



SELF-ASSESSMENT **REPORT**

ENQA TARGETED REVIEW

2022

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

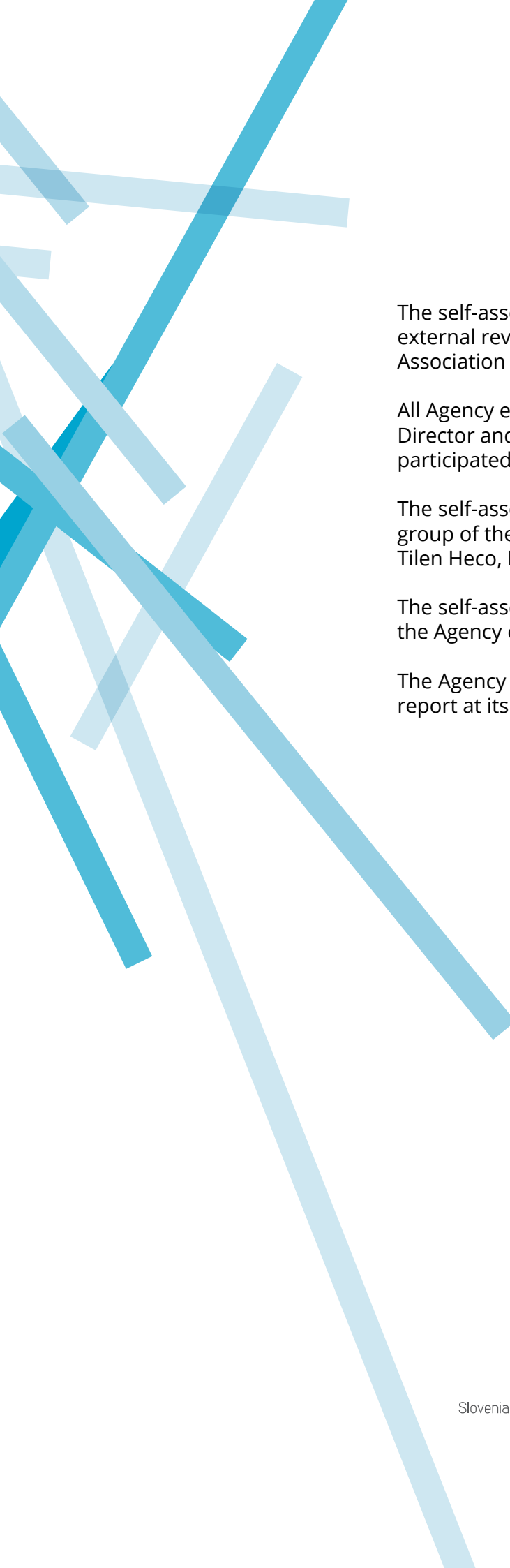


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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education



The self-assessment report is prepared as a basis for the third external review by a group of experts from the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

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

The self-assessment report was written by the self-assessment group of the Agency composed of: Mateja Bajuk Malešič, Tilen Heco, Nataša Kramar, Maja Milas and Gregor Rebernik.

The self-assessment report was approved by the Director of the Agency on 22 December 2022.

The Agency Council granted consent to the self-assessment report at its 184. session on 22 December 2022.



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Part one: **Background**

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this self-assessment report is to show that the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency, SQAA) contributes to the quality and development of tertiary education in Slovenia. It also wants to show that the Agency is actively involved in the implementation of quality improvement processes in tertiary education, monitoring the national and international higher education area and carrying out its tasks and activities in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The self-assessment report is prepared as a basis for the third external review in the context of the so-called targeted review by a group

of experts from the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The main objective of the Agency's self-assessment is to improve the quality of the Agency's activities and to fulfil the conditions for extending membership in ENQA and renewing registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

The composition of the self-assessment group preparing the self-assessment report was slightly different than in previous years. This is mainly due to a different type of evaluation by the ENQA group of experts. The purpose of the targeted external review of the Agency is to review the Agency's target areas of activity, in particular the partial compliances identified, the significant changes in the Agency's operation since the previous review, and the current challenges in achieving ESG compliance. The focus of ENQA's targeted review is also to help the Agency strive for continuous improvement in the quality of its work.



The last two years have been marked by the COVID-19 epidemic, which has significantly changed the Agency's working conditions and procedures. The recovery from the epidemic and the digital and green transitions have accelerated change in higher education and stimulated debate on the future development of quality assurance systems. The aim of the self-assessment is to open a discussion with key stakeholders and to ensure that the Agency is more responsive to the needs of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges and, as a consequence, to improve the role of the Agency in the Slovenian higher education area.

In this document, we present our progress since the last ENQA external review in 2018 and the challenges we face in our work. It is worth mentioning that the Agency prepared the last self-assessment report in 2020. This report covers the period from 1 March 2018 to 31 December 2019 (SAR 2018 and 2019), and is also an annex of this self-assess-

ment report. For 2020 and 2021 the Agency prepared a [Progress Report](#) which is a base for this self-assessment report.

We look forward to a discussion with all our stakeholders and warmly welcome the ENQA external review as a great opportunity to recognise our strengths and learn from opportunities for improvement. We are confident that we are successfully meeting all European quality standards. Nevertheless, all views and opinions that support the future development of the Agency will be more than welcome.

On behalf of the self-assessment team

Maja Milas

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT (SAR)

The Agency's self-assessment is based on opinions, procedures and documents developed in cooperation with a wide range of colleagues and stakeholders in the Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education area. The self-assessment report was prepared and formulated by the self-assessment team of the Agency. The team was composed of five employees and the Agency Council President. 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 and the text of the draft self-assessment report.

The self-assessment report consists of five chapters. The first part of the report consists of an overview of changes since the last ENQA review, a brief presentation of the Agency and the Slovenian higher education area with data on accreditations and evaluations and the internal quality of the Agency. The second part presents progress on the standards that were graded as partially compli-

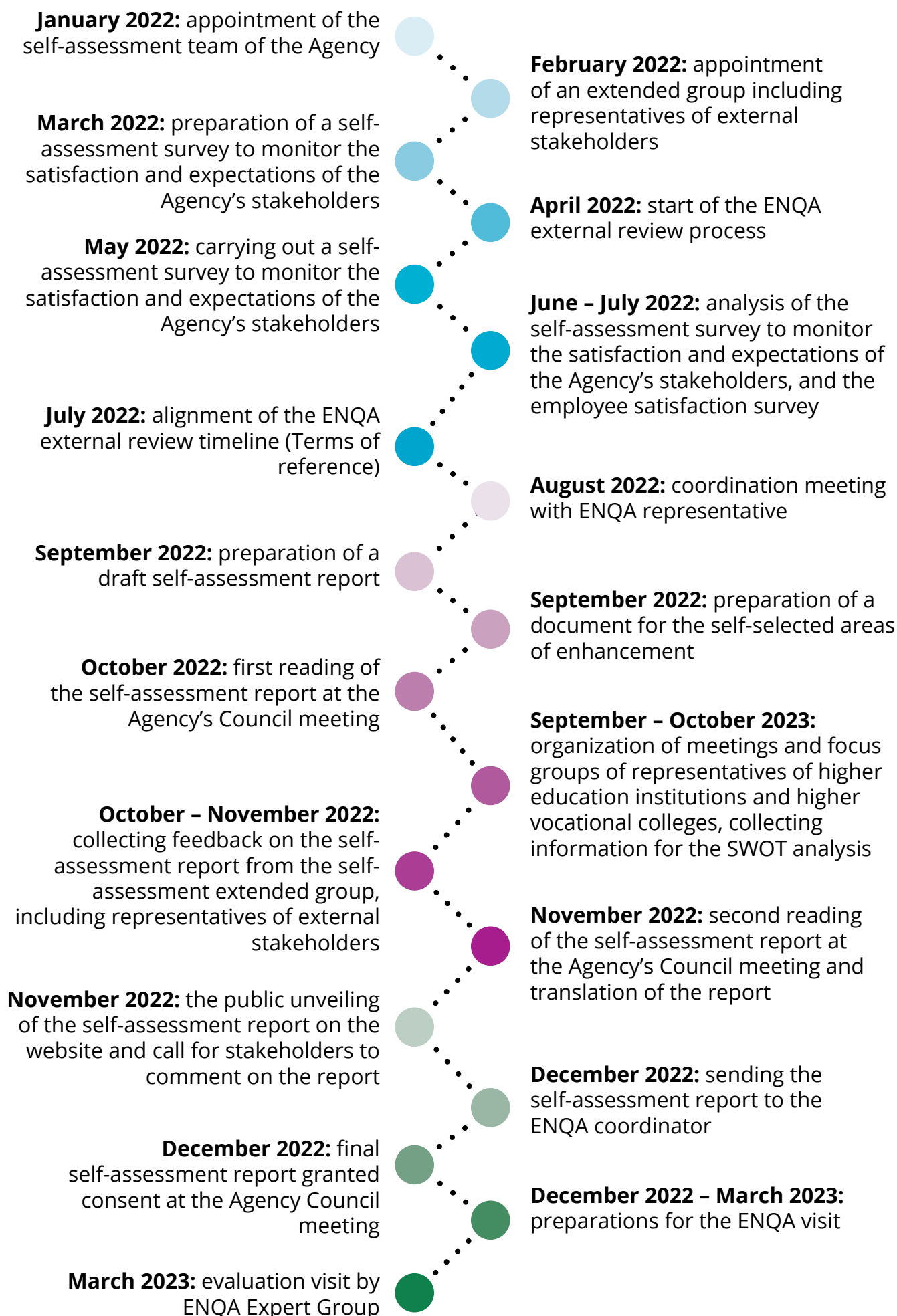
ant in the previous ENQA external review. This is followed by a chapter on selected quality improvement standards, which are closely linked to the Agency's future challenges and opportunities. The document also includes a review of the implementation of the recommendations from the previous self-assessment report and a SWOT analysis. The report concludes with an overview of the current challenges for the next self-evaluation period. The self-assessment report is based on an analysis of stakeholder opinion surveys, action plans, surveys and opinions of various stakeholders and ENQA recommendations in the period since 2018. As part of the self-assessment, the Agency reflected on stakeholder opinions on external quality assessments and accreditation and evaluation procedures and their impact on quality in tertiary education. It also carried out a survey among employees on their job satisfaction.

The analysis of the results of the surveys is presented in this report, while the results of both surveys are presented in the report under individual target areas. 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.

In preparing the self-assessment report, the Agency also considered the past reports on the Agency's work and operation 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.

The Agency sees the self-assessment report as a collaborative and self-critical tool for analysing progress, assessing the actual compliance of standards with ESG, and gaining a better understanding of the Agency and its activities, both internally and externally.

Timeline of the SAR and preparation for the ENQA visit:



CHANGES SINCE THE LAST FULL REVIEW

There have been no significant changes in the Agency operation since the last external assessment in 2018. The last major systemic change affecting the Agency's operations was adopted in 2016. It effected the transition from programme to institutional evaluation. Instead of the previous reaccreditation of study programmes, the law stipulated that the Agency carry out the evaluation of study programmes through the process of reaccreditation of higher education institutions, extraordinary evaluations of study programmes and a new type of procedure – evaluations of samples of study programmes. The law, namely, stipulates that the Agency annually evaluate at least 2% of the accredited study programmes implemented in that academic year by higher education institutions in the Republic of Slovenia. The nature of the procedure of evaluation of a sample of study programmes is different than in other Agency procedures, as the purpose it is to advise higher education institutions in the development of self-evaluation and improvement of the quality of study programmes. The procedure does not end with a decision with legal implications, but with recommendations to the higher education institution on how to improve the self-evaluation, implementation, updating or quality of the assessed study programme. The study programmes for the sample are determined by the Agency in cooperation with higher education institutions. The Agency first intro-

duced the procedures of evaluation of a sample of study programmes in the Annual Plan in 2019 (12 study programmes). As these activities have not yet been reviewed by ENQA and EQAR, an assessment of the procedures of evaluation of a sample of study programmes against ESG standards 2.1 to 2.7 is provided in the *ESG Compliance* section (*Part 2*).

SLOVENIAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

A detailed presentation of the Slovenian higher education area can be found in the Self-evaluation report of the Agency for 2018 and 2019 ([SAR 2018 and 2019](#)). There have been no major changes in the Slovenian higher education area since the last ENQA external review in 2018. While the number of higher education institutions has remained almost the same, and the number of study programmes has been growing with an increase of around 20 programmes each year, in 2021 for the first time we saw a process of several mergers of study programmes in each field, which will lead to at least a temporary stabilisation of the number of programmes after the transition period of the generational change.

Minor amendments to the Higher Education Act (ZViS), the umbrella act for higher education and the Agency's work, have been made in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic and the rapid transfer of the education process to the online environment. If we can say that the legislative part has remained largely the same, the higher education area is undergoing the process of accelerated digitisation (digitalisation of study processes, the HEIs' administration) with all the changes it brings.

In 2020-2022, the Agency has spent a lot of time drafting a stand-alone Agency Act. At the end

of 2021, a working group was appointed at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport to consider the draft Act, prepare explanations of the articles and the rationale for the adoption of the new Act. Due to the political situation (change of government), the further process of adopting the Act was halted. Discussions with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport did not resume until autumn 2022, and the procedures are expected to start immediately after the adoption of the amendment to the ZViS (end of 2022 or early 2023). A stand-alone Act would enable the Agency to participate in foreign accreditation procedures, which is increasingly necessary, and would strengthen the professionalism of decision-making in accreditation procedures.

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC

Like other actors in the European higher education system, the Agency faced the challenge of implementing accreditation and evaluation procedures in 2020 and 2021 in the face of the constraints created by the COVID-related situation. In April 2020, in cooperation with stakeholders, it made recommendations for higher education institutions to work in emergency situations. Most higher education institutions have been forced to move their entire operations to a virtual environment, but the transition to the new way of working and learning has been (too) rapid for most stakeholders to be able to deliver all the elements of successful distance learning due to the situation and measures. To help, the Agency has made recommendations to institutions on the transition to distance learning in emergency situations, as well as guidance on the evaluation of such education. In May 2020, in accordance with ENQA recommendations and with the aim of improving distance visits, the Agency prepared the *Guidelines for Distance Site Visits*, which were included in the work and programme of the *Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education* (CEENQA). In June 2020, the Agency changed the site visits, and in July it carried out a survey on stakeholder satisfaction with the new format of the visits, inviting them to make suggestions for improve-

ment. The stakeholders were generally very satisfied with the new way of working; the main difficulties were perceived in assessing material conditions. The Agency updated the guidelines in September 2020 on the basis of the survey, and focused on standardising the work of the staff through the preparation of technical guidance. The unstable situation continued throughout 2021 and into the spring of 2022, which led the Agency to continue distance site visits, but at the same time to start planning a hybrid approach for 2023.

