishment of facts while also taking into account all comments put forward by applicants. The content of the assessment is the sole responsibility of experts. However, it must be performed within the framework of all assessment areas and standards according to the Accreditation Criteria.

The Agency must pay more attention to this issue, also at consultations and thematic meetings with experts.

During the last self-evaluation period, the templates for drawing up reports were amended and/or changed five times:

- addition of numerical tables of strengths, opportunities and inconsistencies;
- adaptation to the change of the Accreditation Criteria;
- addition of table of excellence;
- addition of a special form for sample evaluation, and
- adaptation of records for a better understanding of the placement of findings when it comes to partial compliance with quality standards in the process of re-accreditation of a higher education institution, external evaluation of a study programme and a higher vocational college, and sample evaluation of a study programme.

We estimate that numerous changes to the form templates cause confusion both among employees and the Agency's experts as to which template should be used in which procedure. The form should be changed only exceptionally.

Updated report writing templates should also be translated into English.

Stakeholders suggest that due to the frequently asked questions of experts involved in procedures, the Agency should also publish such questions and the corresponding answers. Although the Agency staff members regularly and promptly provide answers for the experts, stakeholders are nevertheless of the opinion that the burden on professional co-workers would be significantly reduced by publishing answers to frequently asked questions.

The self-evaluation group notes that the Agency is already preparing a guide to accreditations and evaluations, in which special emphasis will be placed on the assessment of quality standards to be met and/or the interpretation of criteria for assessing standards, tasks of participants in accreditation and evaluation procedures, drawing up expert group reports, etc. The guide will be published on the Agency's website. In addition, answers to questions regarding the application of the criteria and the relevant law have already been published on the website. Because the guide is being compiled on an ongoing basis as the Agency gains practical experience according to the new criteria, it will not be ready for some time. Therefore we suggest that the Agency publish the most frequently asked questions of experts and the corresponding answers on its website. It should organise as many meetings with experts as possible, at which dilemmas faced by experts in procedures could be clarified. An even greater challenge is foreign experts, for whom, according to stakeholders, it is also necessary to prepare appropriate documentation which will facilitate their assessments. For them, the Agency is already translating presentations of lectures at professional conferences (consultations) into English. We also suggest providing recordings of lectures in English or conducting webinars in English.

A list of institutions and study programmes in the accreditation process has been included in the Agency's website, where credible information on not yet completed procedures are available to students and other stakeholders.

Where the Appeal Committee upholds the appeal, the case shall always be remanded to the Agency Council. The re-decision of the Agency Council always summarises the instruction of the Appeal Committee as to which aspects must be particularly considered by the Agency Council when re-deciding. As only the decision of the Agency Council that can be challenged in court shall be final, the decisions of the Appeal Committee are not published separately.

The self-evaluation group also proposes consideration regarding publication of negative decisions of the Agency Council in procedures of initial accreditation of a higher education institution, accreditation of a study programme and decisions of the Appeal Committee.

In December 2018, the Agency re-designed its website, which is also accessible for the blind and partially sighted, and obtained a special certificate for this project.

A detailed presentation and analysis of the stakeholders' opinion on assessments and reports of groups of experts in accreditation and evaluation procedures are covered by a thematic analysis entitled Stakeholder Opinion on External Quality Assurance in 2019 ([link](#)).

Standard 2.7: Complaints and appeals

Every applicant in the procedure has the possibility to appeal against a decision of the Agency Council. Appeals are decided on by the Appeal Committee, whose members are legal experts with a completed state law examination and at least five years of experience from courts (Article 51j of the ZviS). More detailed rules on the appeal procedure are governed by the ZUP. The latter stipulates that the appellant may lodge an appeal due to an erroneously or incompletely established facts, violation of procedural provisions or incorrect application of substantive law. An appeal can also be lodged due to administrative silence, i.e. failure of the Agency Council to decide on the case within the prescribed period of time. The ZViS restricts the decision-making of the Appeal Committee to the possibility to confirm a decision of the Agency Council or abolish it and remand the case to the Agency Council for re-decision.

Applicants have also the possibility to object to individual actions or documents in the procedure: objection against the proposed group of experts, comments on the report of the group of experts to be assessed by the group of experts in the final report; a request for access to the procedure, a request for the service of a decision, etc.

