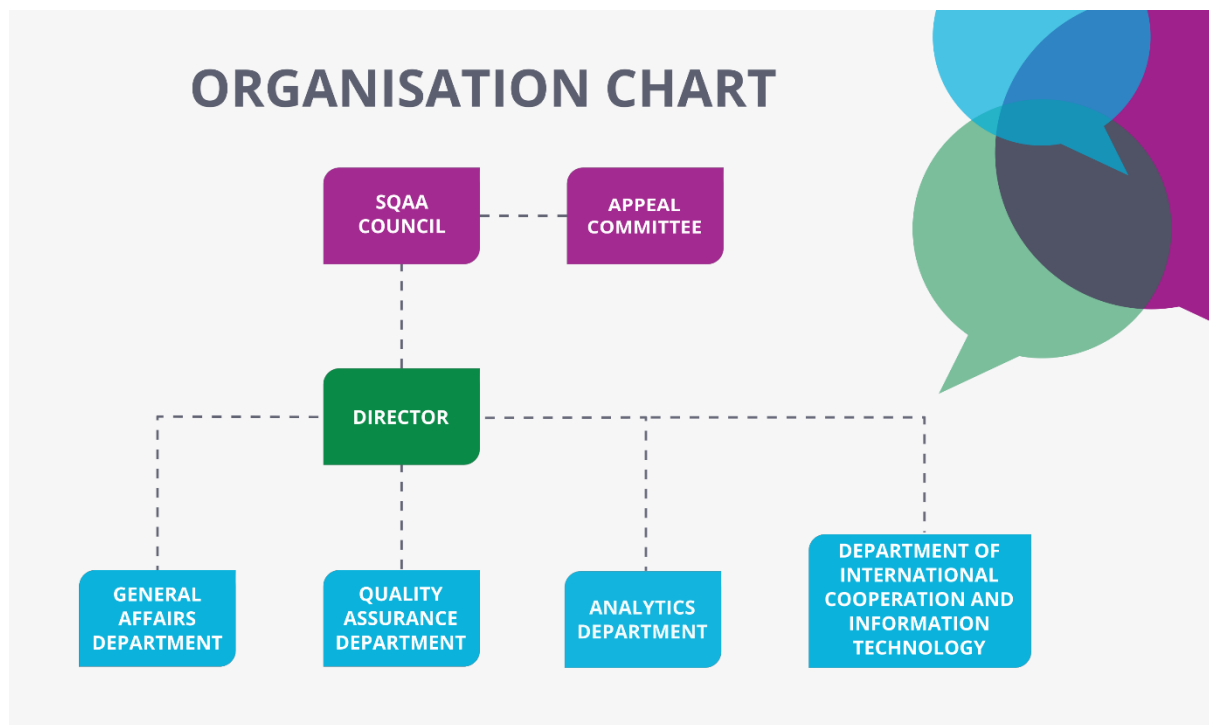


# STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE 2021-2025 PERIOD

## I. INTRODUCTION

The period in which the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) has set medium-term strategic goals from 2017 to 2020 is coming to an end. Before describing the achievement of strategic goals in the period and defining new ones until 2025, let us emphasise that since the beginning of its operation in 2010 – this year marks the tenth anniversary of its founding and the development in all these years is summarised in a special annual publication – the Agency has strived for continuous improvement in all areas of its work. We can see that it has been quite successful, following the values it has set for itself: professionalism, transparency and development. The establishment of the Agency in 2010 was a decisive step towards recognising and understanding the importance of independent quality assessment in higher and higher vocational education and deciding on accreditations, evaluations and opinions on the achievement of quality standards. After a few years, the Agency has established itself well in the international arena and achieved full international recognition by being registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in 2013 and joining the European Association of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – ENQA in 2015.

In the years from 2017 to 2020, it focused mainly on the improvement of professional, consulting and development work, renewal of criteria, better communication with stakeholders and computerisation. It reorganised its work into four sectors and reinforced its human resources in the field of information technology.