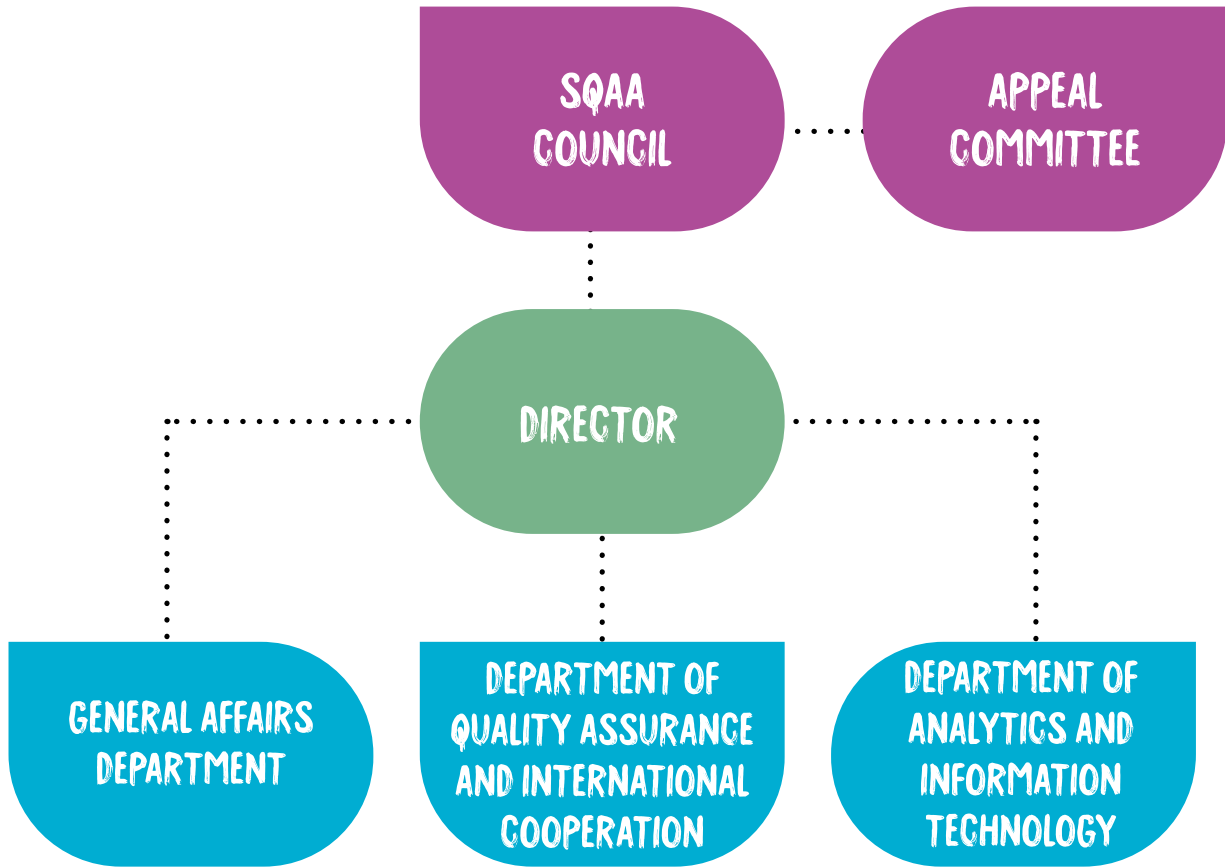
The Agency kept stakeholders regularly updated on new developments regarding the Agency's procedures and conduct on its website.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

There have been no changes to the Agency's organisational structure since the last external assessment. The bodies of the Agency are the Agency Council, the Appeal Committee and the Director. The bodies, how they are appointed and their powers are laid down in the law, which has not been amended in this part.

The Agency Director was appointed just before the visit of the group of experts carrying out the external review in 2018. During his term of office, the work of the Agency's professional services has been reorganised so that the departments are structured around more related areas of work: the Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department, the Analytics and Information Technology Department and the General Affairs

ORGANISATION CHART



Department. Department heads and deputy heads have also been appointed. The Agency has 20 employees, among which 7 work in the Department of Quality Assurance and International Cooperation, 7 in the Department of Analytics and Information Technology, and 5 in the General Affairs Department, and the Director.

The Agency has been reorganised twice during this self-assessment period. At the beginning of 2020, in order to focus more on analytics work, the Agency's former Analytics, International Cooperation and Information Technology Department was transformed into two departments: the Analytics Department and the International Cooperation and Information Technology Department. At the beginning of 2022,

the Agency was reorganised again, with the tasks of the four departments being divided among three departments: the Quality and International Cooperation Department, the Analytics and Information Technology Department and the General Affairs Department. The reorganisation was mainly due to the nature of the tasks, which are intertwined, as well as to the human resources planning (anticipated retirements of two heads of departments, initiation of new heads of departments to work). Discussions on the organisation of the work following the departure of the two heads of department took place for most of the year, at the annual discussions with the Director and at special meetings. The decision has taken considerable account of the wishes and suggestions of the employees who took part in the discussions, which we consider to be an appropriate way of planning the work.

The Employee satisfaction survey conducted before the introduction of the three departments showed that the division of work into depart-

ments had a positive impact on work, as it made tasks more transparent and easier to monitor. It should increase the productivity and efficiency of the work done, and deepen substantive coordination. Greater integration of work between department has been proposed. Our employees suggested that there should be clearer planning of tasks that concern the work of the whole Agency, not just individual departments, and suggested more cooperation between departments and employees. In the survey, our employees expressed an adequate awareness of work-related information (13 out of the 14 employees who completed the survey), which is believed to be the result of many discussions, meetings, participation in groups as well as the internal iNakvis information system. In line with the suggestions made in the survey and in the annual discussions with the Director, it was agreed at the Director's college in September 2022 that the departments would hold joint weekly meetings on a rotating basis, to improve transparency and cooperation between the departments. As these meetings have only just started, we will be able to check their impact in the next self-evaluation period.

Weekly management and Director's colleges and department meetings are held regularly. In addition, a monthly meeting of the staff members conducting procedures has been introduced to prepare for the session, at which the staff members resolve any dilemmas in the procedures with heads of departments and a lawyer. If necessary, problem-specific meetings are also convened, and employees who have not attended the meetings are informed on the problems in question at the Monday joint meeting. This streamlining of work was rated very highly by stakeholders in the most recent SAR survey¹ (4.0, previously 3.6), as they perceived staff members to be working in a compliant and professional manner (4.2), and to be efficient and effective in doing so (4.1).

We consider that management has taken on board the suggestions and findings of the previous self-assessment report to a considerable extent, as staff satisfaction with the organisa-

tion and flow of information is rated quite high. Weekly colleges of managers and the Director, regular department meetings, thematic meetings of employees (systemic issues, changes to criteria and regulations, etc.) and the iNakvis information system contribute to better transparency of work and employee participation. The results of the Employee satisfaction survey show that satisfaction with the management and governance of the Agency has increased from 2.9 to 3.6. Satisfaction with the flow of information while working from home was rated 4.1, while employee collaboration was rated 4.1, which is slightly lower than the previous score (4.6). The score of 3.9 in relation to the openness of communication or the expression of employees' opinions, compared to 4.2 in the previous period, is also somewhat surprising. There are still opportunities for improvement in this area, which management should address accordingly. Interpersonal relations at the Agency are also rated lower.

FUTURE CHALLENGES:

- successful transfer of knowledge and experience to employees upon the planned retirement of two of the Agency's most experienced staff members;
- strengthening collaborative culture among employees and departments.

¹ Most questions required a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 was strongly agree or the highest rating, and 1 was disagree or the lowest rating.

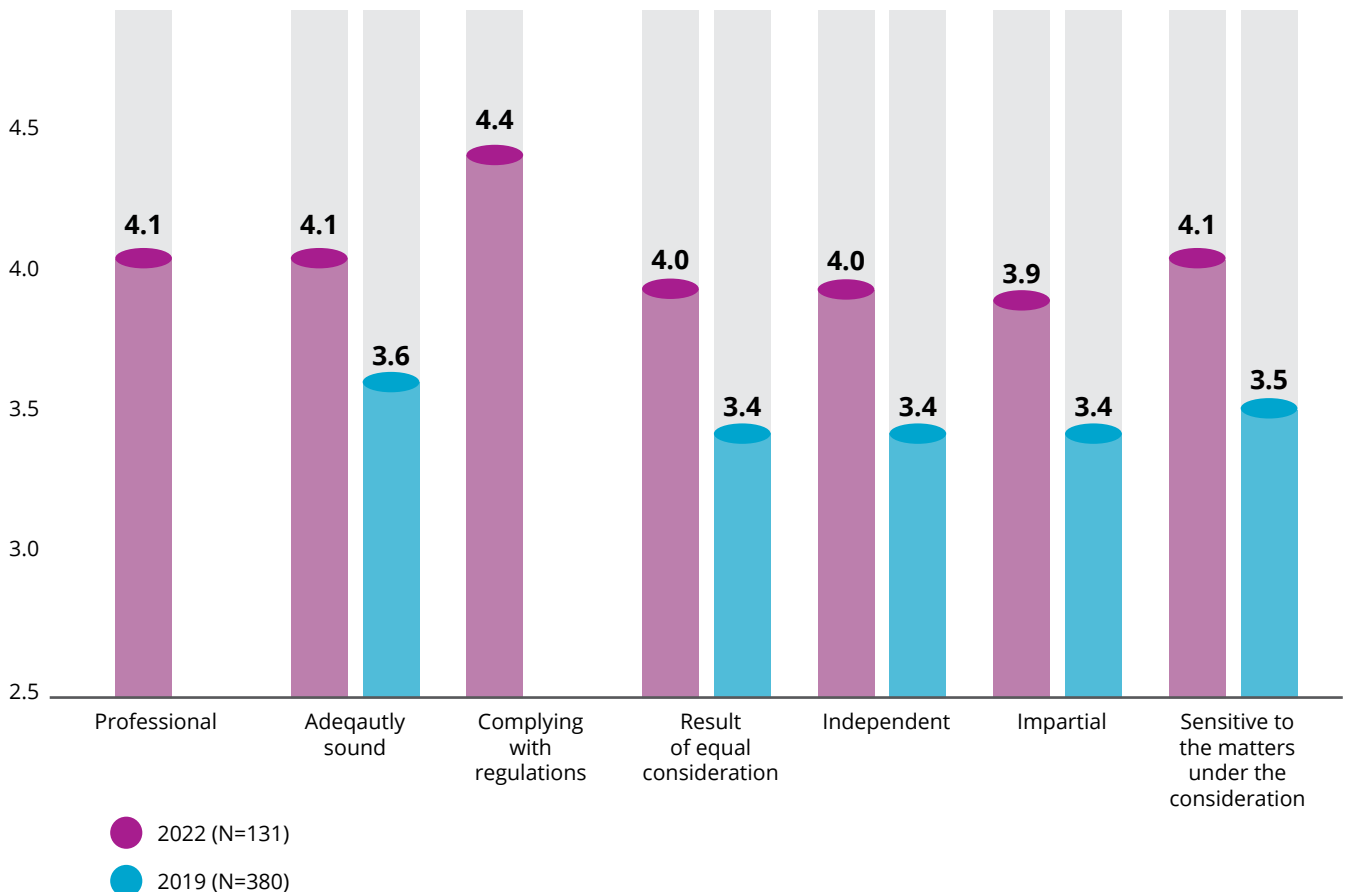
AGENCY COUNCIL

The Agency Council has taken into account the recommendations of the previous self-assessment report (SAR 2018 and 2019) and re-appointed the Commission for Extraordinary Evaluations in early 2020. The Commission addresses the initiatives for and the responses of higher education institutions to extraordinary evaluations and proposes to the Agency Council how to proceed with the launch of the special evaluation procedures. We consider that the Commission has an important role, and that its proposals are substantive and helpful to the Council in its decision-making.

In 2020, when the Agency's operations were moved to a virtual environment due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the Agency Council par-

ticipated in the development of recommendations for distance learning implementation and/or adopted guidelines for distance site visits. We consider the involvement of the Agency Council in topical issues and participation in the orientations of higher education institutions as good practice for the quality of higher education and the visibility of the Agency's position in the environment.

The thematic discussions at the Council meetings were positively received. During this period, the Agency Council discussed a wide range of topics, including presentations of the results of analyses, surveys, guidelines, the draft Quality Act, the proposal on how to deal with undue pressure, the baselines for the assessment of interdisciplinary study programmes, etc., thus strengthening its involvement in the Agency's various themes and areas of activity. The Agency Council has placed particular emphasis on how to deal with cases of undue pressure on experts, Council members or the Agency staff. It has adopted a zero-tolerance approach to undue pressure and a protocol for



dealing with it when it occurs. In 2020, Council members and Agency staff attended a special seminar on this topic. To ensure independence of assessment and decision-making, members of the Agency Council have been excluded from proceedings on several occasions. The SAR survey shows² that the rating of the Council's decisions has improved significantly compared to the previous survey in 2019. For the decisions of the Agency Council, respondents assessed the soundness of the decisions, their compliance with the rules, the equality of consideration at the sessions, and independence and sensitivity to the matters under consideration. The scores were collected for the "Agency Council decisions" as illustrated above.

The scores are high, especially those concerning the view that the decisions are in line with the rules, independent, professional and adequately reasoned. The most significant improvements in scores were in the equality of consideration, independence of decisions and taking into account the specificities of the subject of assessment.

The SAR survey shows that stakeholders give better scores to the soundness of the Agency Council's decisions than in the previous period. This is probably linked to the provision in the [Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council](#) that a proposal for a decision opposing the rapporteur's proposal must be substantiated in writing. Members of the Agency Council must therefore thoroughly consider and justify their decision, and it helps that a matter that requires written and substantiated material is adjourned to the next session.

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Cooperation with external stakeholders has strengthened. The Agency organises regular annual meetings and conferences to which it invites stakeholders, the Director continues weekly meetings with higher education institutions, regular meetings with university rectors, stakeholders are involved in the drafting of new and amended regulations of the Agency Council, they receive

the Agency's monthly newsletters, etc. The Agency also organises regular meetings with representatives of higher education institutions and participates in consultations organised by the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges. The improvement in stakeholder engagement is also reflected in the SAR survey, where all areas received higher scores than in the previous period (see ESG 3.6 Internal Quality Assurance and Professional Conduct).

RESOURCES

Financial resources

As a direct budget user, the Agency receives funding for its activities directly from the state budget. It is autonomous in drafting its financial plan and in the use of the funds allocated to its work. The available financial resources are sufficient to cover all the Agency's activities.

Since the previous self-assessment, the Agency has increased its financial resources, which are fully sufficient for its operation. The relocation to the new premises has reduced monthly rental expenses; work from home, distance site and accreditation visits have slightly reduced expenditure on travel and accommodation for experts. In doing so, the Agency is also doing its bit for sustainable development. Spending is planned on an ongoing basis, with monthly reports on the outturn. In its audit of the regularity of the Agency's operations for 2020, the Court of Auditors of the Republic of Slovenia requested a response report in only one case, for a corrective action that was subsequently implemented. The Court of Auditors stated that, apart from the above case, the Agency complied in

² Most questions required a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 was strongly agree or the highest rating, and 1 was disagree or the lowest rating.

all material respects with the rules in the year of audit. We conclude that the Agency's material and financial operation is adequate.

Human and other resources

The number of employees has not changed. However, also as a result of the action taken in the context of the Family Friendly Enterprise certification process, the Agency, in the last year before the expected retirement of the two heads of department, started to plan for their unburdening and to ensure the transfer of knowledge to the remaining employees. This has also led to a reorganisation of the work of the departments, with one of the heads handing over the management of the department to a colleague with whom she works, and the other initiating her deputy to work.