In autumn 2019, the Agency received 4 requests for the exclusion of members of the Agency staff from the procedure, i.e. from the procedure for re-accreditation of one of the universities and its members. The applicants invoked doubts about impartiality because the Agency management had allegedly prejudiced decisions on re-accreditation of the university, and consequently also influenced the positions of all Agency's employees. The Agency Council refused the requests for exclusion because the fulfilment of conditions for re-accreditation of the university under the second paragraph of Article 14 of the ZViS is evident from the public records on study programmes. Therefore, one cannot refer to partiality. The applicants appealed against the decision of the Agency Council, so it will be up to the Appeal Committee to rule on this decision.

Applicants did not file requests for the exclusion of experts from procedures. Given the fact that the applicant is always, and also prior to their appointment, informed about the members who the Agency Council intends to appoint to the group of experts, an applicant has the possibility to object to the expert group composition before their appointment. Where there are reasons which could imply impartiality or incompetence of an expert in a particular procedure, an appointment of another expert is proposed to the Agency Council.

As a special form of alerting and taking action regarding possible inadequacies in the functioning of a higher education institution or the provision of a study programme, the Slovenian legislative system provides for the institute of extraordinary evaluations. In these procedures, any person can make an initiative to initiate an extraordinary evaluation if they consider that the functioning of a higher education institution, the provision of a study programme or quality assurance system is inadequate (see Articles 51š and 51t of the ZViS). The procedure is described in more detail in the Criteria.

In terms of impartiality, comparability and coherence, appeal procedures are rated 3.5 (score 3.6 is the average score of all responses on a scale from 1 to 5).

11. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE PREVIOUS EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE AGENCY

11.1 Main findings of the previous reviews conducted by ENQA

On 13 December 2018, the Agency's membership in ENQA was extended for further five years. After the external evaluation of the Agency, the recommendations and main findings primarily focused on the following:

ESG 3.1:

- ensuring greater commitment of all stakeholders within the process of external quality provision;
- strengthening the Agency's reputation by, inter alia, incorporating into the Agency Council a foreign member, who will contribute to the Agency's reputation by providing international experience;

ESG 3.3: maintaining the independence of the Agency, also by incorporating several international experts, which will raise public awareness of the Agency's independent operation;

ESG 3.4: developing methods for the preparation and dissemination of thematic analyses on issues relevant to its stakeholders;

ESG 3.5: ensuring the necessary funding for the implementation of its strategic plan and further action plans, including the human resources development plan;

ESG 3.6: involving external stakeholders into the Agency's internal evaluation and quality improvement activities, providing appropriate feedback from stakeholders on the results of surveys and measures, and involving all Agency's bodies in the design and implementation of the internal quality assurance policy. Being the highest decision-making body, the Agency Council could assume a more active role;

ESG 2.2: applying the adopted methodology with great flexibility in relation to all higher education institutions, regardless of their size and profile. If necessary, the methodology should be revised in order to improve its effectiveness. The Agency should focus on quality improvement rather than on quality control and encourage further development of quality culture within the Slovenian higher education;

ESG 2.3: integrating the procedures for monitoring the implementation of recommendations into all quality assurance processes and unifying the understanding of the criteria, and publishing an official interpretation of the criteria and regulations;

ESG 2.4: extending the register of experts by particularly taking into account the institutional accreditation procedures. The register of experts should include experts in various professional fields, as well as students of all types of higher education institutions. Efforts should be made to ensure participation of (more) international experts;

ESG 2.5: encouraging higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges to include procedures for monitoring the implementation of recommendations in their internal quality assurance system. The decision-making procedure taking into account the different roles and tasks of internal stakeholders (report by a group of experts), the Director and the Agency's employees (draft decision) and the Agency Council (formal decision) should be formalised;

ESG 2.6: publishing all reports of groups of experts, including those containing negative results;

ESG 2.7: clearly defining the appeal procedure as part of the quality assurance system and presenting it to appellants.

The Agency drew up its Progress Report at the end of December 2019. In doing so, the Agency took account of the recommendations of the ENQA group of experts and following their visit, promptly adopted an action plan for their implementation.

Chapters 9 and 10 of this Report describe in more detail the implemented measures and compliance with the recommendations within the framework of individual standards, which are only briefly summarised below.

