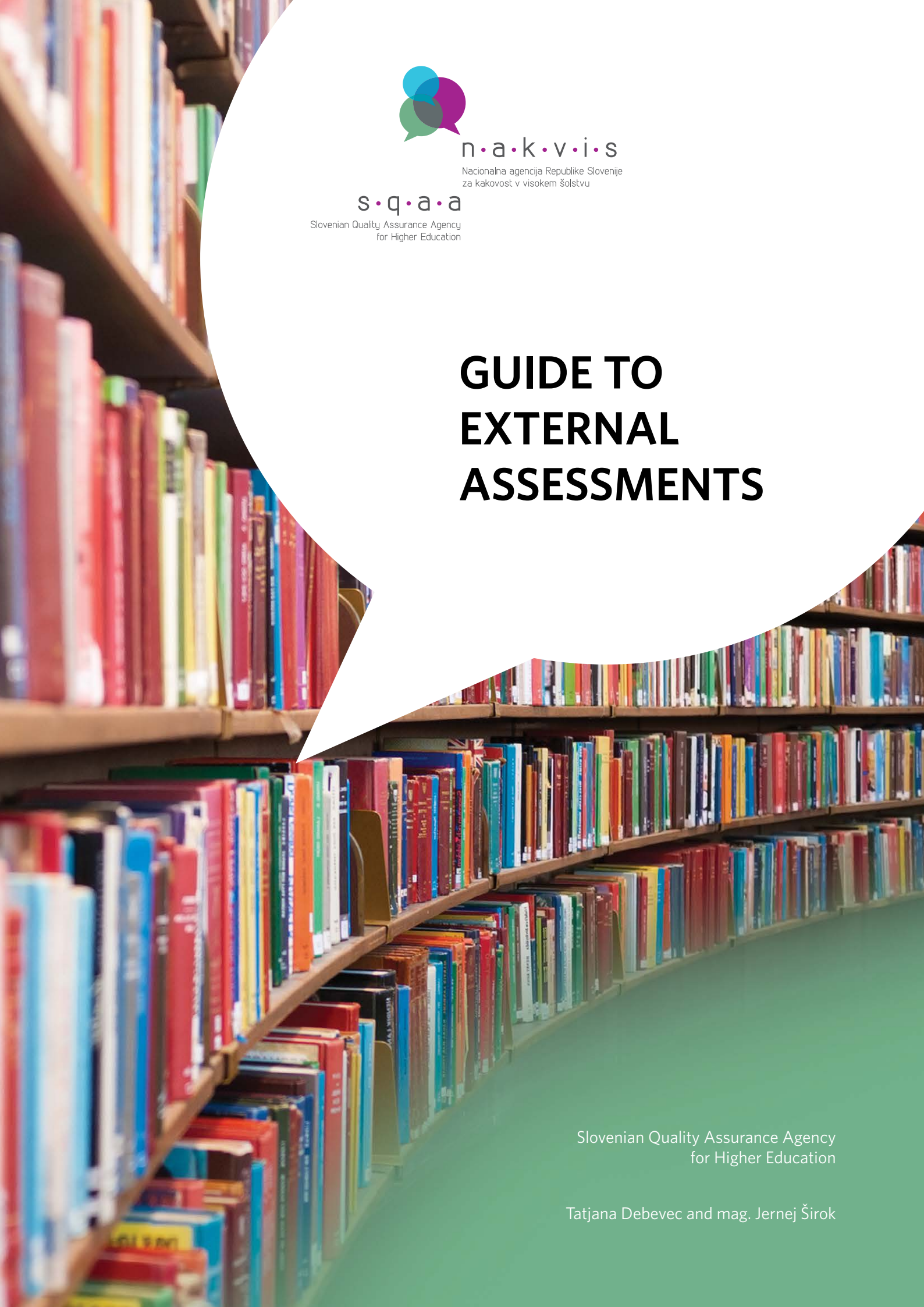

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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

GUIDE TO EXTERNAL ASSESSMENTS

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

Tatjana Debevec and mag. Jernej Širok

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INTRODUCTION

Almost a decade has passed since the publication of the Manual for Experts of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency). Today it is hidden on the Agency's old website, in the online archive. The document was a guide to the accreditation and evaluation procedures: it addressed the role and tasks of the group of experts, the applicants, the Agency staff and the external observers. It provided a detailed presentation of the procedures including a visit to a higher education institution (institution) or a higher vocational college (college) and writing accreditation and evaluation reports. It also addressed the first substantive challenges both in the areas of assessment and by type of assessment – assessments of colleges, institutions and study programmes. The organisational, operational and substantive considerations set out at that time have been successfully assimilated by the experts and other participants in the processes.

Together with experts and other stakeholders, the Agency sought to raise the assessments to a higher level focused on quality. In agreement with stakeholders, it adopted in 2017 and 2018 the new Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes and the Criteria for the External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges, which introduced quality standards to be met by institutions and colleges, and provisions for their proper assessment. From determining the correctness of processes, provision of information, stakeholder participation in institutions and colleges, counting research, artistic and professional projects etc. it has moved to a qualitative assessment with a greater focus on contents.

Before the publication of the Guide, the Agency had to gain as much experience as possible in working according to the new Accreditation and External Evaluation Criteria. It constantly monitored the work of experts and other participants in the procedures and solved the problems that arose. It came to the following conclusions:

- the assessment of compliance with quality standards still often lacks depth in terms of contents – especially the assessment of teaching, scientific, professional, research or artistic activities;
- the reports of experts are generally better than years ago, but there is a need to improve them further, especially in identifying compliances or non-compliances; strengths, opportunities for improvement and major deficiencies or non-compliances based on in-depth and professionally sound assessment;
- assessing compliance with certain quality standards requires more detailed clarification;
- greater sensitivity to the specifics of the subject of assessment is needed.

The Guide was made with a view to establishing a high level of assessments that are sensitive to the needs of students and the external environment, as well as soundly take into account the internal specifics of higher and higher vocational education related to different cycles and types of studies, disciplines to which study programmes correspond, and institutional differences. These are important aspects of the assessed elements that bring quality closer to the inevitable characteristics of the field of higher education and compare it with academic standards as well as the professional characteristics of higher education. The Guide touches on pitfalls and setbacks to which the Agency's policies so far may not have paid enough attention. Namely, we want to be even more attentive and more accurate in determining the actual state of affairs, and make the recommendations for improving quality better-grounded, more pervasive and more useful.

The amendment to the Criteria shifted the assessments from establishing compliance with the prescribed minimum of acceptability to assessing quality. An increasing number of provisions do not only require the suitability or existence of something, but also its quality. Assessments are now conducted at two levels. The first one determines the still acceptable compliance with the quality standard,

i.e. compliance, existence or implementation of the prescribed. The second one qualitatively evaluates the identified state or phenomenon to the extent above (or below) acceptable, thus assessing quality. Attention is therefore also focused on questions of what is very good, good, what is not good or what could be better.

Some assessments have been carried out in a relatively superficial and standard way. We are also aware that the makers of the external quality system have had an influence on this. Already on a typical site visit, a lot of attention was paid to issues aimed at the promotion and interpretation of the elements of the Bologna reform, together with the setting up of quality systems and the strengthening of organisational culture, and to meeting the needs of the environment, rather than to fact-finding and the quality of the studies. Aspects of organising, managing and processing educational activities were highlighted, as well as the rights, informing and participation of stakeholders. Experts and other stakeholders have already developed a good sense and skills to assess such topics, so there is not much more we can offer in this respect. But as the Bologna reform has become fully established during these years, the reach of the recommendations in these areas was exhausted, making them increasingly formulaic, anticipated and empty. On occasion, there has also been an unwritten aversion to more direct and demanding assessments of the study contents, their correspondence to the discipline, approaches to the delivery of studies, the educational attainment of graduates, or research achievements. Not only do such assessments require greater depth and responsibility in dealing with diverse phenomena that are difficult for objective administrative and legal procedures to grasp, but they can also have more serious and far-reaching consequences. Concrete solutions are, namely, more complex than designing organisational, managerial, information- or participation-related measures. The dialogue between experts and institutions/colleges was therefore not balanced; also because of an excessive focus on stakeholder satisfaction, it often led to the neglect of explicitly professional issues that are at the core of institutions and colleges and relate to the already mentioned complexity and depth of study, conceptual and didactic approaches to teaching, correspondence of the study to the discipline, its breadth or specialisation and quality regarding its cycle and type on the one hand, and on the other to the characteristics of professional and practically oriented higher vocational education studies.

The Guide is intended not only for the Agency experts or expert candidates (hereinafter: experts), but also for all participants in accreditation and evaluation procedures: institutions and colleges, Agency staff, Agency Council members and other external stakeholders. Its central part focusing on the assessment according to quality standards will also be useful for institutions and colleges in self-evaluation and preparation for accreditation or external evaluation.

I REGULATIONS

The basis for professional, objective, independent and high-quality work, assessment and decision-making in accreditation and evaluation procedures is a thorough knowledge and application of the following regulations in higher and higher vocational education:

a) acts:

- Higher Education Act (hereinafter: the ZViS),
- Higher Vocational Education Act (hereinafter: the ZVSI),
- Professional and Academic Titles Act (hereinafter: the ZSZN),
- General Administrative Procedure Act (hereinafter: the ZUP),

b) implementing regulations of the Agency:

- Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes (hereinafter: the Accreditation Criteria),
- Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education (hereinafter: Criteria for International Cooperation),
- Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges (hereinafter: Criteria for Evaluation of Colleges),
- Minimum Standards for Appointment to Titles of Higher Education Teachers, Scientific Staff and Higher Education Staff at Higher Education Institutions (hereinafter: the Minimum Standards),
- Criteria for the Allocation of Credits to Study Programmes under the ECTS (hereinafter: Criteria for the Allocation of Credits),
- Criteria for Transferring Between Study Programmes (hereinafter: Criteria for Transferring),
- Criteria for Experts of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: Criteria for Experts);

c) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter: ESG);

d) other implementing regulations of the ministry responsible for higher vocational education, for example:

- Rules on the Procedure for the Appointment to the Short-cycle-College Lecturer Title,
- Rules on Assessment of Knowledge in Post-secondary Vocational Schools.