The Agency connects the strategic orientations for the period from 2021 to 2025 mainly with the further development of enhanced professional, analytical and development work and with more focused training (and cooperation) of stakeholders. The basic strategic

goal of the agency until 2025 is the adoption of an independent act on the Agency – the act on quality assurance in higher education.

## II. OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC GOALS ACHIEVED IN THE 2017-2020 PERIOD

The strategic goals adopted by the Agency Council at its 107th session on 15 December 2016:

- improving the professional work of the Agency,
- strengthening the independence and authority of the Agency,
- strengthening the culture of quality,
- renewal of criteria and other acts of the Agency,
- establishing an efficient and user-friendly information system of the Agency,
- extending membership in the ENQA and EQAR and strengthening the international cooperation of the Agency,
- reorganisation of the Agency work and its
- development work.

In-depth and analytical self-evaluation, annual reports on the work of the Agency and other documents show that the Agency has made great progress in recent years and achieved the set goals. It has put in place a new information system eNakvis with strong databases, it provides updated information about its activities to stakeholders and helps students in choosing their studies by providing information on accredited study programmes, higher education institutions and evaluated higher vocational colleges. It has laid the foundations for improving quality assessment; for the transition from quantitative assessment to qualitative assessment with more in-depth content, which is reflected in the new criteria and other acts it has adopted. It has strengthened the counseling of institutions and colleges and cooperation with them, switched to the so-called institutional accreditation, and begun to perform sample evaluations of study programmes intended to help institutions improve and self-evaluate study programmes. The international and project-based cooperation of the Agency has been diverse: it has its representatives in the bodies of various international institutions and in 2020, the Agency director was elected president of CEENQA. Analytical and development activities have also developed and will be further diversified in the future. There has been a great improvement in communication with stakeholders, which the Agency's self-evaluation group found deficient from year to year. In order to implement the above as soon as possible and as easily as possible, the Agency first thoroughly reorganised its work in 2018 and then in 2019 by adding two more departments to the Quality Assurance Department and the General Affairs Department, namely the Analytics Department and the Department of International Cooperation and Information Technology – the latter two were created by the division of the Quality Assurance Department. It also regulated the long-term and stable funding of the Agency. In 2018 and 2019, it extended its membership in ENQA and registration on EQAR for a full period of five years.

### Overview of events related to the professional and analytical work of the Agency and cooperation with stakeholders from 2017 to 2020:

Year	Amendments to the legislation and adoption of criteria	Guides/guidelines/interpretations	Training	Consultations and conferences	International exchanges and projects	Analyses
2017	New Accreditation	Interpretation of the	4 training courses for			Opinion analysis of

	Criteria	Accreditation Criteria as a constituent part of the regulation	experts			the concept of quality and strategic orientations of the Agency
2018				Consultation for experts Consultation for the Commissions for Quality at higher education institutions		Quality assurance in Slovenian higher and higher vocational education from 2014 to 2017 Quality of staff in Slovenian higher education from 2014 to 2017
2019	Amended Accreditation Criteria  Amended Criteria for Transfers  Amended ECTS criteria	Revision of the Agency's Quality Manual	6 training courses for experts	Consultation for experts Consultation for the Commissions for Quality at higher education institutions  Conference Slovenian higher education area – on the path to excellence?	Exchange – visit of a representative of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance to Slovenia Visit of a delegation of representatives of the Lithuanian Agency of Quality Assurance to Slovenia	Proceedings of discussions on quality assurance in higher education: from minimum standards to excellence, and SQAA annual report 2018. In cooperation with the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts Stakeholder opinion on external quality assurance in 2019
2020	Amended Accreditation Criteria – regulation of provisions for an international alliance of universities  Amended Minimum Standards for the Appointment to a Title	Guidelines for distance evaluations  Recommendations for work in emergency situations  Online guide to assessment of quality standards for accreditation and evaluation	Training course for members of the Agency Council (Commission for the Prevention of Corruption) Training course for members of the Council (decision-making) Training of candidates for experts	Historical overview of the Agency and its predecessors  Symposium on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Agency  International conference on federations of European universities Two consultations for Agency experts		Proceedings of discussions on alliances of European universities – universities of the future, Agency annual report 2019 and tenth anniversary of the Agency