Since the last self-assessment report, the Agency has realised the objective set out in its 2018 Human Resources Development Plan to allocate staff to posts in line with their qualifications. Much attention has been paid to human resources training and development. Each year, the Agency draws up a training plan based on employee requests. To encourage employees to pursue

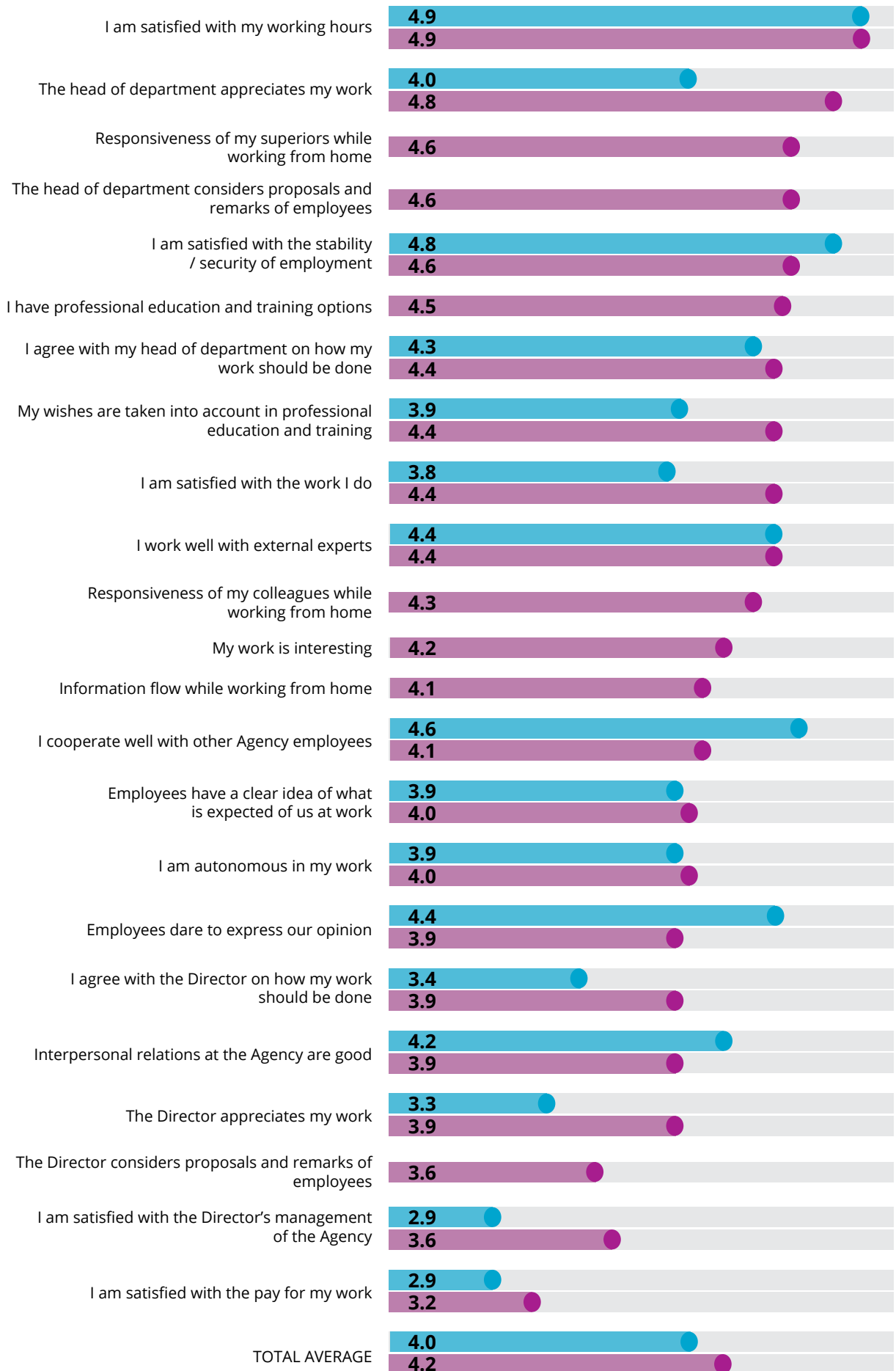
higher education and improve their work, the Agency finances employees in obtaining a higher level of education: three employees are enrolled in doctoral studies, two have completed a master's degree and one is completing a first-cycle degree. Employees are very satisfied with the education and training opportunities offered by the Agency (86%), and the same percentage consider that the training includes their wishes and suggestions. Their suggestions for further improvement are that more attention should be paid to topics related to the field of work (micro-credentials, joint study programmes, etc.). In view of the shortage of organised events where the desired areas would be adequately addressed, the management has given assurances that it will seek to liaise with experts in these fields in order to make competent presentations to employees on the chosen topics.

The employee satisfaction survey³ showed that in both periods compared (2021 and 2019), the highest ratings were given to interesting job, satisfaction with working hours, job security and cooperation with external experts, as well as the work of department heads in 2021. The scores were lower in satisfaction with remuneration for work done, the evaluation of the Agency's management and the Director's taking account of employee suggestions and comments. However, there is a marked improvement compared to the previous period (scores of 3.2 and 3.6 respectively, compared to 2.9). There is a deterioration in the scores for cooperation with colleagues, interpersonal relations at the Agency and expressing opinions. While this is a marginal downward deviation compared to the previous year, it is somewhat strange that the results show that satisfaction with the Agency governance and with the management has improved, while employees are less likely to express their opinions. We suggest that the management look for appropriate mechanisms to improve cooperation between employees (encouraging the inclusion of employees who feel excluded, more meetings without the presence of the Director where employees can openly discuss certain issues, etc.).

Table 1: Number of events (training, seminars, workshops, courses, conferences, etc.) attended by employees during this self-evaluation period:



³ Most questions required a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 was strongly agree or the highest rating and 1 was disagree or the lowest rating.



● 2019 (N=13)
● 2021 (N=14)

2.5 3.0 3.5 4.0 4.5 5.0

The Integrity Group of the Agency (members of the group are employees) has met several times since the last external review by ENQA. The work of the group has been marked by intense engagement with issues of academic integrity, corruption risks and mobbing in the workplace. During the meetings, the Group reviewed and analysed the results of the employee satisfaction survey as regards conflicts of interest, bias and undue pressure. A Mobbing at Workplace seminar was organised for employees in April 2022.

Other significant training activities include participation in a consultation on addressing sexual harassment in the area of science and the consequences of reporting, organised by the national Commission for Equal Opportunities in Science at the end of 2021, and participation in the national Commission for the Prevention of Corruption's online round table on the occasion of Anti-Corruption Day. The newly adopted Agency's Rules on the Protection of Dignity will also be of great help in this area.

The Agency pays particular attention to reconciling work and family life. In March 2020, it was certified as a Family Friendly Enterprise by Ekvilib institute and has adopted and implemented 16 measures (work from home, disconnection from work communication, pre-retirement career plan, quiet hours, possibility to bring children and pets to work, etc.), the implementation of which is verified annually by the certifier. The measures have been well received by the employees, and the evaluations of the surveys carried out as part of this process show a high level of staff satisfaction. We recommend that the Agen-

cy continues this project, as the well-being of employees is key to good relations and cooperation between them. At the same time, measures such as working from home contribute to the pursuit of sustainability objectives and follow the expectations of employees, while respecting the Agency's commitment to a better work-life balance.

The group for the promotion of health also plays an important role in the well-being of employees. The main concern or mission of the group is to encourage employees to adopt a healthy lifestyle both inside and outside the Agency's premises, in various areas (exercise, entertainment, nutrition, etc.). In the past period, short hikes with a final get-together, a New Year's party, and workplace exercise have been organised. The group also raises awareness and informs employees about blood donation campaigns. These events and social gatherings contribute to creating a pleasant atmosphere in the employee team, strengthening interpersonal relations and strengthening the sense of belonging to the Agency.

The Agency moved its offices to a new location in autumn 2021. The search for suitable premises took into account the wishes and needs of the employees (bicycle storage, nearby parking, small offices for one or up to two employees, etc.). Despite the considerable technical, organisational and logistical effort, the relocation to the new premises was carried out without any interruptions to work or any other problems.

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE AGENCY

The amendment to the Quality Manual adopted in June 2021 has slightly changed the self-assessment procedures: it stipulates that the self-assessment report is prepared only before the external review, and the Agency prepares an annual progress report which assesses compliance with the recommendations of the external review on compliance with ESG standards. In accordance with the above, the Agency prepared the Progress Report in 2020 and 2021 and published it on its website. At the same time as the Agency was

changing the way it carries out self-assessment, ENQA adopted guidelines for targeted review. The Agency has opted for this type of assessment and has adapted its self-assessment report accordingly; in accordance with the Quality Manual, it contains additional content on the Agency's internal quality assurance.

Above we also present some of the results of the employee satisfaction survey, which was carried out at the end of 2021; 14 out of 20 employees

responded to it. The areas covered were: risk factors, education and training, work organisation and employee satisfaction.

There have been no other systemic changes in the work and activities of the Agency or its organisation since the last external assessment.

UPDATE ON THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES, WITH DATA ON PERFORMED ACCREDITATIONS AND EVALUATIONS

NEW EXTERNAL QA ACTIVITY: EXTERNAL (SAMPLE) EVALUATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME

The Agency carries out annual evaluations of a sample of study programmes to evaluate the study programmes on quality of content and delivery of study programmes, as well as the conditions for study and to evaluate higher education institutions on quality assurance of study programmes, the self-assessment, updating or quality of the assessed study programme.

UPDATE ON THE AGENCY'S ACCREDITATION AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES AND THEIR DECISIONS

The overview of the data covers the whole period since the last external review by ENQA, and the details are only considered for the current self-assessment period. The more detailed explanation for 2018 and 2019 can be found in the SAR 2018 and 2019. The number of negative decisions covers only those where the decision remained negative after any appeal procedure.

Table 2: Decisions in accreditation and evaluation procedures since 2018

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Study programmes						
Accreditation of new programmes ^a	9	29	13	17	9	77
Withdrawal of application for accreditation	1	8	7	5 + 1 rejected	4	26
Negative decisions in accreditation procedures	2	1	1	0	1	5
Evaluation of a sample (all) ^b	/	12	18	27	17	74
Non-compliances identified	/	4	4	2	8	18
Extraordinary evaluation	1	1	0	0	1 + 1 (HEI)	4
Total	13	55	43	52	41	204
Higher education institutions						
Initial accreditation ^c	0	0	0	1	0	1
Reaccreditation (all) ^d	0	2	7	4	13	26
Reaccreditation for a shorter period	0	0	4	1	4	9
Transformation	2	0	1	2	2	7
Withdrawal of application in HEI procedures	1 (initial accreditation)	2 (re-accreditation + transformation)	0	0	0	3
Negative decisions in HEI procedures	0	1 (initial accreditation)	1 (initial accreditation)	0	1	3
Total	3	5	13	8	20	49
Higher vocational colleges^e						
External evaluation (positive and qualified positive opinions)	9	15	8	8	10	50
Negative opinions	0	0	0	1	1	2
Total	9	15	8	9	11	52

a The procedure determines whether new study programmes comply with the quality standards determined for initial accreditation. The main areas of assessment cover the composition and content as well as the concept of the implementation of the study programme. Accreditation of a study programme is granted for an indefinite period or the application is denied.

b The procedure determines whether accredited study programmes comply with the quality standards determined for external evaluation of study programmes. The main areas of assessment cover the modification and updating of a study programme, its implementation and the quality assurance system of a higher education institution in the part referring to quality assurance and improvement of a study programme (self-evaluation). The basis for the assessment shall be a self-evaluation report containing the evaluation of the areas of assessment from this chapter. The external evaluation of a study programme shall be performed in the reaccreditation procedure of a higher education institution or extraordinary evaluation of a study programme, or as an evaluation of a sample of study programmes.

c The procedure determines whether new higher education institutions comply with the conditions and quality standards determined for initial accreditation. The main areas of assessment cover the operation of higher education institution, human resources and material conditions. Initial accreditation

of a higher education institution is granted for a period of five years or the application is denied.

d The procedure determines whether accredited higher education institutions comply with the quality standards determined for external evaluation higher education institutions. The procedure for reaccreditation of a higher education institution shall be carried out by external evaluation and shall conclude with a decision on reaccreditation. External evaluation is the procedure of the comprehensive assessment of the operation of a higher education institution in the period since the previous accreditation. The assessment shall consider the progress and development since the previous accreditation in all areas of assessment, especially the internal quality assurance system of a higher education institution. The basis for the assessment shall be a self-evaluation report which shall include the evaluation of the whole set of activities and the evaluation of the implementation and modifications of study programmes to assure the quality of educational, scientific, professional or artistic work in the fields and disciplines of study programmes. Re-accreditation of a higher education institutions is granted for a period of maximum five years (or less, but maximum three years) or is not granted.

e In the external evaluation processes of higher vocational colleges, the agency assesses whether a college meets the standards laid down in the criteria for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges. In this process of the group of experts has a similar task to the group in the re-accreditation procedure of the higher education institution, as well as the phases in the procedure until the final evaluation report is issued. The fields of assessment are the same, but the group of experts must take into account the special features of the higher vocational college. The Agency adopts an opinion on whether a college complies with the standards of quality. The accreditation is given by the ministry, responsible for higher vocational education.

From January 2020 to December 2022, the Agency Council had 39 sessions, of which four were extraordinary and five were correspondence.

During the self-assessment period under review, the Agency Council accredited 39 new study programmes and adopted two negative decisions in the study programme accreditation procedures for the following reasons (summarised):

- the applicant has not fulfilled the necessary material conditions as required by Article 15 of the Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes (hereinafter: the Accreditation Criteria);
- inadequate habilitation of the holder (appropriateness in terms of fields);
- underdeveloped research in the field of the study programme;
- inconsistent content of the study programme;
- the level of complexity of the content of the study programme is too low.

The above summary shows that the reasons for the negative decision are similar to those of the previous self-evaluation period.

There is a continuing trend of applications being withdrawn from procedures, followed by procedures being discontinued. Namely, applicants withdrew their applications for accreditation of study programmes in 16 procedures; as a rule, this was done after a negative final report of the group of experts, where it was established that the conditions or quality standards from the Accreditation Criteria were not fully met. This points to the importance of maintaining the process of accreditation of a study programme by the Agency, but also highlights certain substantive and human resources difficulties for higher education institutions in expanding into new areas of activity.

The Agency Council reaccredited 24 higher education institutions, 9 of them for a shorter period. During this period, the Agency also processed four applications for the reaccreditation of universities, where the process is lengthier and more

complex, involving two longer site visits and a larger group of experts with an even greater emphasis on international composition.

In the procedures for the reaccreditation of higher education institutions, the Agency identified problems in complying with the legal provisions (Article 38 of the ZViS) on the conditions for enrolment in university study programmes. In previous years higher education institutions did not comply with the legal provision that university study programmes were open only to candidates who have passed the Baccalaureate and candidates who have passed the Vocational Baccalaureate in the relevant upper-secondary vocational education programme in the same field of study.

Some higher education institutions also enrolled candidates who had obtained the vocational baccalaureate in a secondary school programme in another professional field. Following an urgency of the professional public to resolve the conditions for enrolment, the Agency, with clarification from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, started to consistently check whether the enrolment conditions were in line with Article 38 of the ZViS. The issues were addressed within each procedure, but in the same way for all higher education institutions, which, especially in the case of reaccreditation of universities, led to an increase in the duration of the procedure.

The clearer and more precise Accreditation Criteria are also reflected in an increase in the number of reaccreditations for a shorter period.

The following reasons have been pointed out (summarised):

- insufficient professional, research and development activity, and failure to meet the conditions for student and teacher involvement;
- the internal quality assurance system did not enable the closing of the quality loop in several or all areas of operation of a higher education institution;
- the institution did not have adequate mechanisms in place to detect, monitor and address possible duplication or mixing of content between higher vocational and higher professional study programmes;
- inadequate updating of the content and implementation of study programmes (acquisition of competences is not ensured, contact hours are not implemented as planned, etc.);
- non-compliance with regulatory provisions in the composition of university bodies.

Evaluation of a sample of study programmes

Each year, the Agency identified study programmes in a selected field to evaluate a sample. In 2020, the focus was on the international dimension; in 2021, the sample was drawn from teacher training study programmes, and in 2022, from third-cycle study programmes. 62 evaluations of samples were carried out, with major deficiencies or non-compliances found in 14 cases (summarised):

- the contact hours of study programme courses were not implemented in accordance with the curricula or the legislation in force;
- the learning outcomes of the courses and their implementation were not adapted to the cycle and type of study programme;
- data on the actual student workload in individual courses were not properly collected and measures were not implemented in accordance with the Criteria for the Allocation of Credits to Study Programmes under the European Credit Transfer System (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 67/19);
- the rules on working with students with special needs were not adopted;
- internal and external stakeholders were not properly involved in the preparation of the self-assessment report;
- the quality loop for the evaluated study programme was not closed;
- the implementation of a university study programme was not separated from the implementation of a higher professional study programme;
- science and research projects were not relevant;
- science and research activities of course holders were deficient;
- it was possible to acquire competences and produce final works in areas for which the study program is not accredited;
- the rules for completing the study programme were not unified for all students.

Based on the findings in the area of scientific research, and in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the Slovenian higher education area, third-cycle study programmes will also be evaluated as part of the 2023 sample.

In the area of self-assessment of study programmes, there has been a marked improvement in internal processes, but the Agency has identified a few cases where quality standards have not (yet) been met. The Agency encourages higher education institutions to establish a clear and feasible action plan and regularly monitors progress within each case.

External evaluations of higher vocational colleges

The Agency Council adopted an opinion⁴ on the meeting of the quality standards prescribed by Act and the Criteria for the 26 higher vocational colleges.

In two higher vocational colleges, the Agency Council adopted a qualified opinion, as it identified non-compliances that the colleges had to rectify within one year, namely: inadequate human resources structure and an internal quality assurance system that is not properly formalised and does not ensure a closed quality loop.

For two colleges, the Agency Council issued an opinion that they did not meet quality standards due to an insufficiently regulated system of practical training, inadequate implementation of study programmes, unprofessional staffing and insufficient self-assessment. The Agency notified the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the non-compliances found and proposed to initiate the re-accreditation procedure in accordance with point 5 of Article 26 of the Higher Vocational Education Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, Nos 86/04, 100/13 and 54/22-ZUPŠ-1).