Most of the regulations are published on the Agency's website under Regulation and Legislation. Implementing regulations under d) are published on the website of the ministry responsible for higher vocational education.

The amendment to the ZViS at the end of 2016 changed the process of accreditation and external evaluation of institutions and colleges, accreditation of modifications and accreditation of higher education study programmes, extraordinary evaluations of institutions and study programmes and procedures for conducting such evaluations. Evaluations of samples of study programmes have been introduced, which are advisory in nature and are conducted annually. The conditions for the establishment of institutions have been changed (Article 14 of the ZViS) and the mandatory components of study programmes and the registration of study programmes accredited abroad with the Agency have been supplemented.

Here we should mention more detailed provisions on fulfilling the conditions for the establishment of various types of institutions (higher vocational colleges, faculties, academies, universities), such as employment of higher education teachers, scientific and research work in the field of study programmes, activities specific to each type of institution; and that for regulated professions, in the accreditation process the Agency shall obtain the consent of the ministry with jurisdiction for the profession graduates are to obtain.

The ZViS also sets out in more detail the accreditation and evaluation procedures, or the rights and obligations of the participants therein. The process of reaccreditation of an institution usually includes two multiple-day visits by a group of experts, with the second visit specifically aimed at assessing the institution's quality assurance systems, self-evaluation, updating and implementation of study programmes, or assessment according to the ESG. Reaccreditation can be granted twice for periods shorter than five years, and several evaluations of a study programme are possible before the final decision of the Agency Council.

While institutions are still granted initial accreditation and reaccreditation, accreditation is granted indefinitely to higher education study programmes, provided that the legal provisions and quality standards from the Criteria are met. What has been preserved is the instrument of extraordinary evaluation, which allows for the withdrawal of accreditation of study programmes.

We are talking about the so-called transition to institutional reaccreditation, which in practice means focusing on more in-depth, substantiated assessments of all activities of institutions and colleges, especially educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic.

External quality assessments are not just a matter of finding material facts and gathering documentation, but require in-depth qualitative assessment by quality standards, to help institutions and colleges in quality development, and greater professionalisation of the Agency experts and staff.

I.1 AGENCY CRITERIA

As already stressed, the Criteria constitute a shift from meeting the minimum standards for accreditation or reaccreditation or issuing a positive opinion on the evaluation of a college to a qualitative assessment of the quality of institutions, their study programmes, and colleges. Therefore we specified for the first time the quality standards that must be met in accreditation and evaluation procedures, provisions for assessment according to the standards, major deficiencies or non-compliances that affect the reaccreditation, revocation of accreditation, reaccreditation for a period shorter than five years, as well as withdrawal of accreditation of study programmes, positive or negative opinion on colleges and follow-up procedures for institutions/colleges (Articles 45 and 49a of the Accreditation Criteria, Article 21 of the Criteria for Evaluation of Colleges).

Different regulations regulate the accreditation of joint study programmes implemented only by Slovenian institutions (in the Accreditation Criteria) and the accreditation of joint study programmes implemented by Slovenian institutions together with foreign ones – the so-called international joint study programmes (in the Criteria for International Cooperation). The latter also regulate the registration of study programmes with the Agency and higher transnational education, which are not part of accreditation and evaluation procedures. The Criteria governing international cooperation of Slovenian institutions in one place provide a better insight into the specifics of these procedures.

The Criteria for the Evaluation of Colleges are modelled on the Accreditation Criteria, taking into account the specific features and characteristics of higher vocational education regulated by the ZVSI, while the basis for the evaluation procedures is provided by the ZViS. It is a highly practical education based on the needs of the labour market. As the Agency does not have the power to accredit colleges or higher vocational education programmes, it only issues an opinion on whether a college meets the quality standards set out in the Evaluation Criteria.

The Criteria are clearly structured, with general provisions defining the tasks of the Agency, the types of accreditation or external evaluation, the areas of assessment specific to each type of accreditation or evaluation, the quality standards in each area with the provisions for the assessment according to them, the applications, procedures and decision-making process, and the application forms. Quality standards or provisions for the assessment according to them differ even in the same areas of assessment depending on whether it is the initial accreditation or reaccreditation of an institution, or the accreditation or evaluation of a study programme. Compliance with the ESG can mostly be linked to quality standards in the areas of assessment for reaccreditation or evaluation.

II ACCREDITATIONS AND EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS

This is the central part of the Guide. First, we offer an explanation of the characteristic of assessments, which seeks to regulate the challenges in linking the regulation, the observed state of affairs and the ideal or concept of what is of quality and good. The understanding of this synthesis can be the key to more precise assessments.

An in-depth insight into the characteristics of assessments was provided by past systemic analyses of accreditation and evaluation practices, or analyses of reports from groups of experts and self-evaluation reports from institutions and colleges.

II.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENTS WITH A FOCUS ON EVALUATION

EXTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENTS

Externally, the assessments are characterised by three features: their frequency, their criticality and their determination by regulations.

Frequency of assessments

The frequency of assessments is an indication of how often we focus on certain quality standards and the specific provisions used to assess according to them in our findings and assessments. Although each assessment in a particular type of accreditation or evaluation is supposed to be carried out against all the quality standards prescribed for that type, we either pass a judgment or not pass a judgment on a particular quality standard, or especially its part, and either assess or not assess the actual state of affairs. The frequency of assessments in practice is far from balanced.

Criticality of assessments

The criticality of assessments refers to whether the actual state of affairs is assessed as a strength or an opportunity for improvement according to certain quality standards and the provisions for the assessment according to them. The more frequently we proclaim strengths, the less critical we are. Criticality is the ratio of the proportions of strengths highlighted to the sum of the proportions of opportunities for improvement, major deficiencies or non-compliances, as well as partial compliances with respect to a particular quality standard or its provision.

The old practice was for the assessments to maintain a proportionate quantitative balance between the stated strengths and opportunities for improvement, which was expected to have a positive impact on the motivation of institutions and colleges to improve. Thus, in each area of assessment, opportunities for improvement were balanced by strengths. The loyalty to this principle resulted in some inauthentic assessments.

It is important to avoid credulous or overly positive assessments. An uncritical acceptance of statements of fact in applications should be replaced by a comprehensive assessment with an appropriate critical distance. The same applies to unjustified or excessive criticism.

The stated strengths should clearly communicate that something is good, and opportunities for improvement that something is not good or could be better. If something is merely existent or absent, we are

dealing with an issue of compliance, not with strengths or opportunities for improvement. Furthermore, the assessment cannot be a without a qualification, i.e. a mere recommendation that the matter under assessment should be changed. It should also avoid truisms, vagueness and irrelevant matters. Assessments also have different weights, as they can refer to something direct and more relevant to the quality standard, or something more indirect and less relevant, depending on the regulation.

Last but not least, continuous care must be taken to ensure that the same actual state of affairs is always given a single assessment, so that it does not become a strength and an opportunity for improvement at the same time, or that such inconsistencies do not arise across different standards. In particular, it is important to avoid characterising features of the same actual state of affairs as an opportunity for improvement at one time and as a major deficiency or non-compliance or partial compliance at another time.

Determination of assessments with regulations

The determination of assessments with regulations is derived from the provisions for examination for establishing the actual state of affairs and passing the judgements of quality. Regulations are, namely, laid down in a particular way – their language and content are the result of the way they are drafted, coordinated and adopted. The way in which a criterion or standard is set influences whether a particular condition, phenomenon or aspect of it will be evaluated at all, and in what way, with what level of attention.

All three characteristics of assessments are external to the individual assessment of the actual state of affairs and independent of the language and content of the proclaimed finding or judgment. There are also features of the assessments that are based neither on the proclaimed compliance or the judgment of quality, nor on the way in which the regulation is determined. These features can be seen in the way the specific assessment is written and in the structure of its contents.

INTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENTS – MODALITIES

Internally, assessments are defined by three modalities of presenting findings and assessments:

Conceptual modality

The first modality of presenting findings and especially assessments is conceptual. It refers to a possibility of using different concepts of quality, either essentialist or functionalist, in connecting the actual state of affairs with the regulation. The same finding under the same regulation can often be assessed simultaneously through a prism of:

1. effectiveness of achieving compliance with set goals (e.g. strategic) or regulations;
2. fitness for purpose, i.e. in terms of meeting the expectations and needs of different stakeholder groups, or in terms of their satisfaction;
3. economy and economy-related needs;
4. transformation that is, as a constructivist approach to quality, centered on the student, focusing on their psychological transformation and connecting the quality of study with the enhancement of the learning experience;
5. process management, where the emphasis is on prescribing, planning, organising, managing and supervising processes at the institution/college and related rights and obligations of stakeholders;
6. or through a prism of various academic standards and values, where the principles of knowledge, research and teaching are the guiding principle in the search for quality.

Epistemic modality

The second modality of presenting findings and judgments refers to the epistemic horizon of quality. Its understanding can be situated in the world of quantities and objective, measurable phenomena and properties, or in the world of valuation, i.e. less tangible phenomena. In the former understanding, quality is a fact based on a regulation; in the latter one, it is the result of a value judgment based not only on a regulation but also on an ideal. In the former, both the finding and the judgments focus (at least seemingly) on the material existence or property of an actual state of affairs outside subjective perception, and in the latter on its qualitative properties or their recognition on the basis of expert opinion. This is also reflected in different methods, as assessments are sometimes the result of empirical measurements of quantities, and other times of interpretations that need to be professionally in-depth and well-founded. In practice, epistemic frameworks of quality are not delineated but crossing and overlapping, which makes assessments complex both in terms of epistemology and methodology.

Again we encounter the problem that something can be good or of high quality merely because it exists, because it can be measured, or because it has a certain (surplus) quantity. This, however, does not show that the same thing is of high quality. What happens to everything that cannot be measured and controlled in terms of quantity? Quality should, namely, derive from the intrinsic value of what we observe, and in higher education we observe a social and spiritual phenomenon that simply cannot be objectified in its full dimension. To move from quantity to quality, it is necessary to recognise the intrinsic value in quantity and to link it to this notion, in fact to the concept of quality.