				Consultation for higher education teachers		
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The Agency has organised several **trainings** for the Agency Council and the Appeals Committee members and prepared various analyses to help with consistent decision-making. The analyses focused on objectivity and impartiality, as well as to sector-specific regulations and reasoning of decisions. More than ten training courses and consultations have been also organised for the Agency experts in these three years. In particular, they learned about the new criteria for accreditation and external evaluation, methods of assessment, the Agency's information system, the characteristics of evaluation practices and the related results of systems analyses. Special **training courses** were organised for the introduction of sample evaluations of study programmes. In 2018 and 2019, the Agency organised first two broad **consultations** for commissions for quality and individuals involved in self-evaluation at higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. In these two years, employees participated in 41 education and training courses, workshops and consultations in Slovenia and abroad. They participated in exchanges with foreign agencies, and three of them attended international training for experts according to the European approach.

The **communication plan** of the Agency was thoroughly revised in 2018. The aim was to maximise the cooperation of higher education institutions in changing regulations and to increase the common understanding of quality assessment in higher education among different stakeholders. **Regular meetings** were introduced to resolve open issues regarding accreditation procedures, information system, legislation and other important issues with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Student Organisation of Slovenia, the Employment Service of Slovenia, the Rectors' Conference, universities and other higher education institutions.

The Agency conducted the last comprehensive survey on the opinion of stakeholders on external quality assessment in the expiring strategic period in 2019. The results showed that stakeholders want a greater Agency's contribution to the quality of implementation and content of study programmes, and especially to the quality of material and human resource conditions for study and research at institutions or colleges. A step towards it is the **Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes**, which place a great focus on the assessment of these issues. They set quality standards whose assessment differs according to the type of accreditation and evaluation and the type of higher education institution or the type and cycle of a study programme. They also differ from the old Criteria in the detailed provisions on assessment, which are intended for a uniform interpretation of the regulation. The impact of the new Accreditation Criteria on the experts' assessment and decision-making of the Agency Council began to show at the end of 2019. The Agency is currently examining and analysing it and preparing the basic documents for the consultations that started at the end of November and continued in the first half of December 2020. Following the example of the Accreditation Criteria and taking into account the characteristics of higher education, new *Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges* were adopted in 2018. The *Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education* and the new *Criteria for Agency Experts* were adopted in the same year.

Also updated in 2019 and 2020 were the *Criteria for the Allocation of Credits to Study Programmes under the European Credit Transfer System*, *Criteria for Transferring Between Study Programmes* and *Minimum Standards for the Appointment to the Title of Higher Education Teacher, Researcher and Faculty Assistant at Higher Education Institutions*.

The Agency has finally developed a new **eNakvis information system**, which enabled the submission of applications for accreditation and evaluation in electronic form in 2018

and improved the cooperation with institutions and other users in 2019. During the establishment and development of eNakvis, the Agency actively cooperated with stakeholders.

The greatest progress has been made in establishing a reliable, up-to-date and supplemented database on higher education institutions and study programmes; at the end of 2019, it contained three-quarters of all data required by the Agency from higher education institutions. The database is the basis for connecting with the databases of higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and other state institutions, which will eliminate duplication of work and enable real-time creation of accurate records. The database will also help in further developing the analytical work at the Agency.

The Agency has **comprehensively redesigned its website**, both in terms of graphics and contents, which made it the first organisation in the public sector to receive the A3C Certificate, accessible to all. It has published eNovičnik (eNewsletter) since 2019. It regularly publishes adopted regulations, and informs the stakeholders about the content of the emerging regulations and constructively addresses their proposals.