⁴ In accordance with the Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher vocational colleges, the Agency's Council shall adopt the opinion that:
 - the higher vocational college meets the quality standards,
 - there are significant deficiencies or non-conformities in the school's performance in meeting the quality standards set out in these criteria, and shall impose a deadline for the school to remedy them,
 - the school does not meet the quality standards set out in these criteria where there are significant deficiencies or non-conformities in the school's performance throughout the period since the last evaluation or establishment. In this case, it shall propose to the Ministry to initiate a re-accreditation procedure in accordance with Article 26(5) of the Act on Higher Professional Education (Official Journal of the Republic of Slovenia, No 86/04 and 100/13; hereinafter: ZVSI).

The competence of carrying out the accreditation procedures of higher vocational colleges lies with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and not on the Agency.

INITIATIVES FOR EXTRAORDINARY EVALUATIONS

Initiatives received from external stakeholders

Between 2018 and 2022, the Agency Council received 17 initiatives from external stakeholders for possible implementation of an extraordinary evaluation procedure. Initiatives have been sent by the students, teachers, journalists, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and a law firm.

The Agency Council decided the following on the initiatives received from external stakeholders:

In the case of one higher education institution, the Agency Council initiated extraordinary evaluation, as the response of the higher education institution did not offer adequate and clear explanations on the suspicion of major violations in the field of meeting the habilitation criteria.

In the other 16 cases, the Agency Council did not initiate the procedure because (summarised):

- the factual situation was already established, and the higher vocational college was eliminating the identified deficiencies (elimination of deficiencies will be assessed in the context of regular external evaluation);
- the procedure of reaccreditation of the higher education institution or external

evaluation of the higher vocational college was already in progress;

- the initiative did not substantiate a reasonable suspicion of serious and systematic deficiencies;
- the study programme was already assessed within the evaluation of a sample;
- the Agency was not responsible for the elimination of reported deficiencies;
- the Agency Council noted that the institution did not intend to apply for reaccreditation and that its accreditation would expire shortly.

Other initiatives

There have been two cases, where the Agency Council initiated an extraordinary evaluation based on its own judgement.

In the first case, the Agency Council initiated an extraordinary evaluation after taking note of modifications of the study programme, where it considered that there were reasonable grounds for suspecting major deficiencies or non-compliances in the organisation, implementation and modification of the study programme.

In the second case, the Agency Council initiated an extraordinary evaluation after taking into consideration the findings of the group of experts, where it considered that there were reasonable grounds for suspecting major deficiencies or non-compliances in the implementation of the study programme, connected to the scientific research.

APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

Complaints

In its procedures, the Agency received a couple of complaints, specifically six requests for the exclusion of experts from an already appointed group or a proposed group of experts. The proposed composition of the group of experts is sent to the applicant for review and comments before the appointment. If reasonable grounds exist, the appointment of another expert is proposed to the Council. However, the applicant has the right to lodge a complaint or a request for exclusion at any time during the procedure. There were six such cases altogether in the observed period, as stated above. In five cases, the Agency Council considered that the applicant's grounds were not reasonable and did not replace the expert, and in one case it granted the applicant's request.

The Agency Council also considered two reported cases of exerting pressure on experts, which were reported to the Agency's employees by the experts themselves. In one case, the expert withdrew from the procedure, and in the other, in accordance with the Agency's protocol of conduct in the event of pressure or attempts to influence the experts, a special committee of the Agency Council met and prepared a proposal for consideration at the Council session. It was decided that the group of experts had carried out its assessment in a professional and impartial manner.

Appeals

The overview of the data covers the whole period since the last external review by ENQA, and the details are only considered for the current self-assessment period. The more detailed explanation for 2018 and 2019 can be found in the SAR 2018 and 2019.

Table 3: Overview of appeal procedures since 2018

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of rejected applications or negative decisions of the Agency Council	8	3	3	1	3
Number of appeals addressed by the Appeal Committee	6	2	9	9	8
Number of granted appeals (remanded for reconsideration)	5	1	7	6+2 in part	6+2 in part
Number of rejected appeals	1	1	2	2 in part	2 in part
Number of sessions of the Appeal Committee	3	2	3	6	6

In 2020-2022, the Appeal Committee dealt with more cases than in previous years. In 2020, in eight of the nine cases, the appellant was one of the Slovenian universities with its members that submitted an application for reaccreditation of the university and its members in September 2019. The applications were accompanied by requests to exclude all officials from the procedures because of the alleged bias of the management and, consequently, of all Agency employees towards the university. In seven cases, the Appeal Committee upheld the appeals of universities and/or their members on the basis of procedural deficiencies and referred the cases back to the Agency Council for reconsideration.

In the two remaining cases, the Appeal Committee confirmed the Council's decision. As a result, the new autonomous higher education institution was not accredited due to non-compliance with the material conditions, and the application for accreditation of a new study programme was rejected with finality. In this last procedure, the

applicant brought an administrative dispute before the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia against the Agency's negative decision. As of the date of this report in 2022, the Court has not yet ruled on this case.

The Appeal Committee's decision-making in 2021 was similar to that in 2020. Of the nine appeals in total, seven were lodged by the same university and/or its members as in the previous year. The Appeal Committee (partially) upheld most of the appeals, which were mainly of a procedural nature, and referred the cases back to the Agency Council for reconsideration.

In two cases where the appellants were two other higher education institutions, the Appeal Commit-

tee also upheld the appeals and referred the cases back to first instance for reconsideration. In one case, this was mainly due to procedural shortcomings, while in the other case, where accreditation of a transformation of a higher education institution was requested, it was due to an insufficient assessment as to the merits of the request.

In 2022, the Appeal Committee dealt with eight cases. In four cases, the appellant was again the same university and/or its members as in previous years. In the appeals, the appellant pleaded breaches of the rules of procedure in the adoption of the negative decision of the Agency's council; in the case of a request to exclude a member of the Agency Council from the decision-making process, the president of the Agency's Council, who is authorised to rule on his exclusion, initially rejected the request, however the Appeal Committee upheld the appeal and referred the case back to the president of the Agency's Council for reconsideration, and later it was decided to exclude the member of the Agency's council from the decision-making process; and in the remaining three cases the Agency's council initially rejected the applications for reaccreditation of the university's members, the Appeal Committee upheld the university's appeal and rejected the appeals of the university's members and referred the case back for reconsideration. Two of the university's members brought an administrative dispute before the Administrative Court of the Republic of Slovenia against these decisions.

The same university also lodged an appeal with ENQA in 2020. As the procedure before the Slovenian au-

thorities has not yet been concluded, ENQA has decided that it has no competence to interpret national legislation. It added that the appeal did not provide sufficient evidence for the alleged systematic breach of ESG standards and therefore took no further action. However, ENQA has called on the Agency to carefully resolve conflicts related to systemic issues in the field of higher education.

In the review of the decision in September 2022, the Agency Council decided to continue the procedures for the reaccreditation of the university's members, taking into account the Constitutional Court's decision on the unconstitutionality of Article 10 of the ZViS, issued in June 2022, which regulates the legal personality of a university and its members, and the lack of specific provisions in the Act regulating the status of a university's members in the procedure of reaccreditation of a higher education institution, and issued a decision to reject the request for the exclusion of all official persons from the procedures.

In accreditation procedure of a university, the Agency has been following the legal provisions that granted the status of legal personality (and, consequently, the accreditation) only to the university. In the dispute between the Agency and one specific university, the university argued that these provisions clarified the status of public universities and their members only, but not necessarily the status of the private universities. The Constitutional Court's decision further confirmed the lack of clarity of the legal status between the university and its members in the forementioned ZViS provisions, which resulted in Agency Council's decision granting the accreditation status to the members of this private university as well.

In 2022, the Appeal Committee considered two further appeals of a procedural nature from an autonomous higher education institution, where the Council rejected the appellants' request for the exclusion of a member of the group of experts, and the Appeal Committee upheld the appeals on the grounds of incomplete findings of fact and remanded the case back to the Council for reconsideration.

The analysis of appeals submitted to the Appeal Committee shows that in 2020, applicants started to appeal against rejections of their complaints, i.e. requests for the exclusion of experts or officials from accreditation procedures. Of the 26 appeals dealt with by the Appeal Committee in 2020-2022, as many as 13 were the result of unsuccessful requests for the exclusion of persons who make decisions or participated in the procedure at the first instance on the grounds that they were biased. Adding 9 appeals which were at least partly due to the unclear legal regulation of the status of university members, we can conclude that most of the appeals did not relate to the substantive assessment of the fulfilment of accreditation conditions. As a result, the Agency has taken a systemic approach to address this issue. Due to some unclear and inconsistent provisions in the ZViS and a legal vacuum concerning the status of university members, which was also noted by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, the Agency has drafted a new Quality Act that addresses and eliminates these inconsistencies.

The applicant may raise two grounds as complaints in accreditation or evaluation procedures. The first, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, is the request for the exclusion of the person taking the decision or participating in the QA procedure (experts, Agency's employees, members of the Agency Council and the Appeal Committee), and the second is the possibility of commenting on the first report of the expert group. The number of the latter, where the applicant may, in accordance with the ZViS, within one month, reply to the first report of the expert group on its substantive findings and, of course, also on the conduct of the procedure, is not recorded separately at the Agency, as these are given in most accreditation or evaluation procedures. If the applicant submits comments on the report, the group of experts, after assessing the validity of the comments, prepares a final report in which it addresses all of the applicant's comments.

As can be seen from the above statistics on the total number of appeals and complaints (Table 2), the majority of complaints in 2020-2022 were connected to the request to exclude the persons

who decides or participates in the accreditation procedures on the grounds that they were biased.

SELF-ASSESSMENT SURVEY

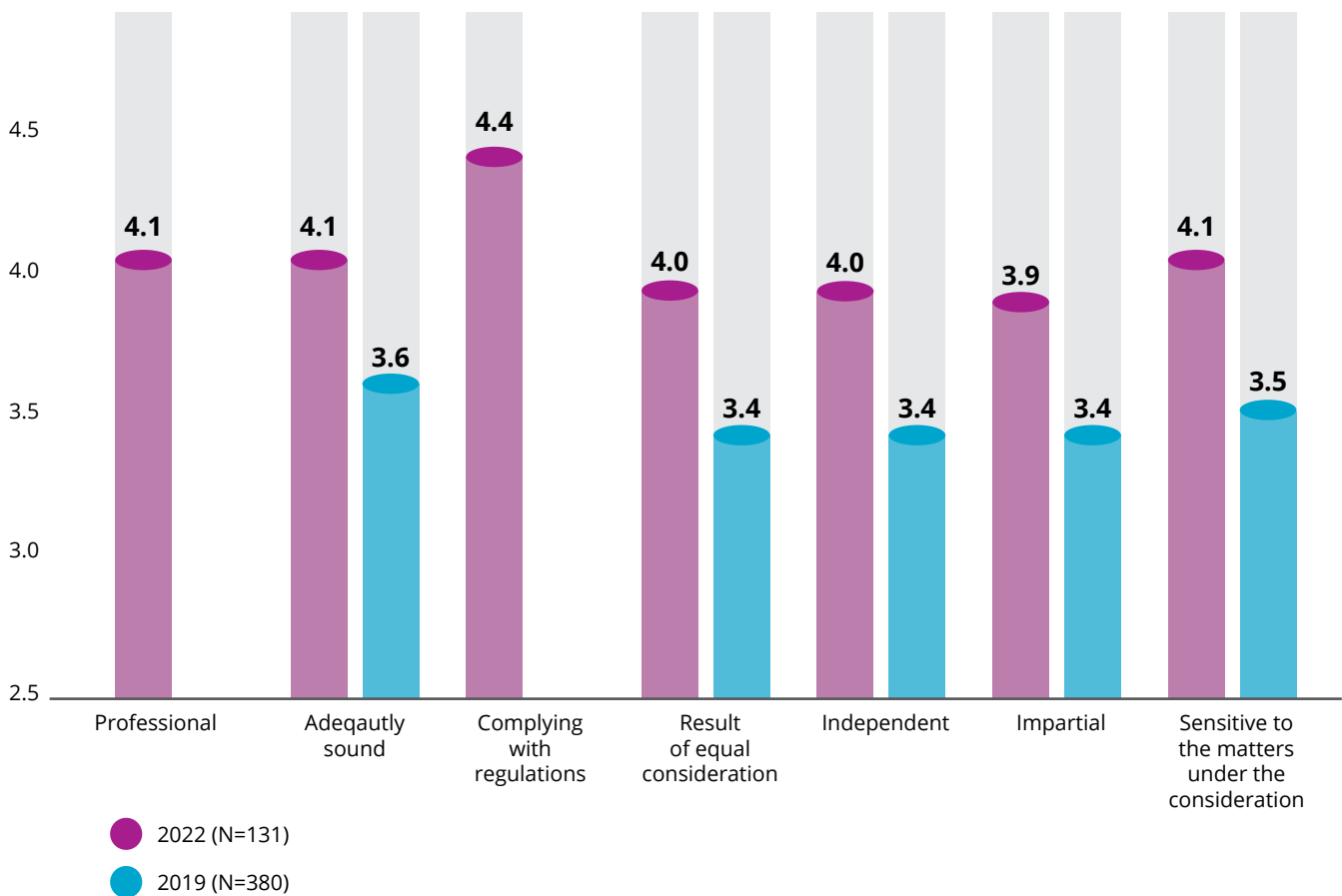
Below are the results of the SAR survey on the decisions of the Agency Council. The survey was sent to internal and external Agency stakeholders. The survey targeted members and former members of the Agency Council, its employees and experts. The external stakeholders group consists of representatives of higher education institutions' or colleges' management boards, the institutions' and colleges' teachers and researchers, professional staff, students and other external stakeholders, including graduates, representatives of line ministries, representatives or members of representative organisations in higher education and higher vocational education, and employers.

The SAR survey was carried out in March 2022. 131 internal and external Agency stakeholders responded to the survey. The SAR survey covered the Agency's area of operation, its procedures and criteria, the work of the staff, experts' assessments, the decisions of the Agency Council, the Agency's management, appeal procedures, relations with stakeholders and the Agency's impact on the higher education environment. The SAR survey also includes a section on Agency's self-assessment, the development of the Agency and the quality of its services.

For the decisions of the Agency Council, respondents assessed the soundness of the decisions, their compliance with the rules, the

equality of consideration at the sessions, and independence and sensitivity to the matters under consideration. Most questions required a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 was strongly agree or the highest rating and 1 was disagree or the lowest rating. The following scores were collected for the question “Agency Council decisions (are) ...”:

The highest score is given to the compliance of the Agency Council decisions with the rules, while the lowest score is given to the impartiality of its decisions. Compared to a survey carried out by the Agency in 2019 (the results of which are available in the SAR 2018 and 2019) most of the variables were typically given below-average scores in 2019 and, all but one, above-average scores in 2022, so the difference between current and previous scores in this area is particularly striking. The most significant improvements were in equality of consideration, independence of decisions and taking into account the specificities of the subject of assessment.





02

Part two:

Focus areas

COMPLIANCE WITH ESG (PART 2)

The following chapters present an overview of the improvements and progress made by the Agency since the last external review, by analysing the following standards in accordance with the agreed Terms of Reference for the targeted review: thematic analysis, internal quality assurance and professional conduct, and reporting, as well as an assessment of compliance with standards 2.1 to 2.7 in relation to the implementation of the SQAA evaluations of samples. The new QA activity - a sample evaluation of a study programme - introduced from the last ENQA review is reflected in the following chapter, while other QA activities have not changed since 2018.

The chapter also contains a section on consideration of internal quality assurance of HEIs and the area of continuous quality improvement of SQAA, which is linked to the independence of the Agency and partly to the development of a methodology fit for purpose (the agency's self-selected enhancement areas).

ESG 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 and/or colleges, which is evident from the regulation as a whole, specifically from the application forms. The Accreditation Criteria are aligned with national higher education legislation (ZViS) and ESG. The Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance (Part 1 of the ESG) are

addressed in the Accreditation Criteria and cover all of the Agency's processes – the accreditation and/or external evaluation of higher education institutions and study programmes and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges. Study programmes selected for evaluations of samples are assessed according to the same quality standards as those set out in the Accreditation Criteria for the assessment of study programmes in the process of reaccreditation of a higher education institution.