Phase modality

Thirdly, the presentation of findings and assessments differs according to their orientation towards the so-called phase of the actual state of affairs. Findings and assessments can be made about (1) conditions that may lead to quality, but not necessarily do; (2) processes that may also lead to quality but not necessarily do (these include the procedures and changes of the actual state of affairs); and (3) end states, i.e. achievements, awards, works completed, final grades, results, outputs. When we look at quality from this perspective, we move along an axis from the promise or possibility of quality to action and change towards greater, potential or merely possible quality, and finally to quality that is achieved, realised, acquired, demonstrated or recognised. The important question becomes how close the findings and assessments are to the end states, especially if the rules are also set with the end state in mind.

SHIFTS

Shifts from normal or equilibrium can be observed in both the external and internal properties of assessments. In such cases, there is either a conflict or an imbalance between the prescribed, recognised actual state of affairs and the perception of what is good, of high quality.

Shifts in the frequency of assessments

Shifts in the frequency of assessments imply an unjustifiably greater focus on certain quality standards or provisions for the assessment according to them than on others, regardless of the fact that the Accreditation Criteria are not structured hierarchically. This raises the question of why certain quality standards have received more attention in practice than others and how this relates to perceptions of quality.

Areas of assessment that the analyses of evaluation practices revealed to be less frequently addressed are correspondence of the study content to the discipline, the quality of the study content with the focus and complexity of the study (including its cycle and type), aspects of the scientific, professional, research or artistic work and references of holders of these activities, and the professional view of the quality of teaching (but not including the conditions for it).

On the other hand, the assessments more often emphasised the satisfaction, participation, motivation and connectedness of stakeholders, especially students, and the procedural and administrative aspects and conditions of educational and research activities.

Shifts in the criticality of assessments

Shifts in the criticality of assessments occur when we establish the actual state of affairs, which indicates a certain level of compliance or quality, but do not follow it in our assessment or divert attention elsewhere. It is also incorrect when a finding is labelled only as an opportunity for improvement, even though it is in fact a major deficiency or non-compliance. Another two concrete variations of such a shift are when something is labelled as a strength, even though it is written down as a critical remark or as a guidance for improvement, or when something is labelled as a strength without denoting any quality or without any justification and explanation. The shift in focus can be illustrated by the identified absence of scientific and research achievements, which is, however, justified just as an opportunity for improvement by referring to the teaching or administrative workload, or even turned into a strength by praising the optimisation of the institution's activities. Such cases confuse both the applicant in seeking solutions and clarifications and the Agency Council in taking decisions.

Analyses of evaluation practices have shown that both the frequency of assessments and the criticality in view of the regulations vary considerably. As indicated, some provisions for the assessment according to standards are particularly frequently and critically considered, while there is a marked lack of such considerations in case of other provisions. The observed strengths and opportunities for improvement are mainly less susceptible to the specifics of the cycle and type of study, its disciplinary background, as well as to certain concepts of quality.

If we turn our attention to the question of individual quality standards, the assessments have more often and more critically focused on provisions that are more closely related to the needs of students and the external environment, and to the management or supervision of educational and research activities. However, the parts of the regulations that relate to the internal specifics of higher education – professional, scientific, artistic and academic issues, such as the relevance of the content of a study programme to its field and discipline – have been addressed less frequently and less critically. The assessments and the resulting demands for improvement therefore placed less emphasis on quality while resolutely pushing studies towards greater applicability and functionality. Economic, procedural and managerial views of quality have dominated the assessments, to the detriment of academic ones.

Shifts in modalities of presenting findings and judgments

Shifts in modalities of presenting findings and judgments are based on how the findings and judgments are written – on the language and contents:

1. 'pars pro toto' shift occurs when a particularity or subordinate state or phenomenon is assessed and connected with a more general, broadly defined standard. A problematic shift can also arise when an overly general assessment or an overly broad, overly comprehensive actual state of affairs is attached to a specific standard, thereby going beyond what is required. The problem can be illustrated by assessing the study content on the basis of grammatical errors in syllabi, or of tutoring on the basis of the availability of tutors' contact details on the institution's website.
2. A shift to another or incompatible characteristic, phenomenon or condition occurs when the balance between the prescribed and the actual state of affairs is broken. The possibilities for advanced pedagogical training of teachers can thus be proclaimed as the quality of teaching.
3. Shift between quality and quantity is based on the substitution or overlap of quality with quantity and vice versa. The latter becomes a sign of good or bad. In the opposite case, quality is limited to objective assessment. It is a shift in objectivity and measurability arising from the epistemic horizon of quality. It is problematic when a value judgement is based on quantities alone.

4. Shift by exaggerating, inflating the appearance means that a certain actual state of affairs is assessed as too critical or too positive; it can be an excessive praise or an unfounded criticism. This includes making unfounded criticism that is not supported by evidence. Some findings are overly neutral although the actual state of affairs is problematic. The result of such shifts is the creation of wrong or false images.

5. Temporal shift has often proved particularly acute for the Agency. This arises when the focus of the assessment shifts from the current actual state of affairs to the past or the future, which is particularly the case for accreditation of new study programmes or institutions, where compliance with regulations or even assessments are presented on the basis of promises, plans and strategies – i.e. on the basis of something that does not yet exist, even though it is required by the regulation. In reaccreditation or evaluation procedures, the situation is reversed, as the actual state of affairs is, in accordance with the rules, also assessed on the basis of past achievements, solutions or practices.

6. Conceptual shift is an erroneous or problematic use of the concept of quality, which influences the interpretation of a regulation and the identified actual state of affairs. This can result in erroneous or biased findings or assessments. For example, the academic question of the correspondence of the study programme to the discipline is assessed solely on the basis of the concept of quality as fitness for purpose, referring to the satisfaction of different stakeholder groups with the disciplinary structure of the study and bypassing disciplinary rules; the assessment of the disciplinarity of a study is linked solely to the economic aspect of its competitiveness, since the disciplinary structure of the study is supposed to make it a good market niche. One of the most frequent conceptual shifts is substituting quality for stakeholder satisfaction – the latter can only be one of the concepts of quality.

7. Phase shift occurs when a finding and judgment are focused on a phase of the state different from that laid down by a provision. Particularly problematic is assessing conditions and especially processes where end states should be assessed. The problem may occur e.g. by assessing the conditions for education and research by assessing the processes related to endeavours to establish the conditions and not – as would be correct – determining the adequacy of the conditions themselves.

   Critical assessments are therefore more often made in situations and especially procedures (for example, in internal quality assurance), and less often in end states. It is a tendency to resort to formalities, to organisational and administrative dilemmas where findings should be professionally and substantively founded.

8. Shift from the specifics of what is assessed arises either from an inadequate, insufficiently in-depth and imprecise knowledge of the actual state of affairs, or from a narrow application of a rule which is typically general and which is not always sufficiently precise for all the intrinsic specifics of the actual state of affairs. Such shift may also be caused by inappropriate use of quality concepts, superficial and standard quality assessments, and drawing on generic good practices from other fields or from outside the field of higher education. Given the type of procedure, the assessment is therefore not sufficiently sensitive to the institutional specifics of the subject of assessment, the specifics of teaching and related approaches to teaching, the disciplinary specifics of teaching and research, and the specifics of the cycles and types of study programmes (see Section III Reflection on assessment in selected areas).

Shifts or divergences from the determination of assessments with regulations

The shifts or divergences from the determination of assessments with regulations do not arise from the way a finding or a judgement of quality is proclaimed but, as the name implies, from the language and content of the regulation; the way the quality standard or the procedure itself is prescribed. The above-mentioned shifts are therefore seen from a different angle: the way and scope of the regulation may be bypassed in the assessment, either because of superficiality or deliberately. It is therefore essential to bear in mind the three modalities of presenting findings and judgments – conceptual, epistemic and phase – when applying the provisions. Since these modalities are not always clearly, or even at all, contained in all regulations, they can only be demonstrated in certain quality standards and, when they do, they are in fact part of other shifts. Let us glance at a few examples: if a regulation only requires

compliance, i.e. the existence of something, or suitability, as in the case of habilitations, then the assessment of quality is redundant – the focus should be on their existence (validity) and suitability. When the Accreditation Criteria require the demonstration of quality scientific, professional, research or artistic activity, the assessment of quality is mandatory; it must be based primarily on the end (demonstrated) state and not on accompanying conditions or processes such as the quality of plan of development of a research activity or perhaps the appointment of a working group to prepare such a plan.

Shifts from the framework of the procedure can also be attributed to this type of shift. This concerns an inappropriate use of a regulation, a failure to comply with its provisions or its purpose. For example, it happens, although not frequently, that the focus of the assessment is on standards and quality issues that belong to another type of procedure. For example, the Agency has faced complaints from applicants that colleges are assessed as institutions. There has also been an occasional overemphasis on institutional issues in the assessment of study programmes.

DEMONSTRATING, ESTABLISHING AND REASONING COMPLIANCE

Evidence must be verifiable – it must allow for legal testing together with an expert finding. By using evidence, a group of experts can explain the established actual state of affairs, clarify their professional perception of truth and dimension of the actual state of affairs. As the latter is linked to a specific quality standard, the explanation is extended to a reasoned statement on compliance with it. It is crucial that experts link the specific actual state of affairs with the prescribed one and do not, for example, write about the adequacy of the structure and content of the study programme when analysing the functioning of the internal quality system or the governance of the institution.

While it makes sense to assess each quality standard in relation to others, because standards are also interrelated, it is precisely when reasoning partial compliance and major deficiencies or non-compliances from a legal point of view that care should be taken to ensure that the arguments are based only on the standard that is (most) directly related to the actual state of affairs. More standards to which experts could try to attach a difficult actual state of affairs would mean more challenges for the reasoning, for the legal test of the finding and, consequently, for the sustainability of the Agency Council decision. There should be constant reflection on whether a particular major problem has been sufficiently evidenced, explained and placed in a legal framework, and whether the applicant has had sufficient opportunity to express their views on it. If this is not the case, it makes sense to deepen the assessment rather than resort to a safer, more modest, partial finding or judgment.