Its website also contains information on individual higher education institutions – their research activities, data on other accreditations, rankings on international scales, enrolment information –, other useful links and presentation videos of higher education institutions, thus enabling them to present their achievements, situation and plans themselves.

The publicly available records of the Agency are an accurate, transparent and up-to-date public database of accredited higher education institutions, study programmes and evaluated higher vocational colleges, together with decisions of the Agency Council and reports of groups or experts. The website also contains a constantly updated list of higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges in accreditation and evaluation procedures with all relevant information.

The goal of “**extending membership in ENQA and EQAR and strengthening the international cooperation** of the Agency” has been achieved. The Agency participates in international projects, in executive committees, general assemblies and working groups of international associations of agencies. In 2020, the Agency director was elected president of CEENQA.

Another important field of international cooperation is strategic networking with agencies in the area of former Yugoslavia, which takes place through participation in international projects and associations and frequent visits to agencies. Particular attention is paid to the exchange of thematic positions and good practices in the field of independence of the operation of quality assurance agencies in higher education.

The Agency also promotes internationalisation through the accreditation of international joint study programmes of Slovenian and foreign higher education institutions, the notification of study programmes accredited abroad and transnational higher education in accordance with the new *Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education*. It recognises accreditation decisions adopted by EQAR-listed agencies.

In the last two years it organised **two regular annual international conferences** on current topics in higher education, published two annual publications of the Agency with proceedings of discussions on selected topics at the conference, a short presentation of its work in the past year and selected thematic contribution.

The **analytical and development work** of the Agency is most evident from the extensive systems and thematic analyses and in-depth self-evaluation of the Agency, for which it also received recognition from external auditors of ENQA. The analyses describe the cross-sectional state of quality of higher vocational colleges, higher education institutions and their study programmes by all areas of assessment or related quality

standards, address the quality of their self-evaluations or reports and shed more light on the characteristics of evaluation practices of experts. They provide an in-depth insight into the operation of the quality assurance system in Slovenian higher education.

In the expiring strategic period, the Agency has prepared and published an analysis of quality in the Slovenian higher education area from 2014 to 2017, an analysis of the quality of staff in Slovenian higher education, a contribution on the transition from minimum standards to excellence, and the findings of stakeholder opinions on external quality assurance and on distance education. It has updated and published the methodology and procedure for the production and dissemination of systems and thematic analyses.

In order to improve self-evaluation and its work, the Agency has also amended its *Quality Manual, Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council* and other internal acts. It also responded quickly to the COVID-19 epidemic by adapting accreditations and evaluations to the situation. It has developed guidelines for distance site visits and published recommendations during the COVID-19 related emergency.

In addition to the eNakvis information system and the established system of distance external evaluations, the Agency set up in the second half of 2020 an internal information system intended for managing employees' time and tasks, called "iNakvis". The latter enables both monitoring and updating of tasks from the action plan, creation of events and online meetings by automatically generating web links for them, as well as fast communication between co-workers.

### **III. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR THE 2021-2025 PERIOD**

#### **Mission of the Agency**

The Agency provides for development and operation of the quality assurance system in the Slovenian higher education area. It operates with substantive and formal responsibility and provides counselling for all stakeholders and participants in tertiary education in accordance with the European and global development orientations.

#### **Vision of the Agency**

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

#### **Values of the Agency:**

- **professionalism (P)**
- **transparency (T)**
- **development (R)**

#### **Strategic objectives for the 2021-2025 period**

1. Adoption of the act on quality assurance in higher education (D)
2. Improvement of assessment according to quality standards and accreditation and evaluation procedures (P)
3. In-depth substantive analytic work in selected areas (P)
4. Establishment of up-to-date databases on selected activities at higher education institutions (T)
5. Pursuing sustainable development goals (D)
6. In-depth international cooperation (P)
7. Proactive communication (T)

The Agency connects the strategic orientations for the 2021-2015 period mainly with the further development of analytical and development work; preparation of a special guide to accreditations and evaluations with an emphasis on in-depth substantive assessment according to quality standards; with continuous and more focused training of participants in accreditation and evaluation procedures; with strengthening international activity in current areas; and with proactive communication. To facilitate the work of the Agency experts, it wants to establish up-to-date databases on research and library activities at higher education institutions, their premises and equipment. The basic strategic goal of the Agency until 2025 is an independent act on the Agency – the act on quality assurance in higher education.