A table of how Part 1 of the ESG is taken into account in the Accreditation Criteria is available below:

ESG – Part 1 STANDARDS	Higher education institutions		Study programmes		Higher vocational colleges
	Accreditation (Articles 7 to 9 of the Accreditation Criteria)	Reaccreditation (Articles 10 to 16 of the Accreditation Criteria)	Accreditation (Articles 17 to 20 of the Accreditation Criteria)	External evaluation (Articles 21 to 23 of the Accreditation Criteria)	External evaluation (Articles 6 to 10 of the Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges.
(1) Quality assurance policy	ST 1, 2, 3	ST 1, 6, Article 16	ST 1, 2, 4	ST 1, 2, 3	ST 1, 6, 19
(2) Design and adoption of study programmes	ST 1, 6, 7	ST 2, 7, Article 16 (+ Chapter II.2.2)	ST 1, 2	ST 1	ST 18, 20, 21
(3) Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	ST 3, 4, 10	ST 2, 11, 12	ST 4, 5	ST 4, 5	ST 10, 11, 12, 13, 21
(4) Enrolment, progress, recognition and validation of knowledge of students	ST 1, 2, 3	ST 6, 10, 11, 12, 13 (+ Chapter II.2.2 + Article 23)	ST 5	ST 5	ST 2, 4, 5, 9, 12
(5) Teachers	ST 6, 7	ST 3, 8	ST 4	ST 4, 5	ST 3, 8, 21, 22
(6) Learning resources and student support	ST 4, 8, 9, 10, 11	ST 4, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17	ST 3, 4	ST 4	ST 4, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21
(7) Information management	ST 5	ST 5, 6	ST 1	ST 1	ST 5, 6, 15, 17, 18
(8) Information to the public	ST 1, 3	ST 5, 7	* Covered under institutional evaluation.	ST 5 (+ Chapter II.2.2)	ST 5, 7, 22
(9) Continuous monitoring and periodic assessment of study programmes	ST 1, 5 (+ Article 21, 22 + Chapter II.2.2)	ST 6, 13, Article 16	* Covered under institutional evaluation.	ST 1, 2, 3	ST 6, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21
(10) Cyclical external quality assurance	* Chapters III.3 and III.4 of the Accreditation Criteria				ST 1 (+ Chapter III.3.1 of the Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges.

ESG 2.2: DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Procedures of evaluation of a sample of study programmes also play an important role in promoting improvement of quality of study programmes. Their advisory nature allows the group of experts and the Agency Council to advise a higher education institution on how to improve the self-assessment, modification and implementation of a study programme, without the institution being negatively affected by the evaluation. In 2019, the Agency organised a special training session for the chairs of groups of experts conducting these evaluations, in which they were briefed on the purpose of these evaluations, how to assess, interview and advise the interviewees in a frank discussion with them, without any repercussions that could affect the accreditation of the study programme, and the task of presenting them to higher education institutions in this way.

At the end of the evaluation of the study programmes covered by the sample, the Agency Council made recommendations to the higher education institutions to improve the implementation, self-assessment, updating and modification of the study programmes and asked them to report on their progress and compliance with the Council recommendations within a given time-frame (usually two years). After reviewing the progress reports, the Agency Council concluded that the Council recommendations had been appropriately observed.

The changes resulting from the new 2017 Accreditation Criteria have been well received after several years. The results of the SAR survey show that there has been a significant improvement in the rating of the Agency Council decisions, appeal procedures, Agency procedures, assessments by experts, the Agency's operation and the Accreditation Criteria. The fitness of the accreditation and evaluation procedures to the purpose of quality assessment and improvement was rated 4.0, the clarity and transparency of the procedures 4.1, while the fitness of the Accreditation Criteria to the purpose received a slightly lower rating of

3.8, which is still higher than in the previous period (3.5). The fact that the Accreditation Criteria take into account the specificities of the higher education institution, college or programme being assessed is reflected in the score of 4.1, which is significantly higher than in the previous period (3.5). The Agency's contribution to advising and improving internal quality assurance systems was rated 4.2 and 4.0 respectively by stakeholders in the SAR survey, which also shows that the evaluations of samples are achieving their purpose.

ESG 2.3: IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

The accreditation and evaluation procedures carried out by the Agency start with the submission of an application accompanied by a self-assessment report of the higher education institution in the procedures for the reaccreditation of higher education institutions, the external evaluation of higher vocational colleges and the evaluation of the study programme, continue with the assessment of the documents and the visit to the higher education institution or higher vocational college, the preparation of the group of experts' report, which is sent to the applicants for comments, and the preparation of the final report, in which the group of experts assesses the comments sent.

The Agency Council, as the highest decision-making body, then takes a decision on the basis of the final report, the self-assessment report and other documentation obtained in the process.

In line with the recommendations of the previous ENQA external review, the Accreditation Criteria were updated in January 2020 (new Article 49a) to include mandatory progress reporting even in the case of positive decisions. Where a higher education institution or a study programme has been granted accreditation, has been found fit to implement a study programme or has been reaccredited for a full period, the higher education institution shall, within two years of the finality of the decision, report on the progress and compliance with the recommendations expressed in the Agency Council decision or final report of the group of experts. With the 2017 Accreditation Criteria, the Agency has put even more emphasis on the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions, requiring them to self-assess each of their study programmes in more detail, in addition to self-assessing all their activities.

The progress report may therefore refer to the parts of the self-assessment report that show the progress made and/or compliance with the recommendations of the Council. 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-assessment report containing the progress description, the higher education institution is relieved of additional work, while at the same time being directed to assess in the self-assessment whether the recommendations made have been adequately implemented.

As the Agency Council makes recommendations to higher education institutions on how to improve the quality, implementation and modification of study programmes in the context of evaluations of samples of study programmes, it also monitors the implementation of these recommendations in these processes. If the evaluation has not identified any major deficiencies or non-compliances, the higher education institution must report on the implementation of the recommendations within two years. However, if the recommendations made by the Agency Council concern major deficiencies or non-compliances, there is a shorter deadline for reporting.

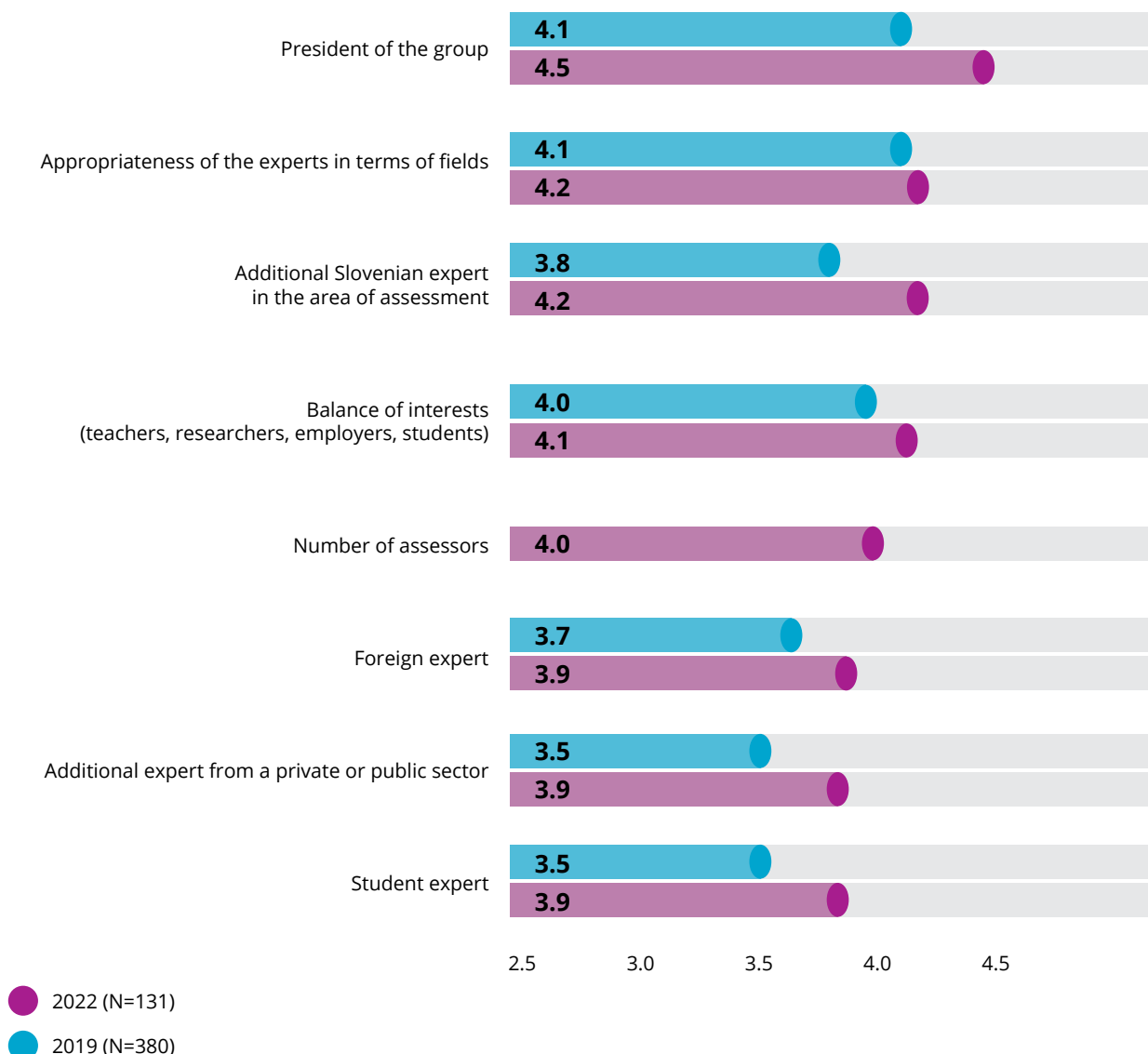
If the higher education institution fails to report within the deadline, the Agency Council invites it to do so. The Agency Council takes note of the progress report on its session. If it finds that the evaluation process has identified significant deficiencies or non-compliances and that the higher education institutions has not adequately addressed the recommendations made, it may invite the institution to provide further clarifications. If it then finds that the recommendations have not been adequately taken into account, it may decide to launch an extraordinary evaluation of the study programme.

The Agency Council made a number of recommendations for the study programmes covered by the sample, and identified major deficiencies or non-compliances in some of the procedures. As the evaluations of sample study programmes started in 2019, the first progress reports were considered only in 2021. It found that the recommendations were mostly adequately considered, and in a few cases forwarded the progress reports to the groups of experts that carried out the institutional evaluation of the higher education institutions implementing the study programmes. In the case of one joint study programme, the higher education institution was instructed to supplement the implemented measures. The respondents to the SAR survey commended the positive impact of progress reports.

ESG 2.4: EXTERNAL EXPERTS

Experts participating in the Agency's procedures must meet the conditions set out in the [Criteria for Agency Experts](#) adopted in March 2018 and amended in May 2022. These differentiate between the conditions to be met by the experts who will assess higher education institutions and those who will assess study programmes. The Agency organised specific training sessions (March 2019) for the chairs of the groups of experts in the procedures of evaluation of sample study programmes to explain the nature and process of these evaluations. A protocol has been developed for the visits in evaluation of samples, as the visit process is slightly different from other evaluation procedures. The fact that the specific

training for chairs of groups of experts was a step in the right direction is confirmed by the results of the SAR survey, where the contribution of the chair of group of experts to the quality of the assessment was rated 4.5. The appropriateness of the experts in terms of fields and the additional expert in the area of assessment were rated slightly lower (4.2). The respondents rated the contribution of foreign experts and students slightly lower (3.9).



In May 2022, the Agency Council adopted amendments to the Criteria for Agency Experts, which stipulate, among other things, that experts must have been active in scientific and research, professional or artistic fields for the last 10 years. This change means that the assessments are carried out by experts who are active in research their field, and will help the Agency to avoid the generally rare criticism that some experts are not active enough as researchers. The Agency carried out a review of the Register in accordance with the amended provisions at its September meeting, when it did not renew the registration of one person due to inactivity.

ESG 2.5: CRITERIA

The standards and criteria for the assessment of study programmes are clearly described in the Accreditation Criteria and are the same regardless of whether the study programme is being evaluated as part of the process of reaccreditation of a higher education institution, evaluation of a sample of a study programme or an extraordinary evaluation of a study programme. More detailed instructions and clarifications are provided in the application forms that is part of the Criteria. In October 2019, the Agency published on its website an interpretation of some of the provisions of the Criteria, which were approved by the Agency Council. In 2021, the Agency prepared a special [Guide to Assessments](#) intended for the Agency staff and experts, as well as for applicants and students, to improve their work in accreditation and evaluation procedures, in particular the substantive assessment according to the quality stan-

dards set out in the Criteria, taking into account the type of higher education institutions or higher vocational colleges, the type, cycle and content of the study programmes, or the specificities of the subject of assessment. It will provide the most transparent possible insight into the understanding of the Agency's criteria. Together with stakeholders, the Agency updated the Guide until autumn 2022, when it was prepared for printing in Slovenian and English versions.

In order to improve transparency of its procedures, the Agency Council (at the end of April 2018) updated the [Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council](#), which clearly shows the manner of addressing applications, the way of decision-making, the cooperation with expert services of the Agency and the adoption of decisions. In 2020 and 2022, the Rules of Procedure were amended to specify the Council's conduct in the event of disagreement with the findings of the group of experts. Each item addressed at a session has a designated rapporteur - member of the Council. The materials for a session of the Agency Council include a table which shows the strengths, opportunities for improvement, partial compliances and non-compliances or major deficiencies. 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.

ESG 2.6: REPORTING

The previous external review by ENQA found partial compliance with the standard.



Recommendation from the previous external assessment: **NAKVIS should publish all reports, including those with negative results in the case of initial accreditation procedures, for transparency and further development.**

In 2018, the Agency completely redesigned its [website](#), both in terms of content and accessibility, and published it in its redesigned form on 14 December. The redesign focused on accessibility of content, clarity of structure and a better user experience. The website is thus adapted for blind, partially sighted and visually impaired people and people with reading disabilities, for which the Agency has been awarded the "A3C Certificate, accessible to all". The Agency recruited a new employee to strengthen its web services and IT development in general.

In the new structure, documents are organised by higher education institution and, from 2018, by year of decision. [The report of the experts and the decision of the Agency Council](#) in each procedure are published when the decision becomes final. Likewise, reports of sample evaluation procedures of study programmes are published regularly and systematically. All [final negative decisions](#) of the Agency Council were made public on the Agency's website in 2019 and the section has been updated regularly since then. In the case of appeals, the content of the Appeal Committee's decisions is always, without exception, summarised in the Agency Council decision because the decision must summarise the course of procedure and findings. The decisions of the Appeal Committee are not published separately because they constitute only one of the stages in accreditation and evaluation procedures. All expert reports and decisions of the Agency Council are published in doc or docx format or as a readable pdf, in accordance with the requirements of the Accessibility Certificate. Older documents can be ordered in a readable format via an online form. For each higher education institution or higher vocational college, in addition to the decisions and reports of the experts in the accreditation and evaluation procedures, basic information about the institution (basic data, research activities, enrolment information, etc.) and a presentation film funded and produced by the Agency in cooperation with the institutions are collected.

The Agency presented the new website and access to information to stakeholders at its own events and, with the help of the Student Organisation of Slovenia, made presentations at events aimed at

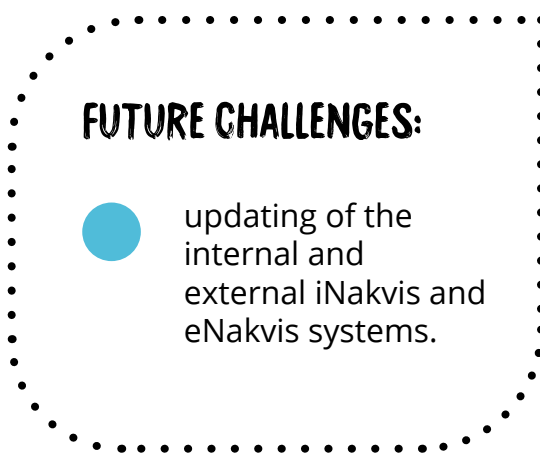
current and future students. Each year, the Agency launches a promotional campaign to invite future students to its website via social media, various student organisations and the media. It also lists the study programmes that are selected for the evaluation of a sample in a given year.

In addition to regularly updated information on the website, stakeholders are informed of the Agency Council decisions in procedures in a monthly e-newsletter. Stakeholders only receive information on the adoption of the decision, while the substantive details are available in the documents published online.