The specifics of the actual state of affairs sometimes do not have a clear and direct reference in the rules. As its establishment is linked to the concept of quality as consistency, it is important to take into account not only regulations but also **Agency guidelines and recommendations**, European quality standards **ESG**, internal acts of institutions/colleges (e.g. rules, statutes, articles of association), their organisational objectives (e.g. strategic objectives or action plans in the context of self-evaluation) and the corresponding accredited state of affairs (e.g. commitments and provisions in the curriculum and syllabi) when declaring compliance. The question of the compliance of the identified actual state of affairs with the prescribed one may refer only to facts and objective circumstances, but not to consciousness, ideas, promises, opinions or wishes, unless these are determined by the regulation.

Past practice reminds us that the decision of the Agency Council has most often been challenged in appeal procedures on the basis of an over-generalisation of the findings without any reasoning and assessment of the actual state of affairs and without any reasoning as to why the statutory requirement has not been met. The decisions were thus overturned mainly because of inadequate reasoning, insufficient evidence, incomplete fact finding, unclear links between the identified actual state of affairs and the legal bases, partial assessment of individual issues, and failure to follow legal practice in the decision-making process.

EVALUATION

The essential features of evaluation or assessment are covered in the previous chapter. From a legal point of view, it is important that qualitative assessments are based on regulations as well, even though quality is not a legal category and even though an opportunity for improvement does not imply a sanction linked to accreditation. This is because even opportunities for improvement are usually binding on the applicant, imposing obligations. If nothing else, the applicant must report on the measures taken. It is therefore appropriate that assessments are also reasoned and not based on mere stock-taking or even without context. It is not appropriate, for example, to simply list all of an institution's research projects and then deliver the assessment of strengths without explaining the intrinsic value of the research being assessed and its impact on quality.

The assessment of quality is indicated by qualifiers such as high-quality, good, excellent, outstanding, special, above average, exceptional, below average, poor. Labels such as necessary, preferred, desirable, important and their antonyms do not reveal qualitative value so much as they reveal the interest orientation or motive behind quality – they instrumentalise quality. Quality should not be labelled by conformity with attributes such as such as adequate, appropriate and their antonyms, or by objective or quantitative attributes such as sufficient, excessive, abundant, existing and their antonyms. Quantities may help evaluate quality but cannot be its markers.

WEIGHING

Finally, findings and judgments must be weighed. This should be done when non-compliances, partial compliances, but also more serious opportunities for improvement are identified. The group of experts assesses the gravity and consequences of the problem and explains its assessment. It checks its gravity already during the assessment and ensures that all stakeholders express their opinion on it; possible solutions should also be explored in dialogue with them. It is likely that the institution or college or applicant will understand the problem differently, even rationalise it or dismiss it as a misunderstanding.

For example, if the problem identified did not bother the students and its solution could be deferred from the professional aspect or entrusted to the institution/college to solve, then it is not so grave. It may be a mere formality that has no serious implications for the actual quality of educational, professional, research or artistic activity. Since it needs to be resolved, however, it may be referred to the self-evaluation or other internal control levers at the institution/college. However, if the problem has disturbed the experts from a professional point of view and seemed to be of concern to the interviewees at the evaluation, because it may have been brought to the attention of the management on several occasions and nothing has happened, the explanation of the institution/college should be carefully considered and the experts as guardians of quality within external evaluation should fulfill their obligation.

This key task in the assessment is not an easy one. It triggers a number of questions without simple answers:

- how urgent is it to protect the weakest stakeholder groups from the problem when deciding whether to leave its resolution to the autonomy of the institution/college or to the follow-up action of the Agency?
- what are the realistic chances to eliminate the problem?
- who can resolve the problem – what if it cannot be resolved either by the institute/college or by the Agency? What if it is a national, system-wide, structural problem? Or if it is a problem of a certain stakeholder group for which the institution/college simply cannot be accountable under the regulations?
- what is needed to solve the problem – what resources and inputs would it take?
- how long will it take to resolve the problem? Is it just a matter of taking action at a managing body, for example changing the internal rules, which can be resolved by the institution/college at the first

meeting of the competent body, or does the solution require new researchers, sophisticated equipment, learning bases or premises, which takes more time, possibly several years?

The cognitive process presented helps to establish compliance or pass a judgement of quality. If problems are less relevant, it may be easier to decide between declaring partial compliance or simply an opportunity for improvement. This process also significantly helps the Agency Council when, for example, it grants accreditation for a shorter period of time or sets a deadline to eliminate the problems. It is good that such a decision already has a basis in the report of the group of experts.

At first glance, the non-compliances identified, which are not explicitly set out in acts and implementing regulations, might seem to have a slightly lesser weight. Too often we forget that the ESG must be taken into account in the assessment and that non-compliance with the ESG carries more weight, as it is a supranational regulation integrated into the ZViS and the Criteria. Non-compliance with the accredited state of affairs also carries more weight, as it is based on an individual legal act of the Agency, but the autonomy of the institution/college in modification of its study programmes must be taken into account. Divergences from the internal acts of the institution/college are similarly important. However, non-compliances and divergences from national guidelines and recommendations, as well as failure to meet organisational targets, carry less weight.

Experts should not change the severity of their assessments, nor should they treat institutions/college with different levels of leniency. Is an expert a person who first ensures that laws and criteria are met and carries out supervision? Or do they mainly act as a consultant trying to encourage the institution/college to improve on its own? An expert must fulfil both obligations consistently, with neither taking precedence over the other.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Each assessment should be justified, i.e. it should have a clear context at the core of the text containing an explanation reference to the regulation (act, Criteria) on which it is based.

Critical and negative assessments should be weighted. How grave is the problem? Who is responsible for it? Who can solve it? How and when? Is it something that needs external monitoring or something that the institution/college can address as part of self-evaluation?

The declaration of compliance or judgement of quality should be without shifts.

We should avoid shifts in the level of critical evaluation: a strength should be really a strength and should express a qualitative value – it should contain a qualifier. An opportunity for improvement should reflect the lack of quality, or the opportunity to improve it, and be carefully considered. Non-compliance or partial compliance should not just be an opportunity for improvement.

We should avoid shifts in the frequency of assessments – equal attention should be devoted to all standards and provisions for assessment at the outset. Greater attention in the assessment of individual standards arises later, which is because of a potential need to check evidence and arguments when deficiencies or non-compliances are identified.

Assessment of quality must be accountable and honest – assessment without conceptual shifts. In particular when assessing the content and implementation of studies, we should not abandon the criteria related to the specifics of the cycle and type of study and its correspondence to discipline. Overlaying such views on quality with economic or organisational views (quality as efficiency, study optimisation or monitoring, etc.) can be problematic.

II.2 ASSESSMENT ACCORDING TO THE QUALITY STANDARDS PRESCRIBED FOR EACH TYPE OF ACCREDITATION AND EVALUATION

Although much has been said about the characteristics of assessments and evaluation, let us recall some important facts before addressing the issue in the subtitle:

1. **The substantive assessment is not necessarily consistent with what is stated in the application and other documents. A document (an annex to an application) does not in itself demonstrate quality.**
2. **Compliance with each quality standard must be assessed according to all the prescribed criteria or provisions detailed in application forms.**
3. **The assessment must take into account the views of all stakeholders, taking into account, of course, their capacity or expertise to assess a particular area.**
4. **The assessment must take into account the specifics of the type of institution/college, cycle, type and field/discipline of the study programme. Individual standards or parts thereof are not relevant for assessing all types of study programmes or institutions/colleges.**
5. **The identification of major deficiencies or non-compliances in the reaccreditation of an institution, in the evaluation of a college or in the evaluation of a study programme must be based on Article 45 of the Accreditation Criteria or Article 21 of the Evaluation Criteria (deficiencies identified in an assessment may not be covered by these, which means that not all the assessment criteria carry the same 'weight').**
6. **Opportunities for improvement are not necessarily linked to poor quality.**
7. **Major deficiencies or non-compliances are not opportunities for improvement.**
8. **Strengths do not constitute compliance with the prescribed.**
9. **In addition to the provisions of the ZViS or the ZSZN and the Accreditation or Evaluation Criteria, other criteria, standards or guidelines of the Agency must be taken into account in the assessment.**

In the following chapters the characteristics of each type of accreditation and evaluation, the areas of assessment, the quality standards with criteria, the inadequacies in assessment and the guidelines for a proper assessment with explanatory notes are explained. These are concrete orientations as well as starting points for a critical and in-depth reflection on the subject of the assessment. They are written so as to set an example of a good assessment. We hope that you will take the orientations positively and apply them in a constructive way in practice. Limiting your views on the assessment of quality is not their intention.

II.2.1 ACCREDITATION AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME

Accreditation granted to a study programme is valid for an indefinite period. The external evaluation of a study programme is performed in the procedure of reaccreditation of a higher education institution, extraordinary evaluation of a study programme, or evaluation of a sample.

The procedure of **accreditation of a study programme** shall assess especially the content and structure and concept of the study programme. It is important to assess the correspondence of the programme to the field of study or scientific discipline, the appropriateness of the proposed curriculum and syllabi in relation to the objectives and competences or learning outcomes set out in the programme, the adequacy of the teaching, scientific, professional, research or artistic work of the holders of programme courses, and the concept of the programme's implementation.

A site visit is exceptional in cases where it is required to fully establish the actual state of affairs. It should focus especially on material conditions, such as specific laboratories, premises and equipment, for example when the institution does not yet have the accredited programmes whose implementation would require such conditions.

In the process of **external evaluation of a study programme**, a site visit to the institution is compulsory. As the study programme is already accredited, the main areas of assessment are its self-evaluation, modification, updating and implementation, all based on knowledge of the accredited state of affairs, the curriculum, course holders and providers, syllabi, etc. If the study programme is carried out at a branch, all of the above should be verified at this branch as well. In case of several branches, visits to at least one fifth of them shall be carried out.

OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY STANDARDS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF STUDY PROGRAMMES BY AREAS OF ASSESSMENT AND TYPE OF ACCREDITATION/EVALUATION

ACCREDITATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME	**EVALUATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME** (in the procedure of reaccreditation of a higher education institution, extraordinary evaluation of a study programme, and evaluation of a sample)
STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF A STUDY PROGRAMME (Article 17 of the Criteria)	INTERNAL ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE QUALITY OF A STUDY PROGRAMME (Article 21 of the Criteria)
1. The structure and content of a study programme are such as to provide students with comprehensive knowledge and help them achieve the objectives set and the planned competences or learning outcomes.	**1.** A higher education institution shall evaluate and update the content, structure and implementation of the study programme.
2. A study programme shall correspond to the envisaged field and discipline in terms of name, purpose and content.	**2.** Self-evaluation reports shall demonstrate the implementation of tasks planned on the basis of the findings of the self-evaluation of a study programme.

ACCREDITATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME	EVALUATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME (in the procedure of reaccreditation of a higher education institution, extraordinary evaluation of a study programme, and evaluation of a sample)
3. A study programme shall be connected with the environment in which the higher education institution operates.	
	MODIFICATION AND UPDATING OF A STUDY PROGRAMME (Article 22 of the Criteria)
	3. A higher education institution shall monitor the implementation of a study programme, review and improve it by taking into consideration the development of the study, scientific, professional, research or artistic fields and disciplines (development of the profession) to which it corresponds, by evaluating the achievement of the set objectives, competences or learning outcomes and society's objectives and needs for knowledge – depending on the type and cycle of a study programme. The modifications and updates shall take into consideration the basic objectives of the programme and maintain the cohesion of its contents or courses.
CONCEPT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (Article 18 of the Criteria)	IMPLEMENTATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME (Article 23 of the Criteria)
4. The concept of the study programme implementation shall correspond to its content, structure, type, cycle and purpose (objectives), which allows for high-quality adjustments and provision of the study content, implementation practices and resources (human and material resources).	**4.** The method, form and extent of the implementation of the study programme shall correspond to its content, structure, type and cycle, which allows for high-quality adjustments and the provision of the study content, implementation practices and resources (human and material resources).
5. The conditions of study and compulsory components of a study programme shall be determined, clear and understandable. They shall enable the exercise of rights and compliance with obligations of all stakeholders in the study process.	**5.** Protection of rights of stakeholders in the study process shall be provided.

ASSESSMENT BY STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION OF STUDY PROGRAMME

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF A STUDY PROGRAMME
(Article 17 of the Criteria)

Standard 1: **THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF A STUDY PROGRAMME ARE SUCH AS TO PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH COMPREHENSIVE KNOWLEDGE AND HELP THEM ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES SET AND THE PLANNED COMPETENCES OR LEARNING OUTCOMES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. consistency and cohesion of the content of individual courses and syllabi and the study programme as a whole

b. cohesion (compliance) of objectives, competences or learning outcomes determined in the syllabi with the objectives and competences of a study programme and its content regarding the type and cycle of study

   (The following shall be assessed:
   - suitability (difficulty, relation between basic knowledge and specifics (specialty)) and the relevance of scientific, professional or artistic contents;
   - suitability of the content (difficulty, extent) and the relevance of study literature;
   - enabling the acquisition of suitable competences or learning outcomes;
   - enabling the acquisition of the appropriate professional or scientific title.

   Recommendation: Part of the compulsory study literature should be in the Slovenian language.)

c. scientific, professional, research or artistic content integrated in the programme

d. order or distribution of courses by individual semesters and years (horizontal and vertical cohesion) and their credit assessment

   (The assessment shall consider the extension, deepening and meaningful integration of the content of courses from year to year with consideration to electiveness; enabling efficient achievement and testing and assessing of knowledge, orientation towards intermediate and final objectives or competences or learning outcomes determined by the study programme and syllabi.

   The suitability of the credit assessment of courses shall be determined according to the importance, difficulty and extent of the course (suitable balance of credit points).)

Explanatory notes:

The assessment according to this standard and the assessment of the study programme in general **is based on the characteristics or specifics of the type and cycle of the study programme**. It should be borne in mind that on this basis, the study content and the related objectives, competencies or learning outcomes must be different from each other and in themselves demonstrate the nature, level and complexity of the study.

An assessment should also take into account other Agency criteria (ECTS).

The assessment is related to the assessment according to other quality standards; for example, it concerns a close substantive connection with the correspondence of the programme with the intended field or discipline.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- compliance with a standard is assessed only partially, in-depth substantive assessment is sometimes missing although the provisions for it are very clear;
- uncritical copying from the application without evaluating the statements in terms of contents;
- mere enumeration of the scientific, professional or artistic work of the study programme course holders, without assessing in particular the provisions under the first indent of points a) and b); the work of course holders must be assessed according to Standard 4 in the field of "Concept of study programme implementation";
- lack of evaluation of contents integrated in the programme (point c), often only a mere enumeration; lack of an analytical view of what these contents mean for the whole programme taking into account its correspondence with the field or discipline;
- proposals for changing the curriculum (e.g. more elective courses, increasing the interdisciplinarity of studies etc.) without sound consideration and justification;
- proposals to increase the number of hours (credit points – CP) for practical training and closer links with the economy or employers without justification; lack of in-depth and weighty reflection, especially on the content, type and cycle of the study programme and the competences or learning outcomes for which it educates;
- instead of the prescribed contents, the conditions for the implementation of studies (especially for students) are assessed, although they must be assessed in the next area of assessment "Concept of study programme implementation".

Guidelines for proper assessment:

It should be established whether:

- in view of the discipline/profession, all basic and other important contents are covered according to the goals of the study programme and the professional or scientific/artistic title;
- the contents are correctly vertically and horizontally integrated;
- the contents are demanding enough with regard to the cycle and type of study, as well as to the field or, more specifically, course;
- the contents are appropriately general or specialised with regard to the cycle and type of study;
- the contents are appropriately closed for the purpose of applicability or appropriately open and theoretical for further study, deepening of understanding and development of scientific thinking (depending also on the field of study).

Too many elective courses may lead to vague educational profiles.

We should avoid recommendations such as focusing first-cycle university studies on applied and special studies; emphasising the needs of the labour market regardless of the specifics of the study programme; recommending the addition of professional and specialised courses to the detriment of theoretical and basic ones; strengthening project work in the study, etc. As a rule, university studies must be sufficiently general, broad in content, theoretically oriented, and must introduce students to science and open opportunities for further study.

We should avoid the following:

- shift between quality and quantity, when the quality of the syllabus, i.e. its integrity and coherence, is assessed on the basis of mathematical proportions according to the number of credits of compulsory and elective and basic and specialised courses. Such quantitative relationships do not allow to draw conclusions about the coherence, balance, complexity, quality or distribution of study content – this requires an analysis of content, analysis of learning outcomes or competences, and analysis of study literature;
- shift between quality and quantity, common in counting publications and research projects, which is then the basis of direct proclamation of quality of research without recognising its intrinsic value and achievements related to the content of the accredited study programme;
- phase shift in the assessment of study content: despite an in-depth analysis of the study content, which highlights the content-related problems in the curriculum, the assessment ends only with a recommendation that the institution analyse the learning outcomes of individual courses and compare these outcomes. The substantive assessment is thus shifted to the process which will, whatever the outcome, become a sign of quality in itself if such an analysis is merely completed;
- excessive reliance on the assessment of study content and objectives in relation to meeting the needs of the external environment or the expectations of only selected groups of stakeholders.

Standard 2: **THE STUDY PROGRAMME SHALL CORRESPOND TO THE ENVISAGED FIELD AND DISCIPLINE IN TERMS OF NAME, PURPOSE AND CONTENT.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider the cohesion of the study programme contents, their relation to the applied or basic knowledge from that field and discipline as well as the conceptual selection of contents, clearly defined and reasonably connected with the current situation and development trends in science, profession or art.

The epistemic conjuncture is a set of issues, theories, methods, theoretic approaches and perspectives that are recognised theoretically and scientifically in a certain moment in history by the scientific community.

The description of the epistemic conjuncture also includes the demonstration of mutual relationships between valid theories, methods, approaches and perspectives and a demonstration of the main problem fields where the theoretic and scientific discussion takes place.

The demonstration of the placement of the study programme in the epistemic conjuncture also includes the presentation of the theory or theories on which the programme is based, and the presentation of the critical relationship (dialogue) to other relevant theories.)

Explanatory note:

The assessment of how the programme corresponds to the epistemic conjuncture of its field and discipline or another field and discipline is closely connected to the assessment of compliance with Standard 1, but has to be assessed from another aspect.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the assessment does not take account of the criteria or provisions in brackets;
- the assessment of the structure of the study programme and its content is in accordance with the provisions of the first standard, rather than the second, which would be appropriate;
- uncritical copying from the application without professional consideration and evaluation of the statements in terms of contents;
- the assessment is not based on disciplinary rules;
- insufficient assessment of the specifics related to the interdisciplinarity of the study.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

It should be established whether:

- the relationship between the content of the studies and the applied or basic knowledge in the field and discipline is appropriate;
- the choice of content is clearly defined and meaningfully linked to the relevant state and developments in science, profession or art;
- the content is homogenous, coherent and comprehensive in terms of epistemology and methodology;
- the interdisciplinary nature of the study content rests on solved dilemmas of different ontological, epistemological and methodological starting points – e.g. different views on truth, understanding, exactness, applicability, reflection on knowledge;
- the content from other disciplines is appropriately integrated with the primary field of the study programme;
- in the case of an interdisciplinary study programme, at least part of the study literature is interdisciplinary and shows substantive links with the primary field of the study programme;
- the interdisciplinary study programme ensures appropriate links between the various branches of knowledge at the level of basic courses, and whether the primary field is appropriately substantiated;
- the interdisciplinarity of the study programme is based on an interdisciplinary problem field previously defined by science and researched by at least part of the course holders.

We should avoid assessments that circumvent disciplinary criteria, for example:

- the study programme has a future because it is from a specific field and because, together with research, it will be applicable for society at large. The applicability of a study cannot be a disciplinary advantage in itself, otherwise it is just the promotion of applied knowledge. It would be an advantage to recognise the knowledge integrity, relevance and coherence of the content, the quality of its structuring into smaller discipline-specific segments, the relevance of the theoretical bases, etc.;
- praising the interdisciplinarity of the study for its own sake, or praising interdisciplinarity only for economic or political factors, e.g. praising it for responding to globalisation trends and current challenges, or because interdisciplinarity connects graduates' employment opportunities. Such assessments can be relevant in the next quality standard.