#### **1. Adoption of the act on quality assurance in higher education**

By providing solutions different from those determined for the work of the Agency by the ZViS, the quality assurance in higher education act (quality assurance act) will enable

high-quality and full implementation of the tasks related to strategic orientations. The quality assurance act will regulate procedures by assigning the essential role to accreditation and evaluation decisions made on the basis of expert substantive assessments or findings; it will establish a basis for accreditations and evaluations abroad, regulate inconsistencies in applicable regulations and gather their provisions in one place.

The reasons for the adoption of an autonomous quality assurance act are therefore the following:

- a) consolidation of the independence of the Agency,
- b) regulation of the appeal procedure, which would ensure the importance of substantive assessment and decisions in accreditation and evaluation procedures;
- c) provision of a legal basis for the work of the Agency abroad – international accreditations;
- d) determination of the Agency's procedures in an act and not in an implementing regulation – as also recommended by the decisions of administrative inspectors;
- e) elimination of a significant number of inconsistencies in the current legislation;
- f) merging the Agency-related provisions of the ZViS, Memorandum of Association of the Agency, Accreditation and Evaluation Criteria, Criteria for International Cooperation and other relevant regulations in a single document, which would also contribute to de-bureaucratisation.

The Agency will strive to consolidate and enhance its autonomy as well as the autonomy of Slovenian higher education. Independence is closely linked to other reasons for the adoption of the quality assurance act; besides those listed above, these are the consolidation of the provisions governing the principal activity of the Agency, or the criteria that will help external quality assessments develop in the right direction and stabilise, which will boost the Agency's reputation and trust of higher education stakeholders.

*The achievement of this goal is in accordance with the value of the Agency that commits it to development.*

## **2. Improvement of assessment according to quality standards and accreditation and evaluation procedures**

The assessment guide outlined under the next strategic goal will contribute to the improvement of assessment according to quality standards in all prescribed areas and to the correct observance of the provisions on their assessment. In the strategic period from 2021 to 2025, the Agency will strive primarily for professional external assessments at high level, which will be sensitive to the needs of students and the external environment, as well as better take into account the specifics of higher education related to different cycles and types of studies, disciplines to which study programmes are linked, and differences in the status and organisation of higher education institutions. It will therefore focus on improving the assessments of experts and, on their basis, the decisions of the Agency Council. The Agency plans to organise many education and training courses, meetings with all important participants in accreditation and evaluation procedures, and together with them:

- a) address the inconsistencies in assessments made so far;
- b) unify the understanding of individual quality standards and provisions on their assessment;
- c) shift the assessment of quality standards from formalisms to a thorough substantive assessment under all its provisions;



- d) improve, in particular, the assessment of pedagogical, professional, scientific, research and artistic work of higher education institutions and teachers;
- e) make better use of individual quality standards and provisions on their assessment, taking into account the type of higher education institution and the type or nature and cycle of the study programme;
- f) improve and unify the accreditation and evaluation reports of experts, in which the factual situation will be even better established and the specifics of the subject of assessment will be taken into account;
- g) strengthen awareness of the importance and effects of both external audits and the quality that these assessment seek (It will encourage a prudent use of conceptual approaches to quality.).

A thorough and in-depth substantive assessment will be the basis for decisions on accreditations and evaluations. Therefore, in the draft quality assurance act, the Agency establishes special commissions by fields of study to assist the Agency Council; these commissions will, if necessary, discuss the findings of experts on study programmes.