11.2 Results of monitoring the Agency's external evaluation recommendations

ESG 3.1:

By means of a communication plan, the Agency systematically enhanced communication with internal and external stakeholders, thereby improving their inclusion in the procedures of amending the Agency's regulations. Since 2018, the Agency has been regularly holding meetings with the MIZS, the Employment Service of the Republic of Slovenia, the Rectors' Conference, the University of Ljubljana and other higher education institutions in order to discuss procedures, the information system, legislation and other important issues.

Since September 2019, the Agency's Director has been regularly visiting higher education institutions in Slovenia in order to deepen their cooperation with the Agency. For the purpose of strengthening the existing ties, developing project and enhancing international cooperation, the internationalisation of the Agency is also being realised through visits to foreign agencies for quality assurance in higher education.

In December 2018, the Agency's website was redesigned, which made it more informative and transparent and, above all, more accessible to all user groups, especially the blind and partially sighted, as well as persons with reading disorders.

The new eNakvis information system (available since June 2018) enables the Agency and higher education institutions to carry out all accreditation and evaluation procedures in electronic form. For the purpose of providing relevant information of the usefulness of eNakvis, several video tutorials for various types of the information system users were prepared. The NAKVIS Youtube channel also contains promotional videos of all higher education institutions, and at the same time represents a communication channel for the public presentation of their characteristics, experience and achievements.

The international element in the composition of the Agency Council is represented by a member of the Agency Council appointed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia pursuant to Article 51h of the ZviS from among the experts in the field of higher education or quality assurance, and who is studying or working abroad. Two members of the Agency Council are appointed by the Student Organisation of Slovenia in cooperation with student councils of all higher education institutions. An expert with a "foreign element" has thus already been included in the Agency Council. The same applies to students of independent higher education institutions, meaning that they also have the opportunity to participate in the appointment of the Council members, i.e. students. The composition of the Agency Council or student representation cannot be influenced by the Agency. Out of 16 students who are entered in the register of experts, the share of those who come from independent higher education institutions is 21%. Given the total number of the Agency's members, the share of students is critical and amounts to only 8%. In the future, the Agency will

have to acquire more student experts, so that their share will be at least one third of the total number of the Agency's experts.

Members of the Agency Council take active part in or attend conferences and consultations organised by the Agency. Furthermore, a training course for members of the Agency Council is planned for spring 2020. A member of the Agency Council is a member of the self-evaluation team in charge of drafting a self-evaluation report.

ESG 3.3:

The independence of the Agency is not threatened. All relevant stakeholders firmly support the Agency's operation. This is clearly reflected in the unified support of the Agency's operation in the event of any significant legislative changes. The Agency has set about drafting an independent Agency Act, which will gather in one place all the provisions concerning its operation and procedural specifics. In accordance with the relevant regulations, foreign experts are included in all groups of experts, and as invited experts they also participate in conferences and consultations organised by the Agency. In March 2019, an amendment to the Accreditation Criteria added a requirement that the application be translated into English language, thus facilitating the participation of foreign experts in assessments.

ESG 3.4:

The Agency has drawn up appropriate documents and methodologies for the preparation of thematic analyses, which specify the system analysis process and the framework of dissemination of their findings and the influence of external stakeholders on the production of further detailed analyses (thematic analyses). Moreover, the Agency has established a department for analytics, international cooperation and information technology of the Agency, within which more attention will be paid to analytics. In October 2018, a 2014 –2017 systemic analysis of the quality of staff in Slovenian higher education was prepared. It examined all self-evaluation reports of institutions and colleges, respectively, and expert reports in this period. The analysis was published on the Agency's website, sent electronically to higher education institutions and vocational colleges, Agency experts, teachers at higher education institutions and vocational colleges, student councils of higher education institutions and the Student Organisation of Slovenia, and presented at the consultation for commissions for quality of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges in November 2019. Furthermore, in December 2019, the Stakeholder Opinion Report on External Quality Assurance, drawn up on the basis of the 2019 self-evaluation survey, was presented to the Agency Council.

ESG 3.5:

The available funds are fully sufficient for the operation of the Agency and the implementation of all its planned activities. Compared to 2019, the funds available for 2020 increased still further. In September 2018, the Agency employed an IT expert without requiring additional funds. The Human Resources Development Plan adopted by the Agency in August 2018 places great emphasis on professional development and training of employees. To this end, a larger share of financial resources is earmarked for these activities than in the previous years.