The assessment of interdisciplinarity should reveal a successful link between the substantive core of the study programme and its segments from other disciplines. This link should make it possible to identify a common denominator that defines the problem field at the intersection of

different branches of knowledge and different disciplinary rules, with a coherent path to truth or understanding. It should also reveal that all the merging disciplines have a thriving teaching and research base – i.e. a well-developed and cohesive group of higher education teachers (experts) from different specialties. And it should reveal whether, in the time available for study, the student will be able to combine the basic and in-depth topics of the different disciplines and to make connections between the different bodies of knowledge. This is particularly important in master's study, which is short for inter- and multidisciplinarity and requires a very specific combination of backgrounds in different fields. And last but not least, the assessment should reveal the intrinsic value of interdisciplinarity in terms of the development and dissemination of new knowledge.

Assessment of second-cycle interdisciplinary study programmes:

The elective courses of an interdisciplinary study programme must include courses that contain the core content of the disciplines that are part of the interdisciplinary study.

Students who have completed their first-cycle studies in one of the disciplines of the programme's primary field may enrol in an interdisciplinary second-cycle study programme without taking additional examinations.

During their studies, students of an interdisciplinary second-cycle programme must choose those elective courses related to the basic knowledge of disciplines that were not part of their first-cycle studies, but were part of the first-cycle studies of another discipline. The maximum share of such courses may be 40% (ECTS credits) for all disciplines combined. They can be organised as standalone courses or as parts of individual courses. The higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy should therefore be provided at the level of the entire interdisciplinary programme, but not necessarily at the level of the compulsory elective courses referred to in this paragraph.

Care must be taken to ensure that the programme is comprehensive, and we cannot separately assess only the suitability of the content of each discipline:

1. The study programme must have a clearly defined problem field at the interface of the disciplines it covers. This field is clearly connected with the primary discipline of the study programme and other disciplines.
2. The applicant demonstrates, through relevant interdisciplinary scientific and research achievements at the level of the institution and of the intended study programme holders, that the problem field of the study programme is already established in science and the profession; this is demonstrated by an international classification of fields, a scientific journal, a monograph, scientific articles, or appropriately peer-reviewed and published scientific works. This is a criterion of the a priori scientific development of the interdisciplinary field for setting up a programme – the problem field should not be defined only by a programme without previously established research. So, the problem field is real in science and is not a product of combining the human resources at an institution.
3. The substantive integration of the courses (theoretical and professional content) demonstrates that, at the envisaged interface of disciplines, the applicant has succeeded in bridging the ontological (what is the truth of the cognitive subject), epistemological (i.e. cognitive) and methodological differences between the individual disciplines included in the programme.

We should avoid shifts, such as the conceptual shift in assessing disciplinarity according to the economic concept of quality (when employability becomes a criterion for disciplinarity).

Standard 3: **THE STUDY PROGRAMME SHALL BE CONNECTED WITH THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION OPERATES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. analyses of the needs of the employment environment, labour market and the employability or the needs for knowledge and objectives of the society

   (A methodologically justified analysis may be made by the higher education institution itself or ordered from competent ministries, chambers or associations. It shall demonstrate the connection between learning outcomes in the draft study programme and the findings of the profession regarding the needs for knowledge, employability of graduates or further education – depending on the type and cycle of the study programme being accredited.)

b. conditions for the practical training of students

   (The following shall be assessed:
   - suitability of companies in accordance with Standard 4 of Article 7 of the Criteria,
   - capability for mentoring in the work environment,
   - number and suitability of agreements.)

   (The plan for practical training shall clearly demonstrate the anticipated organisation of the practical training, its course holders and the tasks of all participants (higher education teachers and faculty assistants, mentors of practical training at employers, organisers of practical training and students)).

Explanatory notes:

The application of the standard is selective, distinguishing between the assessments under a) and b). Doctoral study programmes are not assessed according to this standard.

The assessment criterion in (a) also applies to study programmes that are not practically oriented. **Two types of analysis** are defined, taking into account the content or structure, type and cycle of the study programme:

- the analysis of the needs of the employment environment, labour market and employability of graduates for professional higher education study programmes,
- the analysis of the needs for knowledge and objectives of the society for first-cycle university study programmes or second-cycle study programmes.

Assessment criterion under b): the conditions for practical training should always be assessed in the case of professional higher education study programmes (it is an important component of these programmes, which distinguishes them most from other (university) programmes); in the case of other programmes, only if it is a compulsory component of the programme.

The overall standard is important in terms of differentiating between study programmes as well as institutions, and demonstrates that the Accreditation Criteria take this diversity into account.

In addition to considering the structure and content of the study programme, the assessment under this standard is primarily concerned with the assessment of the concept of study programme implementation under Standard 4.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- insufficient consideration of the type and cycle, as well as the content of the study programme;
- insufficient assessment of analyses; no distinction between the prescribed types of analyses;
- allowing insufficient analyses, i.e. those not prepared in accordance with the assessment criteria and provisions;
- no evidence of the institution's cooperation with the environment, no justification of the planned number of students;
- the plans for practical training are not properly assessed (no indication of whether it will be properly organised with the holders and all participants (bracketed provisions in point b)).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Before making an assessment, we need to look at the content and structure of the study programme and its correspondence to the field or discipline. We should answer the following questions:

- what is the type and cycle of study programme concerned and whether an assessment against this standard is justified;
- is the analysis enclosed to the application the right one, required for the type and cycle of the study programme being assessed;
- does the analysis contain all the necessary information to properly assess the needs of the employment environment and the labor market, or the employability of graduates of the professional higher education study programme;
- is the analysis convincing in terms of methodology and professionalism;
- whether the proposed (university and second-cycle) study programme demonstrates the needs for the knowledge it offers and addresses the objectives of society – how this is reflected;
- how many companies are suitable for practical training in relation to the planned number of students?

Suitable companies are those that can offer students training relevant to the content, complexity or cycle of their studies; that have good quality conditions for practical training and suitably educated and qualified mentors for such training.

Particularly in the case of university study programmes and those corresponding to pure disciplines, the environment needs to be understood somewhat more broadly, as it is not only the economic or public sector in the strict sense, but can also be cultural, artistic, social and disciplinary. Thus, research references and opportunities related to the study of nationally significant, regional or local phenomena can also be an important aspect of integration in the environment in the study of history or geography.

<u>We should avoid the following:</u>

- shift between quality and quantity, common in counting practical training agreements, which is then the basis of direct proclamation of the judgement of the suitability of agreements without recognising their content or the fact that they will, in accordance with the curricula of the accredited study programme, actually enable all anticipated enrolled students to gain appropriate competences or learning outcomes.

CONCEPT OF A STUDY PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION
(Article 18 of the Criteria)

Standard 4: **THE CONCEPT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION SHALL CORRESPOND TO ITS CONTENT, STRUCTURE, TYPE, CYCLE AND PURPOSE (OBJECTIVES), WHICH ALLOWS FOR HIGH-QUALITY ADJUSTMENTS AND THE PROVISION OF THE STUDY CONTENT, IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES AND RESOURCES (HUMAN AND MATERIAL RESOURCES).**

Assessment criteria:

a. envisaged methods, forms and course of teaching

(The assessment of the method of study programme implementation shall consider the structure and content of the study programme (Article 17 of the Criteria) and the related suitability of the forms of work with students and the course of teaching. Any planned adaptation of the study programme implementation or the forms of work with students and course of teaching must ensure the high-quality implementation of the study.)

b. appropriate human resources in accordance with Article 13 of the Criteria and:

- field-appropriate habilitations;
- meeting the conditions for mentorship to doctoral students and the appropriateness of mentors

(The appropriateness of higher education teachers and faculty assistants for the implementation of the study programme and the qualifications of non-educational staff shall be assessed in accordance with Article 13 of the Criteria. It shall be assessed whether the areas of appointment to the title of higher education teachers and faculty assistants correspond the content, structure, type, cycle and purpose (objectives) of the study programme. When a third-cycle study programme is being accredited, the meeting of the minimum research standards, conditions for mentoring doctoral students and the appropriateness of mentors shall also be assessed.)

(Third-cycle study programmes must ensure high research standards. The minimum research standards for third-cycle study programmes are the following:

- in the last five years, the higher education institution that implements (or will implement) a third-cycle study programme has obtained research or development or otherwise academically relevant projects funded from public resources, foreign resources or resources from the economy in the total minimum value of EUR 50,000. Eligible projects are those whose heads are or will be also course holders of third-cycle study programmes at this higher education institution.
- course holders of third-cycle study programme must be active in research, development or otherwise academically relevant activities for the last five years, at least to the extent that they comply with the necessary conditions at least for the appointment to the title of assistant professor set.)

(The fundamental starting point for the quality of research work at the doctoral study level is the capability of mentoring doctoral students. The determination of the capability shall consider the workload of the course holders and their research work. A mentor must have high-level and current educational, scientific, and research references that correspond to their field.

The highest recommended number of doctoral students per mentor is 5 per doctoral study programme. It is also recommended that the mentor is a course holder or involved in research projects or programmes corresponding to their respective field.)

c. material conditions related to the implementation of a study programme, in accordance with Article 15 of the Criteria.

(Article 15 of the Criteria shall be considered; it shall also be determined whether the premises and equipment are sufficient for the anticipated number of students enrolled; especially when the higher education institution already implements other (accredited) study programmes.

The library of the higher education institution shall have the appropriate study, professional and scientific literature; study materials and electronic databases shall correspond to the content and cycle of the study programme.

The higher education institution shall have appropriate library staff.)

Explanatory notes:

The achievement of the standard must also be assessed according to the provisions of Article 13 (Human resources) and Article 15 (Material conditions) of the Criteria.

The provisions of Article 14 of the ZViS must be taken into account when determining the employment of programme holders (FTE). FTE differs by types of institution or programme. Assessment of the scientific, professional, research or artistic work of holders must correspond to the type or cycle of the study programme.