The stages of accreditation and evaluation procedures also have some room for improvement:

- a) filing applications for accreditation or evaluation;
- b) experts and their appointment:
  - removal of non-responsive or inappropriate experts from the register,
  - complaint of an institution,
  - site visit of experts (work method, uniformity, impartiality, objectivity and professionalism – in-depth substantive assessment),
  - regular training and consultation sessions, including training courses for foreign experts;
- c) findings or "interim" reports of experts;
- d) final reports of experts;
- e) consideration of applications and decision-making at the Agency Council;
- f) appeal.

To improve the above, the Agency plans to increase the number of employees for conducting accreditation and evaluation procedures or to reinforce the human resources in the Quality Assurance Department. At all stages, their work with higher education institutions (applicants) as well as with the Agency experts – including in monitoring the production of accreditation and evaluation reports – and members of the Agency Council needs to be further improved and standardised. The Agency will try to achieve a unified understanding of the fulfilment of quality standards and legal provisions, and thus the correct guidance of experts in audits, primarily through continuous and even more intensive training.

The new quality assurance act provides for changes in the objections and appeals of applicants, with greater emphasis on substantiated and in-depth substantive findings. Related to the latter are the consideration of applications and decision-making at the Agency Council. In addition to care and commitment to responsible and fair conduct, independent decision-making, equal treatment of applicants, avoidance of conflicts of interest etc., attention will be focused on preparing Council members or its rapporteurs for substantive findings regarding each application and related report of the group of experts.

*The achievement of this goal is in accordance with the value of the Agency that commits it to professionalism.*

### **3. In-depth substantive analytic work in selected areas**

In the future, the Agency intends to develop analytical work through substantively more in-depth analyses in selected areas. It has written in the renewed methodology for the production and dissemination of systems and thematic analyses that the latter provide information by individual quality variables, namely for study programmes, institutions and colleges; general and specific information on the accreditation and evaluation practices of the Agency, i.e. on the characteristics of the accreditation and evaluation reports of experts and on the internal evaluation practices at institutions and colleges, as shown in their self-evaluation reports. In addition to informing the public, analyses can be the basis for the formulation of higher education and higher vocational education policies, implementing regulations and other regulations on the quality of higher education and for the planning of external evaluations. They provide reference support in assessments in evaluation and accreditation procedures. They provide institutions and colleges information with which they can compare the quality of their educational and research activities and self-evaluation practices. The purpose of systems and thematic analyses is to provide assistance in reflections on the quality of tertiary education, its assessment and improvement. Thematic analyses may be the basis for guidelines, recommendations and guides related to evaluation and accreditation procedures. Such documents are adopted by the Director (recommendations) or the Agency Council (guidelines and guides) and published on the website among the official acts of the Agency. They must be observed by institutions, colleges and experts in their assessments.

In this strategic period, as in the past, a systems analysis of quality in the Slovenian higher education area from 2018 to 2023 and extensive analyses of the opinions of internal and external stakeholders on the operation of the Agency will be made, especially in quality assessment, which will be one of the important bases for Agency reports for 2020 and 2021 and for 2022 and 2023.

The Agency, in cooperation with external associates, will prepare analyses on individual issues related to higher education, publish them and present them at domestic and international consultations. The analyses will be the basis for guidelines to be used by experts in assessing quality standards, and will also influence amendments to regulations, such as guidelines for the assessment of higher education libraries. They will also be the basis for the Agency's thematic contributions in annual publications and for the Agency's international conferences.

In-depth analyses of the reports of groups of experts on accreditations and evaluations will provide additional guidelines for external assessments, which will place greater emphasis on substantive dilemmas and starting points for assessments and on a more in-depth interpretation of regulations instead of operations and protocols already developed. They will try to get closer to meeting different academic standards. The Analytics Department is preparing a special guide to accreditations and evaluations or assessments. Based on the results of the analysis of previous expert reports, quality assessment consultations were held at the end of November and the beginning of December 2020, to which higher education teachers and scientists from higher education didactics and science research were invited in addition to the Agency's experts and other internal stakeholders. Consultations, trainings, conferences, etc. will continue in this strategic period, and the guide will be continuously updated and improved. The Agency plans to first publish it in full in electronic form at the end of 2021, and later to print it and distribute it to all stakeholders.