ESG 3.6:

For the purposes of preparing a draft self-evaluation report, the Agency has engaged a member of its Council (core self-evaluation team) and external stakeholders (extended self-evaluation team) who, through their representatives, participate in the Agency's internal quality assurance procedures. The comments and suggestions put forward by them are reasonably taken into account by the Agency. The draft report is also sent to employees for comments. The draft report is published on the Agency's website (third party call) and discussed at the meeting of the Agency Council. The report must be approved by the Agency Council and adopted by the Director. The report is published on the Agency's website. The ongoing efforts to improve communication among stakeholders are evident

from all self-evaluation reports prepared by the Agency. The measures taken by the Agency are presented in Chapter 8, Standard 3.1.

ESG 2.2:

The new accreditation criteria from 2017 already take better account of the specifics of individual institutions, i.e. their size, resources (human, financial, material and IT) and their areas of operation, and make a clear distinction between various types and levels of study programmes in terms of professional, scientific and research work, practical training of students and human resources and equipment. This is also evident from the electronic application form indicating the quality standards to be met by individual higher education institutions and study programmes. Through an improved communication strategy, the Agency will regularly monitor the applicability of the relevant criteria and, if necessary and in agreement with stakeholders, adjust them further. In order to facilitate understanding, the Agency supplemented the publication of questions and answers on its website and, in addition, included the interpretation of the criteria and the ZViS. Moreover, a guide to accreditations and evaluations is currently in preparation. The use of the eNakvis information system should simplify administrative work in procedures and increase the focus on the content of decision-making. Information on the status of all applications in the procedures is publicly available on the Agency's website.

ESG 2.3:

A change in the quality assessment system and the amendments to the ZViS and the Agency's criteria enabled the Agency to include procedures for monitoring the implementation of recommendations in the accreditation and evaluation procedures. The evaluation of a sample of study programmes is intended for an ongoing monitoring of improvements. Its purpose is to review and assess further measures and to advise institutions. In accordance with the new criteria and modified procedures, each higher education institution is required to submit further measures within two years of the recommendations issued; the Agency Council may set a shorter deadline. In December 2019, an amendment to the Accreditation Criteria was adopted. Accordingly, each higher education institution must submit a progress report to the Agency Council within two years from the completion of the accreditation or evaluation procedure. In doing so, the institution in question may also refer to individual parts of self-evaluation reports that include a description of the progress made. In addition to the assessment of progress reports, the Agency constantly monitors improvements in the quality of institutions by collecting and analysing their self-evaluation reports. The results of a particular analysis are published in the system analysis and specific thematic analyses.

ESG 2.4:

The Agency is aware of the lack of experts from all areas of expertise and therefore invites (through a public call and on annual basis) various experts from shortage areas to cooperate. In 2019, 30 new experts were entered in the register of experts. Foreign experts in relevant fields are also involved in the procedures. By amending the Accreditation Criteria and adding the requirement that the application be translated into English, it has become possible for foreign experts to obtain all the necessary documents for an effective performance of assessments in English. By amending the Experts Criteria, the Agency has modified the training for candidates for entry in the register of experts. Anyone who meets the conditions laid down in the Experts Criteria can apply for entry in the register of experts.

ESG 2.5:

In order to improve the overview of the relevant procedures, the Agency drew up the rules of procedure at the end of August 2018. These rules clearly indicate the method of preparing documentation, the method of decision-making by the Agency Council, cooperation with the Agency's professional services and the method of adopting decisions. Moreover, a guide to accreditation and evaluation procedures is being prepared, intended for the Agency's employees and experts, as well as for candidates for experts and student

candidates. This guide will provide an even more transparent insight into the understanding of the Agency's criteria and procedures.

ESG 2.6:

As of 2019, all reports and negative decisions adopted by the Agency Council are published on the Agency's website, with the exception of negative decisions in the procedure of initial accreditation of a higher education institution that do not create any consequences for the applicant. The reasoning of the Appeal Committee is always summarised in the decision of the Agency Council, which is solely competent for the adoption of a substantive decision. Since only the decisions of the Agency Council and not the Appeal Committee can be challenged before the court, the decisions of the Appeal Committee are not published separately.