The iNakvis internal IT system has contributed significantly to the progress in reporting. The system helps in publishing and updating the online timetable, which is one of the ways in which external stakeholders can check the status of the procedure and the planned deadlines for the next steps in the procedure.

Based on a substantive review of the group of experts' reports, the Agency has focused on standardising the reports through the Guide to Assessments. At thematic sessions, the staff discussed the specificities of the individual procedures, the mistakes made so far in the assessments carried out according to the prescribed quality standards, which were identified during the analysis of the reports of the groups of experts, the guidelines for a proper, in-depth assessment, and at the same time gathered suggestions to supplement the Guide. The Guide has been presented at regular events organised by the Agency and within each group of experts in the accreditation and evaluation pro-

cedures. In addition to the content, the Agency has standardised the graphic design of the reports.



ESG 2.7: COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The procedure of evaluation of a sample of study programmes is not concluded by a formal decision that can be appealed, but by issuing recommendations to a higher education institution for the improvement of quality of the study programme.

During the procedure, applicants have the possibility to object to procedural errors or to express their disagreement in the same way as in the procedure for reaccreditation of a higher education institution. Before the appointment of the group of experts, the applicant is informed about the experts to be appointed for the evaluation of the study programme and has the opportunity to communicate their disagreement with them to the Agency. In the event that the Agency Council considers that there are grounds for disagreement (conflict of interest, inappropriateness in terms of fields, etc.), other experts shall be appointed to the group. The applicant has the possibility to propose the exclusion of an expert, a staff member or an Agency Council

member until the end of the procedure, i.e., until the recommendations to the higher education institution have been issued. Furthermore, the applicant has one month to submit written comments on the evaluation report, which must be assessed by the group of experts and taken into account in the final report. These options are communicated to the applicant during the procedure and are laid down in the General Administrative Procedure Act (ZUP), which the Agency uses to conduct its procedures, and in the ZViS.

The appeals procedure, in which the Appeal Committee decides on appeals against decisions of the Agency Council, is set out in the ZViS and ZUP, which the agency uses where there are no corresponding procedural provisions in the ZViS (paragraph 6, article 51 e of the ZViS). The procedure related to the submitted request for the exclusion of an expert or official from the procedures conducted by the agency (complaint) is specified in the ZUP. According to the provisions of the ZUP, the parties in the proceedings can file appeals against substantive decisions on the primary matter and the possibility of certain procedural objections even before the Agency Council decides on the particular procedure.

The applicants in accreditation or evaluation procedures can thus file a procedural objection (complaint) due to the alleged impartiality of the persons who decide or participate in the procedure, and demand their exclusion, even before the Agency Council decides on the procedure. The Agency Council shall decide on such a request, or, in the case of a request for the expulsion of a member of the Agency's Council, the President of the Council. If he or she accepts the request and disqualifies the person from the procedure, he or she shall appoint another person in their place. If the request is not granted, the applicant can file a separate appeal against such a decision, and therefore does not contest the decision until the appeal against the decision on the main accreditation procedure.

The Agency has published on its website in the Frequently Asked Questions section under Section [3. Other options of applicants in the procedure](#), the following clarification for applicants, which provides them with an open communica-

tion channel for the messages that do not relate to formal objections and appeals: Throughout the procedure, applicants may communicate any dissatisfaction or comments regarding the process (e.g. the work of the expert, the work of the group of experts or the work of the Agency Council) through the agency's employee who manages the procedure, through a special section on the

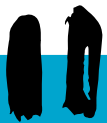
website (Initiatives and recommendations to the agency), the general contact address (info@nakvis.si) or any other channel that may be convenient for them. These comments do not serve as formal appeals objections or complaints.

COMPLIANCE WITH ESG

(PART 3)

ESG 3.4: THEMATIC ANALYSES

The previous external review by ENQA found partial compliance with the standard.



Recommendation from the previous external assessment:

The group of experts recommends NAKVIS to develop methods for the preparation and dissemination of thematic analyses on issues relevant to its stakeholders.

The Agency produces analyses summarising trends, strengths and areas for improvement at system level, with the aim of improving the quality of the Agency's operations. Thematic analysis is an area of development for the Agency, and in the years since the Agency's last evaluation, tasks have focused on in-depth analytics work at the Agency.

In 2019, the Agency created a dedicated Analytics Department, initially also working in the area of international cooperation and the Agency's IT activities, and later as a department in its own right. In early 2022, it was reorganised as a stand-alone Analytics and Information Technology Department. The main areas of work of the

department are the preparation of plans and reports, as well as strategy documents, analyses, manuals, guides and the Agency's annual publication. The Analytics and Information Technology Department is responsible for organising and participating in various conferences, consultations, training sessions and workshops, as well as for setting up databases, translation and IT tasks. To improve the Agency's analytics work, four staff members are enrolled in a PhD programme and most of their training is funded by the Agency.

In order to address the recommendations of the ENQA group of experts, in August 2018, the Agency prepared a document [Methodology and Procedure for the Production and Dissemination of Thematic Analyses](#), setting out the detailed procedure for systemic analyses and the framework for the dissemination of their findings, as well as the influence of external stakeholders on the production of subsequent more detailed (thematic) analyses. The document also clearly defines the target group of these analyses. The latest systemic analysis defines the purpose, process

of work and methodology in great detail. The Agency further updated the document in September 2022; in 2022, it launched activities for the preparation of a systemic analysis, which will comprise quality, quantity and comparative analyses of the outcomes and characteristics of evaluation practices in the period 2017–2021.

The Agency carries out periodic thematic and systemic analyses to further develop its external quality system; in the years since the last ENQA review, it has prepared an analysis of expert group reports on the quality standards to be met by universities and other higher education institutions for the reaccreditation, and other thematic reports. It has prepared an analysis of evaluations of samples of study programmes with the so-called international dimension, an analysis of employability of graduates of Slovenian higher education institutions and an analysis of the independence of quality assurance agencies in higher education. It continued the analysis of the scientific, research, professional and artistic work of the holders of courses in the programmes being accredited. Useful databases on this are being created at the Agency. They are compiled on an ongoing basis for each accreditation or evaluation process and shared with experts to help them in their professional assessment.

In the Agency's Development Strategy from 2021 to 2025, one of the key strategic objectives is to improve assessments or to strive especially for high-level expert external assessments that will take into account the specifics of higher education and be related to various cycles and types of study, disciplines

in which study programmes are embedded and status and organisational differences between higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. The Agency can boast the creation of an [Online Guide to Assessments in Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures](#), which provides experts and staff good guidelines for the assessment of individual quality standards.

The Agency regularly presents thematic analyses to its Council members, to the Agency's experts at expert consultations and to interested parties at its annual events. It also continuously extends and deepens thematic cooperation with different stakeholders through training sessions for professionals and employees and consultations for other interested higher education stakeholders. The Agency continuously ensures that the key documents and publications are accessible to the international public and that those of other actors in the European higher education area are accessible to the Slovenian public. The Agency ensures that the documents are presented at various events (e.g. [ENQA Members Forum](#), [CEENQA annual assembly meeting](#), ECA and BFUG Working Group, presentations to foreign agencies during study visits and mobility of staff) and are translated into English or Slovenian.

Every year, with the aim of disseminating thematic analyses to higher education stakeholders, the Agency prepares the [Annual Publication](#), which – in addition to the annual report on the Agency work – contains various thematic discussions, including guidelines for quality assessment and work in epidemic conditions, the European approach to strengthening quality of the European University Association (EUniQ) and guidelines for a hybrid approach in tertiary education.

In the field of databases on selected activities at higher education institutions, the Agency continuously upgrades the records on research, employability and library data. The iNakvis internal information system provides a strong support in the creation of up-to-date databases and internal records of the Agency.

In iNakvis, the Agency keeps individual records of study programmes, higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. It uses them

for publication in public records on the Agency's website and for thematic analyses. iNakvis also includes an analysis module and an annual report module on the Agency's work. Certain statistics are automatically generated and included in the annual report, such as the processing of applications received, the average duration of procedures and the number of new accreditations of study programmes by field. In the system, the Agency manages information on active accreditation and evaluation procedures for study programmes, higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, including the dates of individual actions in the procedures and the planned deadlines for the next actions in the procedure, in accordance with the Agency's internal rules of procedure.

FUTURE CHALLENGES:

- enhancing assessment against quality standards and procedures for accreditation and evaluation, including training for staff members to understand the specific areas of assessments (e.g. interdisciplinarity, joint study programmes, micro-credentials, hybrid education, sustainability aspects).

ESG 3.6: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

The previous external review by ENQA found partial compliance with the standard.



Recommendation from the previous external assessment:

NAKVIS should involve external stakeholders more directly in the Agency's self-evaluation and quality improvement activities. Appropriate feedback should also be provided to better inform stakeholders about the results of the research/actions undertaken by the Agency. In addition, NAKVIS should involve all its bodies in the design and implementation of its internal quality assurance policy. Being the highest decision-making body, the Agency Council could assume a leading and more active role.

The Agency ensures continuous development and improvement of its own quality system in transparent self-assessment procedures – with the emphasis on the development of the culture of quality. The area of internal quality assurance is fur-

ther defined in the [Quality Manual](#), which was adopted by the Agency in 2015 and last updated in June 2021. On the basis of self-assessment findings, the Agency regularly assesses the Manual and updates or amends it, when necessary, with the approval of all important internal and external stakeholders. The Quality Manual shows that the document complies with the ESG and that the Agency assesses its activities in a way that allows it to close the quality loop.

The basis for internal quality assurance is the self-assessment report, which the Agency, following the amendment of the Quality Manual in June 2021, prepares prior to the external review by ENQA, and a progress report prepared on an annual basis. The self-assessment covers the implementation of tasks and activities from the Action Plan, analysis of questionnaires of all stakeholders with points for reconsideration for the future self-assessment period and assessment of the compliance of the Agency's operation with the ESG; in this specific case, it also provides answers and lists improvements regarding the findings of the last external review by ENQA in 2018.

The Agency prepares or harmonises the self-assessment report with a wide range of higher education stakeholders. The self-assessment process involves the active participation of both an internal team, composed of employees and a member of the Agency Council, and an external team, composed of representatives of external stakeholders appointed at the Agency's invitation by the representatives of the Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Slovenia, the Union of Indepen-

dent Institutions of Higher Education, the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges and Student Organisation of Slovenia. The draft document is prepared by a narrow internal team and reviewed and updated by an extended team. The extended team is also actively involved in the preparation of the survey questionnaire.

All self-assessment reports are considered and harmonised at employee meetings and at the Agency Council meetings. The Agency Council discusses both the self-assessment report and all stakeholders' comments at several sessions and agrees on the final version at its meetings. The report is adopted by the Director and published on the Agency's website. The practice introduced in 2015 entrusts the Agency to prepare the so-called third-party call where the relevant self-assessment report is publicly displayed and stakeholders are invited to comment on its contents. The Agency also produces an annual progress report, which is presented to employees and members of the Agency Council and made public on the website. As part of the activities related to the preparation of the self-assessment, several focus group meetings were also held in September and October 2022 with representatives of higher education institutions evaluated in the last two years to obtain feedback on the implementation of the procedures. The focus was on distance site visits, with a generally very positive response from institutions to both the work of the Agency staff and the work of the experts.

Based on the findings of the focus groups, an analysis was carried out and the findings of the analysis were presented to the candidates for new experts in November 2022 and will be presented to the already registered experts as part of the training in January 2023.

The Agency is aware that ensuring an adequate flow of internal and external feedback is crucial and has therefore taken a number of measures since the last ENQA review to maximise the involvement of all stakeholders in the Agency's activities, the adoption of its key instruments and its development orientations. A full list of communication activities is provided in the Agency's [Progress Report](#) prepared in February 2022 (see Standard 3.1), but as these activities are closely

linked to the compliance with this Standard, they are also summarised here.

A new [Communication Plan](#) was developed in August 2018, outlining activities to strengthen two-way communication with internal and external stakeholders. Since 2018, the Agency has held regular meetings with all relevant stakeholders on its activities, and the Agency Director has visited all higher education institutions in Slovenia in 2020-2022. These visits were also aimed at gathering feedback on the Agency's activities. Every year since 2019, it organises the International Conference on Quality in Higher Education, which focuses on a variety of topical issues in higher education.

The Agency keeps the public regularly and diligently informed of changes to any important regulation, report, strategy or other document. Each document to be considered or adopted by the Agency Council is made public twice – first as a draft, then as a consolidated version, and external stakeholders always have an opportunity to comment. The Agency's website, which was completely overhauled in December 2018, the eNakvis IT system, and social media ([Twitter](#) and [Youtube](#)) also play an important role in communicating with stakeholders. Since January 2019, the Agency has published a monthly e-newsletter, whose main purpose is to proactively inform all stakeholders on the most important issues related to the Agency's activities and operations. The preparation of thematic analyses, which are described in more detail in the previous chapter, also plays an important role in strengthening the Agency's advisory and analytic role in the Slovenian higher education area. The Agency actively communicates the results of the thematic analyses to all relevant stakeholders through its channels, and the Agency's annual publication is a key document in this respect.

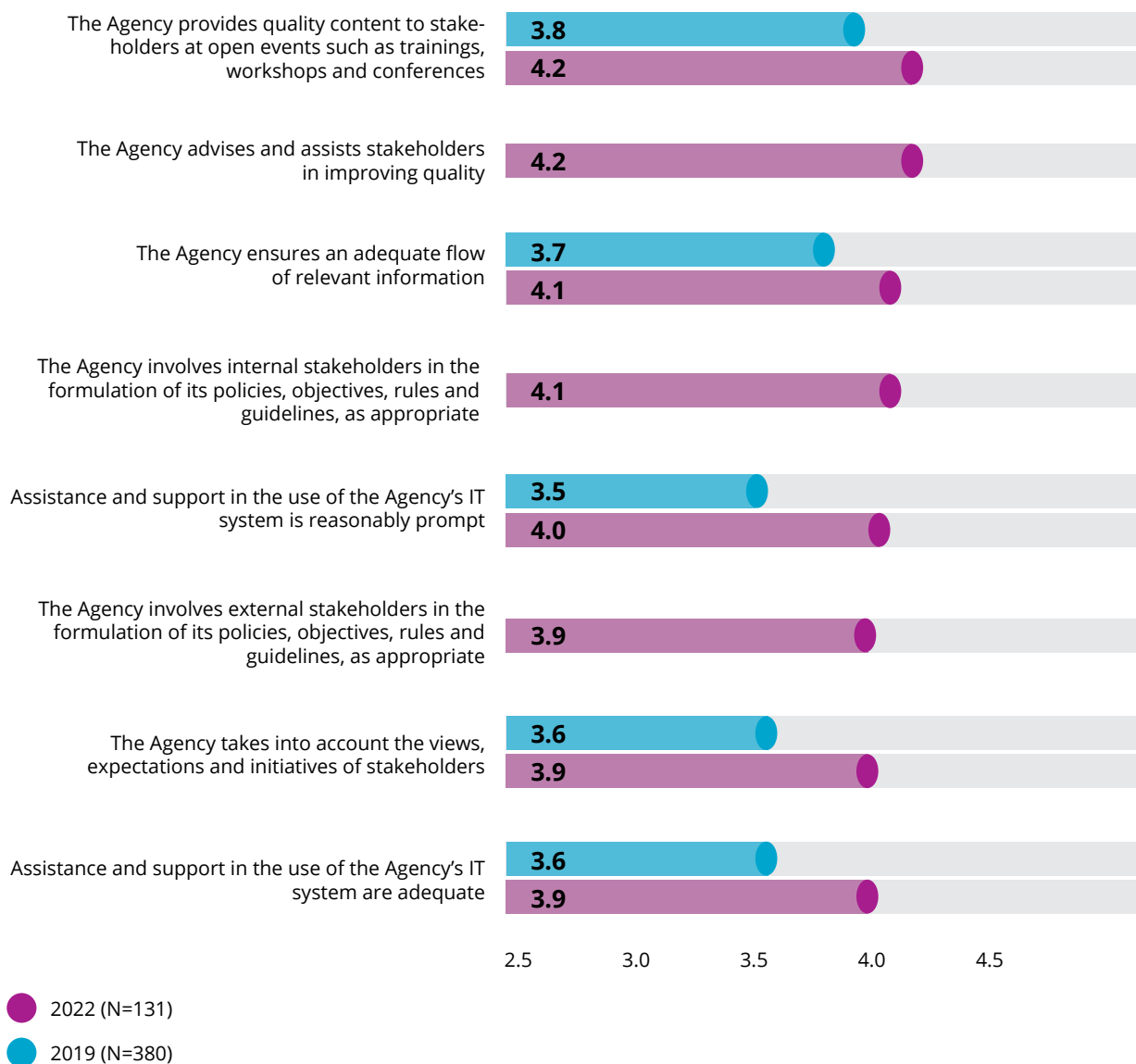
The Agency strives to ensure that the Agency Council, as the highest decision-making body, plays as active a role as possible in engaging with external stakeholders. Council members take part in all the events organised by the Agency – consultations, conferences and expert training. In accordance with the adopted Communication Plan, the members of the Agency Council accompany

the Director in regular meetings with higher education institutions and, where necessary, in meetings with other stakeholders. In February 2020, the Agency organised a training session on the prevention of corruption for the members of the Council, and in March 2020, a training session on the interpretation of the Accreditation Criteria. The Agency is strongly committed to ensuring independence and preventing conflicts of interest, and the Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council have been amended accordingly. Individual members of the Agency Council continued to participate actively in various events and working bodies in 2021. For example, the former President of the Council served as a member of the expert group drafting the basis for the new National Programme for Higher Education 2021-2030.