*The achievement of this goal is in accordance with the value of the Agency that commits it to professionalism.*

#### **4. Establishment of up-to-date databases on selected activities at higher education institutions**

The Agency has developed and put in place the eNakvis information system, which already enables much more than the old system. During this strategic period, it will develop it so as to make it maximally useful or easy to use. In addition to submitting and completing electronic applications for accreditations, evaluations, transformations of institutions and modifications of study programmes or the possibility of communicating their transformations or modifications, creating various databases and updating them on an ongoing basis, it will further assist the work of the Agency Council and the Appeals Committee, experts and Agency staff. It will support the Agency's self-evaluation and its analytical activity, including by obtaining data on accreditations and evaluations according to the old criteria set before the establishment of eNakvis.

By enabling the connection of various information systems and databases, the Agency will promote the connection between the systems of higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Vocational Education and Training (CPI) and other institutions.

New databases are planned: the Agency, together with IZUM, will create a database on the research activities of higher education institutions or their higher education teachers and associates and libraries, as well as a database of compulsory components of study programmes. A database on spatial capacities and equipment of higher education institutions will also be established. These bases can be of great help to experts and the Agency Council in assessing the quality of higher education institutions and study programmes. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, a database on the employability of students by higher education institutions and study programmes is also planned, taking into account the cycle, type or nature of the latter.

The Agency will provide access to a variety of data to the general public, especially students and prospective students.

*The achievement of this goal is in accordance with the value of the Agency that commits it to transparency.*

#### **5. Pursuing sustainable development goals**

Taking into account the Strategic Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2030) adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 and the changes caused by the epidemic situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Agency will strive to achieve the sustainable development goals in the next strategic period. In line with development trends in the European and international environment, it will take these objectives into account in its operation and management, as well as in the broader context of supporting and assisting the education area in reflecting and implementing good and transferable practices aimed at improving higher education. This will demonstrate support for society on the path of change towards a more sustainable lifestyle. This field is opening a new spectrum of knowledge and potential for research and development also in the field of higher education. It includes inclusive and integrative approaches to learning, teaching and cooperation, and paves the way for new or innovative principles and priorities in education.

The Agency's activities will therefore be oriented towards:

- improvement of its internal quality assurance system and activities related to sustainable development goals;
- active cooperation in the convergence of the elements of the external quality assurance system with the sustainable development goals in the Slovenian higher education area.

Taking into account the sustainable development goals and the epidemiological situation due to COVID-19, the Agency will continue to:

- a) rationally plan travels abroad;
- b) implement distance:
  - accreditation and evaluation procedures or visits of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges;
  - education and training courses of experts and organise consultations with them and other participants in distance accreditations and evaluations;
- c) organise several meetings with representatives of domestic institutions and foreign agencies, associations, etc. through video conferencing tools;
- d) enable the acceptance of applications in electronic form;
- e) take care of health and well-being of its employees;
- f) find new premises for the Agency: it will strive to make them less costly than at present and better tailored to the needs of the Agency's activities and its employees.

Already in 2020, the Agency had to adapt its activities to the changed situation caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to experts, the pandemic will not completely slow down, so it will continue to shape the work of the Agency in the future. With the listed adjustments, it will try to do it as well as possible while maintaining its quality. Distance accreditations, evaluations, trainings, consultations and meetings must therefore be carefully planned and managed. Some advantages may also be identified in this method of work: these certainly include a reduction in the cost of transport, accommodation or overnight stays, lecture halls, etc.; as well as a greater chance of more events or their repetition where necessary – the latter being particularly important in the Agency's commitment to training experts and other stakeholders for a more in-depth quality assessment in line with the emerging guide to accreditations and evaluations.