ESG 2.7:

The appeal procedure against the decisions of the Agency Council is regulated in detail by the ZViS and the Administrative Procedure Act (ZUP). Within this procedure, applicants have also other options, by way of which they can express their disagreement – object to the composition of the group of experts, request an exclusion of a member of the Agency Council, a staff member or an expert, and comment on the findings of the group of experts (in the process of institutional evaluation also immediately after the visit, etc.). The reasons interpreted by the ESG as "complaint" are, under the Slovenian legislation, grounds for an appeal lodged by reason of substantial violations of procedural provisions. Applicants can obtain information about the options they have in the procedure in the relevant act and in every decision or resolution adopted by the Agency Council (legal instruction). The Slovenian legislative system also envisages the institution of extraordinary evaluation as a special form of warning and action in connection with possible shortcomings in the operation of a higher education institution or in the implementation of a study programme.

12. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

The Agency included the recommendations and/or measures proposed in the previous self-evaluation report in the 2018/2019 Action Plans.

2016-2017 Self-evaluation Report – measures for 2018	Self-evaluation findings
<p>Preparation for the Agency's external evaluation to renew the ENQA membership</p> <p>and entry in the EQAR, the Agency's external assessment and taking into account the findings of the international group of experts</p>	<p>The Agency drew up quality documentation for external assessment and provided the ENQA group of experts with all the necessary additional information on an ongoing basis. It also compiled a comprehensive response progress report. In the future, the Agency could better prepare for such visits in terms of a careful selection of interlocutors, especially from the ranks of external stakeholders. By involving the interlocutors in preparations for the external evaluation, the Agency could discuss with them in detail possible questions posed by the assessors and the corresponding answers, especially with the aim of clarifying possible misunderstandings and issues related to the assessors' lack of acquaintance with the Agency, its activities and competences. In this way, the Agency could avoid receiving unnecessary recommendations, as practice</p>

	<p>has shown that following the assessment visit, the opinion of the ENQA experts is difficult to change with sound arguments, when the issue is not factual errors of assessment, but the understanding of the actual complex situation based on partial views. The Agency fully and successfully complied with the recommendations of the group of experts from the previous ENQA evaluation.</p>
<p>Installation of eNakvis in production environment (further cooperation with stakeholders, assistance in filling in electronic applications and their use in practice, assistance in case of any ambiguities in interpreting the provisions on compliance with quality standards set out in the criteria, introduction of electronic applications for schools ...)</p>	<p>At the end of May 2018, eNakvis was successfully transferred to production environment, and the Agency continues to develop and upgrade the system smoothly in accordance with action plans and in cooperation with stakeholders. The system already enables the simplification of accreditation procedures, support to data entry and connectivity with some other relevant databases. Moreover, it has already created an extensive database for ongoing monitoring of changes in higher education and their analyses. By introducing a cloud, the system has also started to support external assessments and made it easier to transfer and forward documentation.</p>
<p>Preparation and implementation of the first sample evaluations of study programmes (minimum 2% of accredited study programmes per year)</p>	<p>The Agency Council approved the first list of study programmes for the evaluation of the sample in October 2018. It contained 7 study programmes of Slovenian higher education institutions which are also implemented abroad, and 12 first-cycle study programmes already considered by the Agency during the initial accreditation procedure (according to previous criteria) but not yet externally evaluated. Most of the evaluation visits have already been carried out successfully, and the Agency Council adopted recommendations in 12 procedures. In October 2019, the Agency Council approved the second list of study programmes for the evaluation of the sample. In addition to the programmes that have not yet been evaluated (14), it includes 5 VTIs and 2 joint study programmes. Key documents supporting the implementation of the sample evaluations were prepared in a timely manner: arranging the protocol of the visit, preparing a special template for drawing up reports and modifying templates for compiling session materials. Prior to the beginning of sample evaluations, a preparatory and coordination meeting of experts appointed to study programme assessment teams was held.</p> <p>As the first round of sample evaluations is just being completed, the Agency does not yet have concrete data on their suitability. Prior to the start of the new cycle, it would be appropriate to develop good practices and the most adequate methods of conduct</p>