All surveys prepared by the Agency involve all relevant internal and external stakeholders, and their analysis is accessible to all stakeholders in a clear and understandable manner. Questions related to internal quality assurance, the self-assessment process and stakeholder relations were also part of the SAR survey. The field covered eight questions on stakeholder consideration and involvement, consultation and information. In the previous self-assessment period, we did not collect ratings for questions on stakeholder advice and the involvement of external/internal stakeholders in the formulation of the Agency's policy objectives and rules. In all the variables, where a comparison is possible, the survey results have improved compared to the previous period. The graph below shows that stakeholders rate the Agency's training, meetings and conferences

the highest, while the overall rating for advice and assistance to stakeholders is also above average. The score for the involvement of internal stakeholders is above average,

while the score for the involvement of external stakeholders in the formulation of policies, objectives, rules and guidelines is slightly below average.



The assessment of the provision of an adequate flow of relevant information shows that respondents consider that the Agency's e-newsletter provides up-to-date information (89.8% of responses) and that this information is useful (60.2% of responses). 82.5% of responses further confirm the relevance of the information on the Agency's web-

site and 59.2% confirm its usefulness. The SAR survey also asked respondents to rate the overall adequacy of the self-assessment. The statement "The Agency's self-assessment is adequate and enables the quality loop to be closed" has the average score 4.1, compared to 3.5 in 2019, indicating that stakeholders rate this item above average and that this score has improved significantly compared to the previous period. In the open-type questions, the Agency's self-assessment

process was not directly mentioned, but the importance of the Agency's advisory function, good two-way communication between the Agency and external stakeholders, and high-quality analytics activity were highlighted by respondents as examples of good practice. These results show that the Agency has made significant progress in the previous period in the area of cooperation with

external and internal stakeholders (in the area of self-assessment and in general), but on the other hand, the activities set out, in particular in the area of cooperation with external stakeholders, need to be continued and strengthened.

FUTURE CHALLENGES:

- continuation of systematic involvement and proactive two-way communication with external and internal stakeholders in all processes of internal quality assurance (preparation of SAR, adoption of new regulation/documents, procedure implementation, strategic planning, analytic work);
- strengthening the advisory role of the Agency and enhancing assessment against quality standards and procedures for accreditation and evaluation;
- organising consultations and training sessions, taking into account specific recommendations from the stakeholder survey (e.g. preparation of applications in accreditation and evaluation procedures, preparation of self-assessment reports at institutions/colleges, knowledge of the Agency's procedures).

SELF-SELECTED AREAS OF ENHANCEMENT

In ten years, the Slovenian external quality assurance system in higher education has been transformed from a traditional and quantity-based system to one that is more clearly linked to a quality culture. Below you will find an overview of the different aspects and challenges of quality improvement related to Standard 3.3 (Independence) and partly to Standard 2.2 (Designing methodologies fit for purpose).

ESG 3.3: INDEPENDENCE

The Agency's independence is guaranteed by the acts and regulations governing its work. Article 51e of the ZViS stipulates that the Agency is autonomous and independent in its operation. It is bound by the principles of professionalism, impartiality, legality and political neutrality. Article 51h of the ZViS further stipulates that the Agency Council – as the highest decision-making body – acts in a professional, independent and autonomous manner. Members of the Agency Council shall not be bound by the decisions, positions and instructions of the institutions that appointed them or of other institutions.

The Agency continuously ensures that its work is free from dominant influence of third parties such as government or higher education institutions, in particular in the appointment of the Director, the drafting of quality standards, the appointment of experts, the de-

cision-making on evaluation and accreditation procedures and appeal procedures. The formal independence of the Agency is demonstrated in the composition of the individual bodies of the Agency (the Agency Council, the Appeal Committee), as they are formed in a way that does not allow for a dominant influence of a single stakeholder. The balanced composition of the different stakeholders in the bodies ensures greater effective independence. Notwithstanding the formal independence and balanced composition of the various stakeholders in the Council, the Agency sees better gender balance as an opportunity for improvement.

The Agency makes autonomous decisions on how accreditation and evaluation procedures are carried out, the working methods used at the Agency and the appointment of external experts. The Agency adopts its decisions autonomously and independently, publishing reports by groups of experts, its own decisions, annual reports and analyses, and keeping publicly accessible records of accredited or evaluated higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and higher education study programmes in accordance with the ZViS.

In 2020, the Agency started to step up its activities to adopt the Act on Quality in Higher Education and Higher Vocational Education to ensure a more stable regulatory environment. The commission of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, which included representatives of the Agency and various higher education stakeholders, started working. The working group drafted extensive substantive baselines and set good foundations for further procedures of adoption of the Act. In spring 2021, there was a change of government and the draft law has not yet been prioritised by the ministry, so we are still awaiting its further procedure. Further activities regarding this law are expected to start at the beginning of 2023.

In addition to working towards a stand-alone Act, the Agency is continuously working on the necessary amendments to secondary legislation, such as the Accreditation Criteria and the Criteria for International Cooperation. Still, the agency is often challenged by acknowledging the specificities of disciplines, higher education institutions and quality assurance procedures while acting equally in similar cases to ensure that the same rules and legal framework are applicable to everyone.

The final decisions of the Agency or the decision-making in accreditation and evaluation procedures are the responsibility of the Agency. Because of the challenges of preventing conflicts of interest, the Agency has established functioning mechanisms to prevent them on the part of the Agency (experts, staff, Agency Council, Appeal Committee) as well as on the part of applicants 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), for which it has a proper complaints procedure in place. The Agency ensures awareness-raising and education of experts, staff and decision-makers, signing declarations of impartiality before entry in the register of experts, and prior notification of an applicant of the composition of the group.

The Agency has an Integrity Team which monitors potential risks and organises regular training for employees on how to prevent conflicts of interest. Still, individual higher education institutions (especially independent ones) occasionally express concerns about the submission of complete documentation, syllabus, financial plans and business data. Concerns have been repeatedly expressed that in a geographical area as small as Slovenia, the potential for biased treatment is high. In the future, the Agency aims to strengthen its awareness-raising and training activities to achieve a high level of integrity, objectivity and trust in domestic experts in the same field.

The Agency ensures that anyone associated with the work of the Agency (e.g. a member of the Council, an Agency expert, an Appeal Committee member) is acting on their own behalf and does not represent the interests of the organi-

sation in which or with which they (co-)operate. In implementing their tasks and adopting decisions, the members of the Agency Council shall observe the principles of preventing conflicts of interest and of impartiality. To this end, they sign a special statement binding them to respect these principles. In 2021, the Agency adopted the protocol of conduct in case of undue pressure or attempts to influence experts and prepared a statement of zero tolerance for pressure on Council members, employees and experts. The Council's Rules of Procedure also require those present to declare at the start of each session if any attempts to exert influence in a particular matter have been made.

Based on the finding of the past review by the ENQA group of experts that more international experts should be included in the Agency work, which will strengthen the public awareness of the independent operation of the Agency, a considerable step forward was made. In March 2019, the Agency amended the Accreditation Criteria, which now require part of the application to be translated into English, so that foreign experts receive the documents they need to perform their tasks more effectively. In the procedures of accreditation of doctoral programmes and reaccreditation of universities, the Agency has stipulated that the group of experts must include at least two foreign experts from different countries. The Agency also strengthens the inclusion of foreign experts through international events, where presentations and discussions are held in English. In 2021, the Agency included a foreign student from the European Students' Union (ESU) register in the external evaluation process,

which proved to be a very good experience. It therefore concluded a cooperation agreement with the ESU in December 2021.

The Agency has included in its accreditation and evaluation processes foreign experts hosted through the CEENQA mobility project. To support the inclusion of international experts in the procedures, the Agency has set up a register of (international) experts through an internal IT system. It is an internal Agency record, accessible only to staff members, which allows them to efficiently search for teams of foreign experts to participate in procedures, according to the suitability of their area of expertise, education and other relevant information.

The Agency sees challenges in the continuous inclusion of international experts in the procedures, in particular due to the provision of extensive documents in English as part of the compulsory documentation in the procedure, which imposes a significant financial and time burden on higher education institutions. The Agency also strengthens its independence principles and procedures through analytic and project work. In 2020, it launched a study exploring the independence of quality assurance agencies in higher education from different European countries. The study, carried out in cooperation with CEENQA, developed a methodology for assessing the independence of agencies. The methodology focuses on five categories of independence, namely the appointment of the agency director, the procedures for developing and adopting quality criteria/standards, the appointment of experts, the decision-making procedures for accreditation and evaluation, and the

appeal procedures. The importance of strengthening the Agency's analytics field in the area of independence is also evident in the promotion of staff training, including the funding of doctoral studies.

The Agency has established links with CEENQA and individual European agencies to share good practice in the field of independence. The cooperation framework is based on the joint organisation of thematic events and publications on independence (e.g. CEENQA Annual Assembly and publication, study visits to foreign agencies such as AKKV, HCERES, QAA, AZVO, ACQAHE) and strengthening the idea of identifying common problems of agencies, exchanging examples of good practices and proposing appropriate solutions.

FUTURE CHALLENGES:

- designing the new Quality Act for the purpose of simplifying the QA procedures, enabling international evaluations and sectoral boards in appeal procedures;
- acknowledging the specificities of disciplines, higher education institutions and quality assurance procedures while acting equally in similar cases to ensure that the same rules and legal framework are applicable to everyone;
- reducing the administrative-bureaucratic burden of the institutions while obtaining all the necessary documentation for quality assessment;
- active involvement of international experts, given that documentation in English and conducting site visits in English represents a significant financial burden and is time consuming for higher education institutions and the Agency.

ESG 2.2: DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

The Agency's work is based on respect for the autonomy of higher education institutions and trust in the quality of their work. The Agency's goal is to help higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges to identify strengths, good practices and areas for further development in their activities. The third Agency's self-assessment cycle was conducted in a collaborative process in which various higher education stakeholders were actively involved. They report that the transition to institutional evaluation has been successful and, together with the evaluations of samples, is making a significant contribution to quality enhancement.

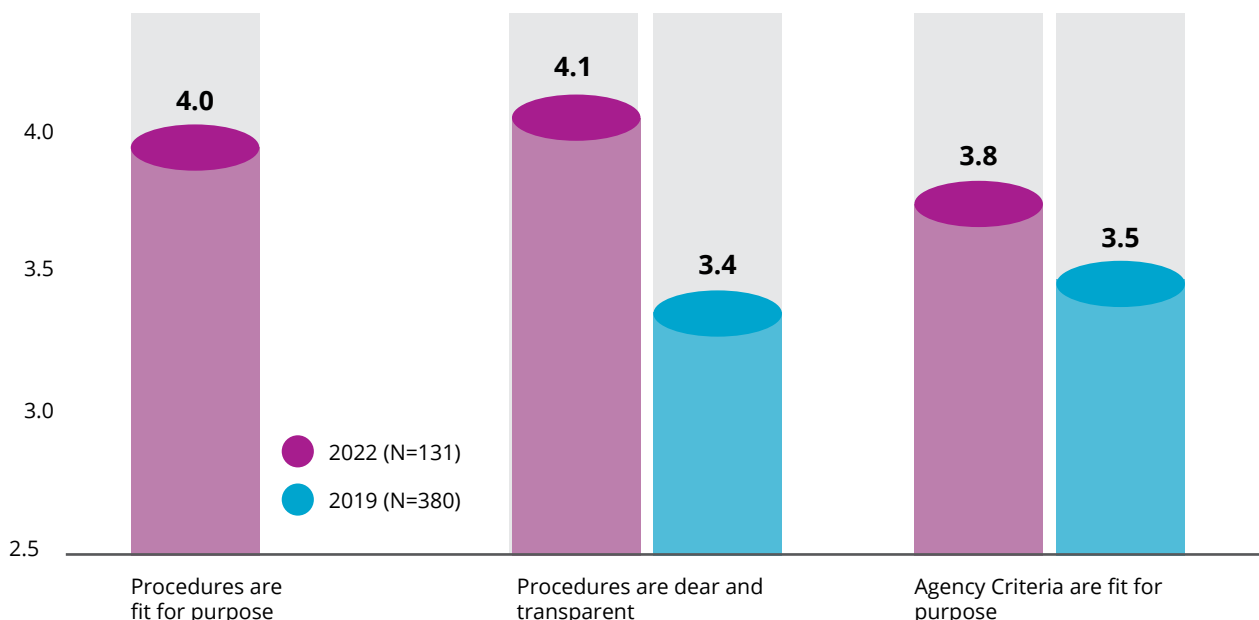
Flexibility of procedures is possible through the definition of the number of experts in the evaluation team, the number of days of evaluation, the selection of study programmes and thematic evaluations of samples.

The Criteria are developed and amended in cooperation with representatives of the university, autonomous higher education institutions, the Rectors' Conference, students, Agency experts, etc. In the autumn of 2022, as part of the process of preparing the self-assessment report, the Agency organised meetings with various stakeholders in higher education, in particular to obtain their

views on the conduct of the site visits and/or evaluation procedures in the recent period and on the good and bad practices of the Agency.

We find that bureaucratisation is reduced mainly through a well-functioning internal and external information system. Nevertheless, there are different opinions on the scope of the mandatory documentation in the accreditation and evaluation procedures, both at the stage of submission of the Slovenian and English documentation and later at the stage of the visits. The Agency will seek to reduce the financial and administrative burdens on higher education institutions (e.g., high interpretation costs, translation of comprehensive documentation into English) if it wishes to include international experts.

The Agency also asked external stakeholders about procedures fit for purpose. In the area of procedures and criteria, respondents rated the relevance of accreditation and evaluation procedures to the purpose of quality assessment and enhancement, their clarity and transparency, and the fitness of the Agency's criteria for the purpose.



Respondents gave the highest score to the clarity and transparency of accreditation and evaluation procedures, where improvement is above-average compared to 2019. The fitness of the criteria for the purpose of quality assessment and improvement was rated slightly below average.

By identifying the needs of higher education institutions, active engagement in the European Higher Education Area and international associations in the field of quality, the Agency makes reasonable adjustments to keep up with the realities of the European and Slovenian higher education area. One of the Agency's main objectives is to create a trustworthy internal quality system for the Agency, which will provide an appropriate support environment for stakeholders in higher education.

The Agency is well aware that these quality issues and strategic objectives can be upgraded at all levels. A balanced approach to change remains a challenge and we look forward to discussing this with the various stakeholders.

FUTURE CHALLENGES:

- meaningful integration of new models of education (e.g., micro-credentials, hybrid education and European Universities) into existing and/or new evaluation procedures;
- readiness for launching targeted evaluations of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges;
- adaption of site visits taking into account sustainability and digital orientation of QA procedures.



03

Part three:

Points for Consideration

IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION FOLLOWING THE AGENCY'S OWN INTERNAL QA PROCESSES IN 2018 AND 2019

This chapter presents an overview of the implementation of the measures proposed in the SAR 2018 and 2019.

During this agency's internal self-assessment period, starting in 2020, almost all the meas-

ures proposed in the Agency's last self-assessment report (SAR 2018 and 2019) have been implemented.