The second indent of point b) is assessed only when a third-cycle study programme is accredited.

The premises and equipment for the implementation of the study programme must be provided, so the institution must already have them, and the same applies to programme holders. Intentions or various agreements are not enough.

If an institution intends to implement distance study (e-study) or a blended or hybrid form of study, assessment should focus on the suitability of the software used, the planned course of teaching, forms of work with students, extent of the implementation of distance study by individual courses, anticipated methods of testing and assessing knowledge, qualifications of higher education teachers and faculty assistants as well as tutors and non-educational staff for such a form of implementation of the programme.

Guidelines for Accessibility in Tertiary Education in the Republic of Slovenia: https://www.nakvis.si/akreditacije-in-evalvacije-v-visokem-solstvu/zakonodaja/ may help in the assessment of material conditions.

When assessing human resources, databases of professional, research or artistic work can be helpful.

Assessment of habilitations:

As appointments to titles are confirmed by final administrative acts – habilitation decisions, the validity of the habilitations cannot be questioned by assessments, even though an examination of a habilitation file, bibliographical data or the composition of the habilitation committee may raise doubts about an individual habilitation. Appointments to titles are within the competence of an autonomous institution. However, if the assessment confirms that there is a pattern of deficiencies in the appointment process, such as, for example, systematic non-compliance with the

requirement of three months' work abroad for the appointment to the title of associate professor, it may be concluded that the institution's bodies responsible for the appointment process are not functioning properly, or that the institution's internal procedures and rules are not being followed, or that the Agency's minimum standards are not being followed properly.

While we cannot dispute the validity of an individual habilitation, we must determine whether it corresponds to the field of the course for which the individual teacher is responsible. Since the scope of the habilitation may be either too broad or too narrow in relation to the course, or since the habilitation may only partially correspond to the course, the relevance of the scientific, professional, research or artistic achievements of the individual higher-education teacher in relation to the course in which they are involved as a holder or provider must also be taken into account when assessing the field references. If the course field does not match either the field of habilitation or the field of research references, the quality is inadequate from the aspect of teacher's field-specific references.

The assessment according to this standard is primarily concerned with the structure and content of study programme.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- stating that the concept of study programme implementation is appropriate, without justification;
- lack of in-depth assessment especially of the scientific, professional, research or artistic work of the holders related to the study programme or the courses they teach – just listing projects, etc. is not enough, nor is quantity in itself a guarantee of quality;
- assessment of the scientific and research work of holders where, taking into account the type and cycle of the study programme, the assessment of professional or artistic work should come first;
- despite the non-compliances identified (e.g. in terms of field of habilitation, research, professional work etc., including unacceptable excessive teaching workload of individuals) or the insufficient number of holders and practice mentors, reports do not record any non-compliances;
- despite the identified lack or inadequacy of the premises and equipment, reports do not record any non-compliances;
- the premises and equipment have not been assessed in light of the anticipated number of students and the number of those already enrolled in the institution;
- libraries are, as a rule, not properly assessed (just a statement that there is a library, but nothing about its equipment and the adequacy of the library staff) or are even omitted from assessment.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Each envisaged method, form and course of teaching are also assessed in terms of content. It is not just about the shell – the technique – but about why certain methods, forms and processes are chosen and how knowledge, behaviours, skills, etc. are communicated through them. Not every method, form and process is suitable for all study programmes.

It should be determined whether the number and type of contact hours, the intended method of implementation (either in technological or organisational terms, or in terms of the approach to teaching) and the allocation of credits are appropriate in relation to:

- disciplinary or professional characteristics and criteria of individual courses/studies;
- foreseen study content of the course;

- competences and learning outcomes;
- cycle and type of study programme – in doctoral studies, the nature of contact is changed and centred on the mentor.

It should also be assessed whether the didactics of alternative, hybrid forms of teaching and distance learning are adequately adapted in the curricula.

When assessing the quality of human resources, it is important to remember that they must also be assessed against all the provisions of Article 13 of the Criteria (Human resources in the reaccreditation of a higher education institution) and linked to the study programme being accredited. Important for the quality of teachers' scientific, professional, research or artistic work is to assess the end state –the value, visibility and quality of their professional, research or artistic achievements.

It should be established:

- for teaching in which type and cycle of study programme is the quality of the course holders assessed; which work they must predominantly do in addition to teaching (professional, research or artistic);
- whether the higher education teachers are active as scientists, professionals, researchers or artists in the field of courses whose holders they are;
- whether their scientific, professional, research or artistic achievements are sufficient for making them holders of certain courses;
- in the case of interdisciplinary studies, whether they also have references at the interfaces of different disciplines linked in the study programme.

When assessing the material conditions, we should bear in mind the provisions of Article 15 of the Criteria (Material conditions in the reaccreditation of an institution). Although these conditions are assessed in relation to the study programme being accredited, we need to take into account all the activities already carried out by the institution and the number of students enrolled. Is there enough premises and equipment for all?

The assessment of the higher education library should be sufficiently detailed; the quantity and quality of the material in relation to the study programme being accredited should be identified and assessed. Is the library adequately stocked in terms of the field and discipline of the study programme, and is the literature or material appropriate to the type and cycle of the programme? Is it adequate for the study mode or implementation envisaged by the programme; will it be sufficient for the envisaged number and needs of students, higher education teachers and faculty assistants, and other staff? How good are, after all, information support and the access to databases?

In third-cycle study programmes, the suitability of a mentor is strongly influenced by their reputation, international visibility and publications.

We should avoid the following:

- shift in epistemic modality in the requirements for the ratio between the number of contact hours and the credits allocated to a course. Although such thinking may provide a good basis for roughly identifying problems, it is not directly based on regulations. It also does not rely on understanding the specific content and features of the study. It can vary from course to course how much and what work the student is expected to do on their own, how much explanation, practice, or independent work in seminars is needed;

- phase shift in the assessment of human resources when, instead of considering the scientific, professional, research or artistic competences of teachers, we focus only on assessing the adequacy of minimum standards for appointment to title, the introduction of staff interviews, the form and extent of employment, the teacher education plan, etc.

Standard 5: **THE CONDITIONS OF STUDY AND COMPULSORY COMPONENTS OF A STUDY PROGRAMME SHALL BE SET OUT, CLEAR AND UNDERSTANDABLE. THEY SHALL ENABLE THE EXERCISE OF RIGHTS AND COMPLIANCE WITH OBLIGATIONS OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE STUDY PROCESS.**

Assessment criteria:

a. conditions for enrolment in a study programme and advancement of students

b. criteria for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired before enrolling into a study programme

   (It shall be determined whether the higher education institution shall recognise the knowledge and skills of candidates (qualifications or abilities) obtained through formal, informal or experiential learning, which fully or partially correspond in content and difficulty to the general or subject-specific competences of the draft study programme, namely as a completed study requirement evaluated according to the ECTS.)

c. methods of assessment

   (It shall be assessed whether the methods and forms of testing and assessing knowledge are defined in a manner enabling a suitable review of achieved learning outcomes and competences, and continuous study and efficient monitoring of students' own progress.)

d. conditions for the completion of studies

e. conditions for completing individual parts of the programme if the programme contains such discrete parts

f. professional or scientific title

   (It shall also be assessed whether the title(s) is/are consistent with the cycle, type and content of the study programme as well as with the law regulating them and determining their formation.)

g. conditions for transfers between study programmes

   (It shall be assessed whether the provisions are in accordance with the criteria for transfers adopted by the Agency Council.)

Explanatory note:

The assessment must verify compliance with the ZViS and the ZSZN.

Other Agency criteria, such as ECTS Criteria and Criteria for Transferring, should also be taken into account.

In determining the suitability of enrolment conditions in accordance with Article 38 of the ZViS, Guidelines for determining the appropriate secondary school programmes for enrolment in university study programmes published on the Agency's website should be taken into account (https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Smernice-38.-clen-ZVIS.pdf).

The assessment according to this standard is primarily concerned with the structure and content of study programme.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- allowing the lack of consistency of conditions for enrolment in a study programme with the ZviS;
- failure to assess a standard against all criteria and points;
- copying methods of assessment from the application without assessing them in accordance with bracketed provisions.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Compliance with the standard is mainly assessed in accordance with the provisions of the ZViS, which must be fully respected. When assessing a professional or scientific/artistic title under the ZSZN we determine, in addition to the correct structure of the title, whether the title is consistent with the content, cycle and type of study programme and the field and discipline to which it corresponds.

Since assessment is of paramount importance for the quality of the work of both course holders and students, we should assess whether:

- it is appropriate in view of the content, cycle and complexity of the study programme or course;
- it will give the teacher a realistic insight into student's knowledge, skills and abilities;
- it will enable students to monitor their own progress, encourage them to do quality continuous work and take an in-depth approach to their studies;
- it will enable both teachers and students to fulfil all their obligations;
- it will lead to the acquisition of the competences or learning outcomes set out in the programme;
- it will ultimately enable both teachers and students to identify the students' strengths or specifics.

SPECIFICS IN THE ACCREDITATION OF A JOINT STUDY PROGRAMME

An accreditation procedure may cover:

- **a joint study programme of Slovenian higher education institutions (hereinafter: joint study programme), or**
- **a joint study programme of Slovenian and foreign higher education institutions (hereinafter: international joint study programme).**

Both types are characterised by the fact that a programme is conceived and adopted by all participating institutions and that their mutual relations are regulated by agreement. In addition to the above quality standards and the provisions for assessment in the areas of the structure and content of the study programme and the concept of the implementation of the study programme, the accreditation of such programmes must take into account the provisions of Article 20 of the Accreditation Criteria for joint study programmes and Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Criteria for International Cooperation for international joint study programmes. These articles set out what defines such study programmes in the first place. Both types are based on an agreement between all participating institutions; for a joint study programme there is a specific agreement, and for an international joint study programme there is a consortium agreement (hereafter referred to as the agreement), which must specify, for example:

- how the institutions participate in the implementation of the joint study programme, and what are their rights and obligations;
- share and content or courses of a study programme to be implemented by individual higher education institutions, and the number of credits allocated;
- regular self-evaluation of the programme, its modification and updates;
- content and format of the joint diploma supplement;
- coordination of enrolment of students, implementation and completion of study and awarding diplomas.