	<p>in cooperation with the higher education institutions and experts involved in these procedures.</p>
<p>Reorganisation of work within the Agency, determination of competences and responsibilities</p> <p>of professional employees by taking into account the change in the quality external system and new tasks assigned to the Agency by the ZViS-K (incl. keeping record of institutions/colleges and study programmes and other records, and providing data for eVŠ, editing and publishing professional and scientific titles)</p>	<p>The Agency established three internal departments, between which the Agency's obligations and activities were reasonably divided. The advantage of this change is that some activities, previously not adequately organised and developed, have been consolidated and strengthened. In addition, the responsibilities and obligations of various departments are largely complementary and interlinked. The international operation of the Agency was consolidated, and IT activities (significantly improved by increasing staff capacity) related to the development of eNakvis and the provision of information to the Agency's stakeholders were expanded and upgraded. The overview and supervision over the conduct of procedures have strengthened. The archiving of files, keeping records and providing data for other institutions in higher education have also stabilised and strengthened. The general sector has done extensive work in the areas of protection and management of personal data, human resource development and the drafting of the Agency Act.</p> <p>Despite the reorganisation, the activities within some departments are, on the one hand, highly dispersed, and on the other hand, some activities that go beyond the departments' frameworks are duplicated. The reorganisation brought about certain challenges in dividing work obligations, meaning that several employees continue to perform activities that belong to other departments and some employees, unlike others, pursue activities from all departments. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the involvement of department heads and to monitor activities spread across several departments. The introduction of departments resulted in a pyramid structure of the Agency management. The advantage of this change is a better overview of the management over the Agency's activities, while an opportunity for improvement is to increase the employees' autonomy and inclusion in the process of adopting decisions (policies, plans and regulations). Professional and practical experience of all employees is, namely, of key importance for the Agency development.</p> <p>In addition, the division of the collective occasionally disrupts the flow of information between departments, which may have a negative impact on the coherence and unity of work. The reorganisation has not yet brought a significant progress in the Agency's analytics activity that has remained sporadic. The latest announcement of a change in the Agency's analytics, international cooperation and information technology department, from which the</p>

	<p>independent analytics department will secede, promises the consolidation and steady development of this activity.</p>
<p>Revision of the manual for experts or preparation of another document, with the emphasis on development of conceptual platforms for the quality of studies, pedagogical work and research, including their assessment</p>	<p>Due to objective reasons, the goal has not yet been achieved, and its realisation is planned for 2020. The manual will be replaced by a guide to accreditations and evaluations intended for various participants in the procedures. The guide is being compiled gradually and is expected to be updated throughout the year. This is mainly due to the fact that in 2018 and 2019 there was still a lack of practical experience in assessing quality standards according to the criteria from 2017 and 2018, and that all types of procedures and novelties have not yet been tested in practice in accordance with these criteria.</p>
<p>Revision of the protocol of visits to institutions/colleges</p>	<p>The Agency has revised the protocol of visits to higher education institutions relating to the procedures of sample evaluations of study programmes. The protocol attaches greater importance to the advisory function of external assessments and places emphasis on providing recommendations and offering assistance in cooperation with representatives of higher education institutions and stakeholders associated with the study programme under assessment. To this end, the protocol envisages that talks, which should be more candid and relaxed, take place mainly in the premises where stakeholders carry out their activities.</p> <p>The document was discussed at a preparatory meeting of experts appointed to sample evaluation procedures. The Agency Council did not consider and adopt a decision on the amended protocol. To date, the protocol has not been published on the Agency's website. Although the measure was partially implemented, its purpose was not fully met.</p> <p>The protocol of visits was tested in sample evaluations. After having examined good practices and conduct in sample evaluation procedures, the Agency suggests that the protocol, if necessary, be amended or revised and presented to all employees and the Agency Council.</p>
<p>Training of candidates for Agency experts in accordance with the new criteria</p>	<p>The measure has been successfully implemented. The Agency trains candidates for entry in the register of experts on an ongoing basis, and candidates participate in evaluation visits as observers. The level of success of the relevant training is reported to the Agency Council by members of groups of experts and professionals involved in this procedure. The procedures are standard and comparable.</p>

	Due to the additional theoretical training of candidates, it would be advisable to consider supplementing the training or organising several thematic and guidance meetings with experts (assessment according to individual standards, examples of good practice, etc.).
Maintaining and improving the professional level of the Agency's operation: continuation of consultations and workshops relating to assessments and decision-making processes according to the new criteria	The Agency implements this permanent measure on an ongoing and regular basis. It regularly organises consultations for both, the Agency experts and members of the commissions for quality in higher education institutions. This year, for the second time in a row, the Agency will organise a thematic annual international conference.
Arranging databases and improving the provision of information to stakeholders	The measure has been successfully implemented. In addition, the Agency established methods of regularly informing stakeholders about important events.

13. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International recognition of the Agency • Stable funding of the Agency • Good relationships among the Agency's employees • Great emphasis on professional development and training of employees • New website, monthly e-newsletter • Transparent operation of the Agency (publication of all criteria and regulations, guidelines, analyses, self-evaluation reports, expert reports and decisions of the Agency Council) • Established way of cooperation and coordination with stakeholders in preparing criteria • Advisory role of the Agency • Enhanced international cooperation and networking with other quality assessment agencies from abroad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient number of experts in certain shortage fields, foreign experts and students • Inadequate provision of information to employees at the departmental level and within the Agency • Insufficient involvement of employees in the formulation and adoption of strategic decisions, policies and regulations • Problems in the Agency's premises that interfere with the work of employees

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further development of e-Nakvis (mechanisms for self-evaluation, a system of two-way communication with stakeholders) • Strengthening the advisory role of the Agency • Introducing measures to improve trust and information flow between management and employees, and introducing new reward and stimulation mechanisms • Expanding the pool of experts • Agency Act • Involving employees in the formulation and adoption of strategic decisions, policies and regulations • Drawing up a guide to accreditation and evaluation procedures • Regular thematic meetings of experts • Improving the role and visibility of the Agency in the higher education environment and cooperation with other stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a constant risk of disruption in the workplace due to problems in the Agency's premises • Unpredictable changes in higher education legislation, which jeopardise the stable functioning of the Agency and require continual adaptation by stakeholders

14. CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT SELF-EVALUATION PERIOD AND PROPOSALS FOR THE ACTION PLAN

According to the above-mentioned findings we propose that the Agency include in its action plan for the next year tasks relating primarily to:

1. assessment of the fulfilment of the Agency's strategic goals by 2020 and the preparation of a new medium-term strategy until 2025;
2. implementation of procedures of re-accreditation of universities and independent higher education institutions;
3. definition of samples of study programmes, on the basis of which it will be possible to monitor the quality of their development at the system level (e.g. study programmes in the same field, etc.);
4. development of good practice and method of approach to the implementation of evaluations of a sample of study programmes, in order to achieve their advisory purpose;

5. review of the protocol of visits in connection with sample evaluations, possible corrections and presentation of the latest version to employees and the Agency Council;
6. in-depth preparation of the content of consultations, including by ensuring participation of various stakeholders, such as representatives of quality assessment commissions;
7. organisation of several consultations with stakeholders on the topic of specific recommendations from the survey among the stakeholders (increasing the applicability of the content of study programmes, enhancing cooperation with foreign agencies, more user-friendly application forms, etc.);
8. several thematic and coordination meetings for experts;
9. improvement of the Agency's visibility for the purpose of increasing the number of domestic and foreign experts and student experts, especially by publishing a call for experts on the ENQA website, forwarding the call to foreign agencies and directly to foreign higher education institutions, and presentation of the Agency's activities to students at higher education institutions;
10. improvement of the information flow between individual departments and a clear division of tasks between employees (both directors and managers), and introduction of annual interviews;
11. finding ways to increase the inclusion of employees in the Agency's policy-making and taking their views into account in the adoption of strategic decisions;
12. thoughtful change to criteria and forms with prior coordination of possible change with stakeholders (e.g. informal meetings of the Director and the president of the Council with stakeholders); in doing so, the following should be taken into consideration:
 - some accreditation and evaluation procedures are already underway,
 - changes to the criteria lead to adaptation of electronic forms and other documents (e.g. proposals, guidelines, etc.), which takes time,
 - a method to test the proposals for modifications in practice should be found;
13. completion of the preparation of an autonomous act on the Agency or the amendment to and/or modification of the ZViS in the part relating to the Agency, and the adoption of such act;
14. establishment of cooperation with the relevant ministries regarding regulated professions, in order to formulate clear and publicly announced criteria for issuing consent to study programmes;
15. continuation of a successful implementation of the eNakvis information system, especially through the development of tools for system and thematic analyses and self-evaluation, and improvement of tools for informing stakeholders and interconnection with the IZUM information system;
16. continuation of activities to improve communication between the Agency and stakeholders;
17. publication of the most frequently asked questions of experts and corresponding answers on the website.

Director's approval:

Dr Franci Demšar, Director

Ljubljana, 28 February 2020
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