The Agency has obtained the "family-friendly company" certificate, which proves that it strives for the health and well-being of its employees. The latter is taken into account in the process of choosing new Agency premises by observing the opinion of employees and allowing them to tour the premises at various locations. The relocation of the Agency is planned for the end of 2021.

*The achievement of this goal is in accordance with the value of the Agency that commits it to development.*

## **6. In-depth international cooperation**

As can be seen from the above explanations, the Agency has established extensive international cooperation in the expiring strategic period. In the future, in line with the adopted plan, it will further strengthen its international activities to get a good overview of examples of good practice, policies, analyses and comparisons on a European and global scale, and adapt their application in the Slovenian higher education area to its specifics.

In addition to maintaining or renewing ENQA membership and registration on EQAR, which, if the Agency works well, can be done every five years, the Agency will:

- a) cooperate even more actively with other agencies and associations of quality assurance agencies; during the presidency of CEENQA, it will introduce

- innovations according to which all members of this association will prepare contributions in delineated subject fields and present them publicly;
- b) participate in international project groups, international networks and activities, in education and training courses, in the exchange of experts and employees;
  - c) make international comparisons in the context of analyses;
  - d) after the adoption of the quality assurance act, also perform accreditations and evaluations abroad.

A particular challenge in this strategic period will be the Agency's work on the establishment and operation of federations of European universities (European universities), the so-called universities of the future. Their present participants include two Slovenia's biggest universities. This integration will require the adjustment of quality assessment in all participating countries, agreements and creation of criteria or assessment frameworks tailored to such universities, mutual recognition of accreditation and evaluation decisions and, of course, full and mutual trust and great professionalism of all participants related to the above.

*The achievement of this goal is in accordance with the value of the Agency that commits it to professionalism.*

## **7. Proactive communication**

The Agency has made a great step forward in the communication with stakeholders. It intends to develop and deepen it further in the coming years. It is a commitment to transparent and open two-way communication, inclusion of external stakeholders in self-evaluation procedures and other activities of the Agency, and prompt notification of interested parties (website, monthly e-newsletter, social networks, etc.).

The Agency wants to provide its stakeholders with the most up-to-date, accurate and diverse information on Slovenian higher and higher vocational education. The aim is to increase the visibility of the website, which will be an information centre for raising awareness of the importance of assessing the quality of higher education. Therefore the Agency will prepare web content following the example of presentation films, which provide in an accessible and popular way information on the operation of the Agency, higher education institutions and the structure of the Slovenian higher education area while guiding visitors towards important contents (e.g. reports of groups of experts) more inherently related to the basic activity of the Agency, i.e. the assessment of the quality of higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and study programmes. In the coming years, the Agency's website will become the most important information point for students and future students, gathering all information relevant to them and links to other websites in one place. In order to popularise the website, the Agency will further strengthen its cooperation with higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, secondary school and university student associations, while increasing its presence on social networks.

*The achievement of this goal is in accordance with the value of the Agency that commits it to transparency.*

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

In the expiring strategic period, the Agency has established a foundation or orientation for further development in 2021 to 2025. Although it concerns different areas of its operation, the biggest challenge among the strategic goals it has set is to improve the assessment of quality standards in accreditations and evaluations. This will help to make

meaningful the role played by the Agency under the ZViS, i.e. to provide higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges a professionally substantiated, realistic, true insight into their activity, help them in its development, and strengthen the Agency's reputation as an indispensable partner in improving the quality of higher and higher vocational education. It will also improve and facilitate the decisions of the Agency Council and Appeals Committee.

An independent act on the Agency – the act on quality assurance in higher education – will play an important role in achieving strategic goals. The Agency will strive to enable even more in-depth professional assessment of quality standards and decision-making of the Agency Council by introducing special commissions by fields of study, reorganising appeal procedures and enabling the work of its staff abroad. It will work to harmonise the quality assurance act with all relevant higher education stakeholders, and, moreover, make them identify it as a necessary step to improve as well as facilitate work in the field of quality assurance in higher and higher vocational education.