The Agency has taken into account the recommendations or actions proposed in the SAR 2018 and 2019 in the preparation of its action plans for 2020, 2021 and 2022. Below is an overview of the tasks realised:

1. Assessing the achievement of strategic objectives and preparing a new medium-term strategy for the next period

Following a thorough self-assessment and review of its work in the 2017–2020 strategic period, the Agency concluded that it has realised or is realising all of its objectives and will plan its future development on this basis. In December 2020, it adopted a new Agency Development Strategy for the Period 2021–2025, which follows the Agency's key priority areas, in particular

the desire to adopt the Act on Quality in Higher and Higher Vocational Education, to enhance assessments against quality standards and the procedures for accreditation and evaluation, to deepen its analytical work, to establish up-to-date databases on selected activities, to take into account the orientations of sustainable development, to actively cooperate internationally and to communicate proactively.

2. Carry out procedures for the reaccreditation of universities and independent higher education institutions;

Based on its annual work plans, the Agency carried out the planned accreditation and external evaluation procedures for higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges, includ-

ing procedures for the reaccreditation of universities. It placed particular emphasis on the broad representation of foreign experts in the assessment process, on the quality assessment of scientific and research work, and on strengthening the quality culture at institutions.

3. Identification of samples of study programmes that can be used to monitor the quality of the development of study programmes at a systemic level (e.g., study programmes in the same field)

With the exception of the first sample in 2019, which assessed study programmes that were never reaccredited and those with branches outside Slovenia, the Agency selected the programmes for the evaluation of a sample thematically. The thematic range of programmes gives the Agency an overview of what is happening across the bulk of higher education institutions in a given field. In 2020, it focused on the international aspect, in 2021 it selected teacher training study pro-

grammes, and in 2022 it selected doctoral programmes, which will be continued in the 2023 sample. Higher education institutions are informed of the draft sample before it is approved, and can comment on the choice of programmes, as well as make an alternative proposal for a study programme in the annual sample. The Agency Council considers the proposals and takes them into account as appropriate.

4. Designing good practice and a tailored way of conducting evaluations of the sample of study programmes to achieve their advisory purpose

After the sample evaluation cycle, the Agency carries out a thematic analysis. Thus, in 2022, an analysis of the quality of the sample of study programmes implemented as joint study programmes, transnational higher education or at the branches of Slovenian higher education institutions abroad was carried out, followed in 2023 by the results of external evaluations of teacher training study programmes. The analysis aims to show the quality of the programmes assessed

and identify the characteristics of the assessments. Through the findings of thematic analyses, the collection of good practices and the regular follow-up of quality progress through sample evaluations, the Agency strengthens its advisory role, working with stakeholders at all times.

5. Possible amendment of the protocol of the visit and its presentation to the Agency's staff and Council

Like other actors in the European higher education system, the Agency faced the challenge of carrying out evaluation visits in 2020 and 2021, considering the constraints imposed by COVID-19. In May 2020, in line with ENQA's recommendations and with the aim of improving distance visits, it developed Guidelines for Distance Site Visits, which have also been incorporated into its work and programme by the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). In June 2020, the Agency be-

gan changing site visits, and in July it carried out a survey on stakeholder satisfaction with the new format of the visits, while inviting stakeholders to make suggestions for enhancement. Based on the survey, the guidelines were updated in September 2020 and presented to staff and Council members at joint sessions and Council sessions.

6. In-depth preparation of the content of the consultations in advance, including with the participation of stakeholders and representatives of quality assurance commissions

7. Organise more consultations with stakeholders on specific recommendations from the stakeholder survey (increasing the usability and practicality of the content of study programmes and checking the relevance of the content to market needs, increasing cooperation with foreign agencies, more user-friendly application forms, etc.)

8. Organise more frequent topic-specific and coordination meetings for experts

Explanatory note to (6), (7) and (8):

The Agency has held a number of thematic and coordination meetings for experts in the past period. Most of the meetings were related to the discussion of the draft Assessment Guide. Intense cooperation with representatives of higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and experts was necessary to coordinate comments as part of working meetings or formal meetings with experts.

In April 2021, the department organised a training event for candidates for the Agency's experts, at which were presented the criteria for accreditation and evaluation, the specificities of the assessments by type of accreditation and evaluation with the related quality standards and provisions for their assessment, and the criteria for the Agency's experts. In November 2022 the Agency carried out a training event for candidates for the Agency's experts in a new format, where the emphasis – besides the above-mentioned theoretical foundation – was also

on the practical assessment of an application and the inner dynamics of the expert groups.

An important meeting was held at the end of May 2021, where, after reviewing and assessing in particular the guidelines for the evaluation of scientific, research, artistic and teaching work, many solutions for improving the Guide were agreed or coordinated.

In 2020, the Agency organised an international online consultation with a strong team of international experts to present the results of the EUniQ project, the European Approach for Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European University Networks. The following year, in October 2021, it organised an international consultation on remote quality assurance also in cooperation with international experts. The event was accompanied by the publication of the [proceedings of the meeting, which includes a presentation of the Agency's annual report on its work](#). In 2022, the Agency organised an international conference on hybrid studies and, in cooperation with external experts and the Agency's working group, prepared [Guidelines on Hybrid Studies](#). In December 2022 the Agency also carried out its annual national consultation, where the participants were presented with the work of the Agency, the work of the Agency Council, the Guide for assessments and also the present self-assessment report.

9. Improving the visibility of the Agency in order to increase the number of national and foreign experts, student experts, in particular by publishing a call for experts on the ENQA website, sending a call to foreign agencies, directly to foreign higher education institutions, presenting the Agency's work to students at higher education institutions

Due to epidemiological constraints, promotional activities for Slovenian students in 2020 and 2021 were mainly carried out through social media posts, where the Agency's website is highlighted as an entry point for Slovenian students when

enrolling in higher education. The Agency cooperates with various stakeholders (Student Organisation of Slovenia, Slovenian Secondary School Students' Organisation, secondary schools, media, etc.) to promote its activities and its website. It organises regular meetings with foreign quality assurance agencies, and the traditional inter-

national conferences on quality assurance have been held online over the last three years – on the one hand, due to epidemiological constraints, and on the other hand, to ensure maximum participation of foreign guests. The Agency actively contributes to international events, participates in various working groups, and the Agency's Director has chaired CEENQA from 2020. In 2022, the Agency published through ENQA and ECA [an open call for foreign experts](#) to which 90 responded. In 2021, the Agency also concluded an agreement with the ESU on the involvement of foreign students in accreditation and evaluation

procedures. Foreign experts are involved in all procedures for the assessment of higher education institutions and study programmes, and the number of experts from different countries has been increasing recently. For example, 19 foreign experts from 11 countries participated in the reaccreditation processes of the four largest universities over the past two years.

10. Improving the flow of information between departments and a clear division of tasks between staff (both Director and heads), introduction of annual interviews

In 2020, the Agency launched its internal IT system iNakvis, which is useful for improving the flow of information. There is a better overview of the tasks and responsible staff, the real-time monitoring of staff workload, and a common calendar of meetings, training and other events. A regular joint meeting is held every Monday, where news relevant to the Agency's work is presented and staff can raise any dilemmas, which are sought to be resolved at further dedicated meetings, which are not necessarily department-specific. In 2022, additional cross-department meetings were introduced by the heads of departments, as well as meetings to prepare for the Council meetings.

All employees can meet informally every Wednesday morning before work for an "online coffee", allowing equal access for those working from home and those on the Agency's premises.

By introducing annual interviews with all employees, for the first time in 2020, the Director has further fostered communication between employees and management.

11. Find a way to increase the employees' involvement in the adoption of the Agency's policies and take their opinions into account in strategic decision-making

Before drafting the Agency's rules and documents and finding ways to address strategic issues, a group of employees is formed to discuss the potential change of content of the document or decision to be taken by the Agency. The draft document is first coordinated within the group and then circulated to the heads of departments, who in turn circulate it to the staff in their department. This gives employees the opportunity to give their views and comments, which are col-

lected by department and considered and taken into account in the preparation of the final document.

- 12. Careful consideration of changes to criteria and forms:**
- Establish a systematic way of involving stakeholders in the formulation and adoption of regulations and procedures (prior coordination of possible changes to regulations with stakeholders – e.g., informal meetings of the Director and the Council President with stakeholders: "breakfast with rectors, deans")
 - Take care when changing the criteria while accreditation and evaluation procedures are already underway
 - Changes to the criteria results in more time-consuming adaptations of electronic forms and other documents (e.g., templates, guidelines)
 - Test the proposals for modifications in practice

The Agency has introduced the practice of involving stakeholders in the drafting of regulations, so that any draft (amendment) of a regulation is first circulated to stakeholders electronically. The purpose of the (amendment to the) transcription is briefly explained and stakeholders are asked for comments and suggestions. These are then presented to the Agency Council, taken into account in a meaningful way, or stakeholders are told why their comments may not have been taken into account. The Agency

Council then adopts a draft text (amendment) of the regulation, which is published on the Agency's website, and stakeholders are also informed about it in an e-newsletter. The Agency Council reconsiders the comments received and, based on stakeholder feedback, drafts or adopts a revised proposal for the regulation.

The Agency Director also presents individual major changes to the regulations under preparation (e.g., Amendment to the Minimum Standards for Appointment) at monthly meetings with rectors, visits to higher education institutions or other meetings with stakeholders.

13. Preparation of an independent Agency Act or supplement or amend the ZViS in the part pertaining to the Agency

At the start of 2020, the Agency prepared the text of amendments to the current ZViS. These amendments would, even without a new independent Act, increase the Agency's autonomy, simplify accreditation procedures and expand the Agency's competences in relation to international cooperation. The proposed amendments

to the ZViS were not addressed in 2020, so the Agency drafted the text of an independent Act on Quality in Higher and Higher Vocational Education containing a justification, the reasons for it as well as an international comparison. The document

was presented to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. An important innovation would be the introduction of special sectoral commissions to assist the Agency Council, a revised appeal procedure, the meaningful application of the General Administrative Procedure Act (ZUP) and an extension of the Agency's international activities. In October 2021, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport appointed a multi-stakeholder working group to prepare the draft Act, which met three times. The documents (examination of and replies to comments, harmonisation of the text of

the Act) were prepared intensively by the Agency. The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport has not tabled the Act due to the change of government, but talks are currently underway with the new Minister for Higher Education and representatives of the National Assembly on how to submit the Act to procedure.

14. Establishment of cooperation with the relevant ministries regarding regulated professions in order to formulate clear and published criteria for issuing consent to study programmes

In April 2020, the Agency organised a meeting attended by representatives of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MDDSZ), the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MIZŠ), the Ministry of Health (MZ) and the Ministry of Culture (MK). Participants agreed on the procedure for obtaining the approval of the competent ministry for the accreditation of study programmes educating regulated professions. This is done in two stages: first, the competent ministry makes any comments on the application, and then, once the application has been completed, it decides whether to grant ap-

proval. The meeting also agreed on the content to be considered by the competent ministry when granting approval. The Agency has made extensive [explanatory notes](#) on the procedure and content of the criteria to be drawn up by the ministries for the granting of approvals under the professions regulations.

15. Continuation of a successful implementation of the eNakvis information system, especially through the development of tools for system and thematic analyses and self-assessment, and improvement of tools for informing stakeholders and connecting with the IZUM information system

In 2020, the Agency upgraded the eNakvis system, where the online forms were aligned with the current version of the Criteria, with the addition of fields for research organisation codes for higher education institutions and researcher codes for study programme course holders. Data on researcher codes allow the Agency to obtain information on research activity for the assessment

of a particular procedure. The tools for systemic and thematic analysis were partly implemented within the new internal IT system iNakvis and were already used when preparing the current self-assessment report.

16. Continuation of activities to improve communication between the Agency and stakeholders


The Agency continues its activities to strengthen two-way communication with external stakeholders (consultations, conferences, training events, regular thematic meetings). The Director visited all higher education institutions in Slovenia in 2020–2022. In 2020–2022, the

Agency launched an intensive promotion of its website and YouTube channel, where the Agency's and the Slovenian higher education area's films and presentations of higher education institutions are uploaded. Stakeholders are informed through different channels (the website, e-newsletter, social networks).

17. Publication of the most frequently asked questions of experts and corresponding answers on the website

The Agency systematically publishes on its website the most [frequently asked questions](#), related to the eNakvis information system, accreditation and evaluation procedures, and [interpretation of legislation](#). All stakeholder issues are addressed in an up-to-date and systematic way. Where the Agency receives a question that would be of interest to a wider range of stakeholders, it is also published on the website or forwarded via an e-newsletter, together with the

answer. In 2021, the Agency prepared and published the first version of the Guide to Assessment, which is intended for the Agency's experts, those in charge of accreditation and evaluation procedures, as well as higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges, mainly as a guide for improving the quality of self-assessment. The document guides them through an in-depth substantive assessment against the quality standards according to the prescribed criteria and helps them to understand the Agency's rules, including the most common questions and dilemmas that arise in this context, and attempts to answer them.



04

Part four:
SWOT analysis



STRENGTHS

- preparation and use of the Guide to Assessment
- strengthening the Agency's analytic work
- development and modernisation of the iNakvis internal IT system
- active promotion of the Agency in the Slovenian higher education area (newsletter, website, presentation films, publications, regular thematic meetings with all stakeholders)
- active international cooperation and participation in various working groups of international associations in the field of quality in higher education (CEENQA, ENQA, ECA, BFUG, etc.)
- excellent working conditions (training and professional development of employees, Family Friendly Enterprise certification, flexible working hours, home working, good premises and modern equipment)

WEAKNESSES

- administrative and financial burden of accreditation and evaluation procedures (extensive documentation in Slovenian and English, high interpretation costs due to the mandatory use of Slovenian)
- lack of legal basis for international evaluations
- financial obstacles to managing and participating in international projects



OPPORTUNITIES

- the adoption of the Quality Act to simplify procedures, international evaluations and sectoral boards in appeal procedures
- meaningful adaptation of external assessment systems to take account of new models of higher education (e.g. hybrid education, micro-credentials, European universities, sustainability aspects)
- further development of the internal iNakvis and external eNakvis systems
- strengthening the advisory role of the Agency and enhancing assessments against quality standards and procedures for accreditation and evaluation
- strengthening the collaborative culture among employees and departments

RISKS

- additional workload within a limited human resources structure and the retirement of two of the Agency's most experienced staff members
- subordination to the General Administrative Procedure Act regarding the appeal procedures



05

Part five:
Looking to the future

CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR
THE NEXT INTERNAL
SELF-ASSESSMENT PERIOD
OF SQAA

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

1. drafting a stand-alone Quality Act achieving a purpose of simplifying the QA procedures, enabling international evaluations and sectoral boards in appeal procedures;
2. enhancing assessment against quality standards and procedures for accreditation and evaluation, including training for staff members to understand specific areas of assessments (e.g. interdisciplinarity, joint study programmes, micro-credentials, European universities);
3. acknowledging the specificities of disciplines, higher education institutions and quality assurance procedures, including acknowledging the possibilities of implementing targeted evaluations and accreditations of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges;
4. continuation of systematic involvement and proactive two-way communication with external and internal stakeholders in all processes of internal quality assurance (preparation of SAR, adoption of new regulation/ documents, procedure implementation, strategic planning, analytic work);
5. organising consultations and training sessions, taking into account specific recommendations from the stakeholder survey (e.g., preparation of applications in accreditation and evaluation procedures, preparation of self-assessment reports at institutions/colleges, knowledge of the Agency's procedures);
6. more thematic and coordination meetings for experts, training in report writing and external assessments, exchanges of experience and practices between experts, and discussion of good and bad evaluation examples in accreditation and evaluation processes; and awareness of the quality of experts' work;
7. strengthening the integrity area, including active awareness-raising among experts, Council members and employees;
8. strengthening cooperation between departments and tasks of common interest to the Agency;
9. updating of the internal iNakvis and external eNakvis systems;
10. taking sustainable development principles into account in quality enhancement in higher and higher vocational education, including through hybrid site visits;
11. continuing international cooperation, in particular through active participation in international associations, visits to foreign agencies and participation in projects.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



BFUG – Bologna Follow-up Group

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

ECA – European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education

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

iNakvis – Internal 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

SAR – Self-assessment report of the Agency

SQAA – Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

ŠOS – Student Organisation of Slovenia

VTI – Higher transnational education

ZViS – Higher Education Act

ZVSI – Higher Vocational Education Act

ZUP – General Administrative Procedure Act

ANNEXES

- SAR 2018 and 2019
- Analysis of the self-assessment survey



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