The exact mandatory elements of the agreements can be found in Article 20 of the Accreditation Criteria and Article 8 of the International Cooperation Criteria, respectively. Participating institutions constitute a consortium.

We should pay attention to the following:

- not any study programme in which an institution cooperates with another is an (international) joint study programme (for example, different student or teacher exchanges). The latter is the case when it is conceived, adopted and implemented jointly by the institutions and the provisions of the Criteria or agreements concluded between them are met;
- an international joint study programme should also be assessed in its entirety, not just the part that will be implemented by the Slovenian institution. We need to obtain the curriculum and syllabi for the whole programme. In this context, we also assess foreign human resources without going into the standards for their habilitation, which may differ from the Agency's minimum standards. It is sufficient for a foreign higher education teacher to have a valid habilitation at their own institution. However, they must be habilitated in the relevant field of the course whose holder they will be.

Before detailed assessment of the structure, content and concept of implementation of an (international) joint study programme, we should establish:

- whether the programme shares are appropriately distributed among the participating institutions in terms of content and whether they are adequately justified;
- whether the distribution of the shares means a study connection that transcends the educational, research and creative capability of individual participating institutions with its levers of mobility;

- whether the distribution of programme implementation is appropriate, or whether it will enable implementation in accordance with Article 18 of the Accreditation Criteria;
- whether the agreement sets out in sufficient detail how the institutions will work together, and their responsibilities and the integration of educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activities as well as of human resources, students and, where appropriate, employers; or how the study programme will be implemented;
- whether the (self-)evaluation of the programme is planned in a high-quality and transparent way, and whether it provides for adequate cooperation of institutions in all core areas of self-evaluation:
  - how and where is it arranged (in an agreement, joint quality manual or other appropriate document);
  - whether it will be tailored to the specifics of the (international) joint study programme and quality will be the responsibility of the consortium and not of the individual institution, which is only one of the partners in the consortium.

ASSESSMENT ACCORDING TO STANDARDS FOR EVALUATION OF STUDY PROGRAMME

INTERNAL ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE QUALITY OF A STUDY PROGRAMME (Article 21 of the Criteria)

Standard 1: **THE HEI SHALL EVALUATE AND UPDATE THE CONTENT, STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME.**

Assessment criteria:

a. the self-evaluation of a study programme enables its development and updating by maintaining its relevance and creating a high-quality educational environment

   (It shall be assessed whether the planning of the self-evaluation of the study programme and the related tasks are focused mainly on the following:

   - updating the content of the study programme,
   - assessment of the suitability of the implementation of the study programme, methods and forms of educational work and the work of students,
   - evaluation of the students' load, their advancement and completion of the study, and state-approved documents,
   - comparison of the achieved and planned competences or learning outcomes or the assessment of the justification of their modification,
   - assessment of the suitability of testing and assessing knowledge,
   - assessment of the study conditions and/or study environment and counselling services,
   - assessment of the expectations, needs and satisfaction of students, higher education teachers and faculty assistants, and stakeholders from the environment,
   - identification of the needs for knowledge and employment needs in the environment in accordance with Standard 5 of Article 12 of the Criteria;

- analysis of the enrolment, transfers and completion of the study;
- assessment of the scientific, professional, research or artistic work and the **relevance and extent of achievements** in the field of the study programme.)

b. methods and procedures of collecting and analysing information or proposals for the modification of a study programme

c. appropriate provision of information to stakeholders on implementing the planned tasks or on the findings and results of the self-evaluation of a study programme

Explanatory notes:

The basis for the assessment of quality under this standard – and all quality standards prescribed for the evaluation of the study programme – is the self-evaluation of the study programme or a report on it. Position must be taken on the content of self-evaluation, taking into account the bracketed provisions in point a); the assessment of self-evaluation procedures alone is not appropriate.

The planning of the self-evaluation may be evident from the self-evaluation plan or the annual work plan of the institution or another relevant document.

For a quality evaluation of a study programme, we need to have a good knowledge of the accredited state of affairs.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- it is not evident that the standard is assessed in accordance with all the provisions of point a); findings only in individual indents (provisions) or in some cases only a sparse indication that the evaluation of the programme is regular and appropriate;
- insufficient assessment of the evaluation of methods and forms of teaching, adequacy and forms of assessment, relevance and scope of achievements of scientific, professional, research or artistic work in the field of the study programme;
- uncritical listing of elements of self-evaluation without the evaluation of their contents – what is assessed is mostly the procedure, persons responsible for individual tasks etc. and not the depth of evaluation: validity of the arguments, the level of detail and justification of the individual assessments of quality, and the suitability of the recommendations in light of the findings;
- neglecting or abandoning the views, opinions, proposals etc. of higher education teachers and faculty assistants (including researchers or employers where it is necessary depending on the type and cycle of the study programme); only the student aspect is emphasised;
- uncritical and unexplained proposals to change the programme, without sound consideration and justification – furthermore, proposals for programme modifications belong to Standard 3;
- assessment of the provisions under points b) and c) is clearly dominated by the student aspect;
- assessment of the provision under point c) points out only the methods of communication, without assessing suitability (taking into account the characteristics of each stakeholder group);
- small number of enrolled students as a strength (it is a fact that cannot constitute a strength in itself).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Self-evaluation must be sufficiently comprehensive, which means that the assessment of the educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activity required for the type and cycle of the study programme must be balanced in terms of content. It must offer an answer to the question of whether and how the institution wants to develop a study programme – both study content and its modifications, and the implementation of the study and the material and human resource conditions required.

We should establish whether the (self)evaluation contains a thorough and sufficiently comprehensive reflection of the following:

- whether the evaluation of study contents takes into account disciplinary criteria (university study) or professional criteria (profession in the case of professional higher education study);
- whether the content is updated correctly according to the original purpose of the study (perhaps it is a characteristic (purpose) of the study that newer content is constantly sought and old one is replaced)? Which "old" content is necessary and canonic, significant;
- if the study programme is based on a system or school of ideas, or if it is based on knowledge or epistemology from a historical period, the requirements for topicality should be appropriately contextualised instead of requiring the exclusion of important content due to "obsolescence". This also depends on the discipline and is, for example, important for humanities, social sciences and arts. Certain disciplinary content is indisputable and therefore timeless. Not all disciplines or disciplinary specialties are trendy, either. Following trends is mostly the case in applied disciplines;
- how the modifications of content affect the correspondence of the curriculum with the discipline, the integrity and balance of its content;
- what is the relationship between content and competences in abolished courses and content and competences in newly introduced courses? How, for example, does a new course replace competences from diploma thesis withdrawn from the curriculum (written expression, argumentation, scientific proving, etc.)? Is abolishing diploma thesis with the purpose of increasing the number of graduates acceptable;
- how do changes in the implementation of the study affect the transmission of the envisaged knowledge and the achievement of outcomes, goals and competences, especially in view of reducing the number of contact hours or even practical classes;
- whether the effects (suitability, quality…) of accredited contents or modifications have been considered comprehensively and what the opinion of various stakeholders about them is;

in connection with the findings in the accreditation of a study programme (see the guidelines for assessment at the accreditation of a programme).

<u>(Self)evaluation or assessment of quality of competences or learning outcomes:</u>

What is the analysis of achieving competences and learning outcomes? Is it only about listing average grades and rate of transition/completion of studies?

Does it include the reflection of higher education teachers on the examination and assessment of knowledge and results and on how good students are in their studies?

What is the students' and graduates' opinion on achieving competences or learning outcomes? Is the professional view balanced with the students' view of their own progress in their studies and the quality of acquiring knowledge and skills?

The (self)evaluation of education is important not only at the level of qualifications (competences), but also at the socialisation and subjectification levels. It is a reflection on approaches to teaching, the placement of graduates in society, their social and personal skills, and personal growth. In the opinion of graduates on the one hand and in the opinion of experts on the other, does the institution successfully prepare graduates for autonomous life in society?

(Self) evaluation or assessment of professional, scientific, research or artistic work (hereinafter: research):

How thorough is the self-evaluation of research? Is it based solely on bibliometrics in connection with strategic goals or does it also include a reflection on the importance, effects and internal knowledge of this work?

Is the creation of new knowledge and its relevance for the field of study or programme, even the course, actually assessed (when it makes sense, when it is not a basic, general course)?

Is the assessment focused only on conditions for research and accompanying processes such as research planning, conditions, progress monitoring, administrative and organisational challenges – i.e. are there phase shifts? What needs to be (self)evaluated is especially the contents and importance of research in itself. The assessment of quality of research is expected to distinguish between:

- characteristics of different cognitive features of disciplines: hard, soft, pure, applied science; positivist and applied and reflective and hermeneutic science; exact and non-exact research; autonomous and interest-based research; specialised and basic research; technical and political research; statist and critical research;
- different criteria as to their origin/location: Basic research should be assessed according to disciplinary criteria relating to internal quality, originality, evidence-based theory, knowledge and research. External criteria are applied especially to the assessment of applied research – the segment in which already created knowledge is transferred into practice, when the emphasis is not so much on science, knowing the truth and deepening reason, but on innovation.

When relying on external criteria, awareness of the complexity of the so-called social relevance of research is appropriate. It is influenced not only by academic values and disciplinary criteria, but also by the bureaucratic culture (based on rules and representation), the needs of the economy and profit-making, and the public sphere with an emphasis on legal requirements, equality, social benefits and reducing disparities:

- whether we want to seek in the social interest the average of economic and political interests or the need for new interpretations of the natural and social world for our lives;
- whether we will, in seeking quality in the name of social relevance, discover what form of relevance we rely on;
- whether one form of social relevance can cover up the rest ('pars pro toto' shift).

Addition to the assessment of teaching:

(Self)evaluation of the quality of teaching cannot be just about the following:

- counting pedagogical and andragogical trainings, teacher exchanges, guest lectures, average grades, rates of transition and completion of studies;
- describing or unfoundedly recommending "new" approaches (e.g. student-centred learning) instead of "old" ones, or methods, technologies and techniques in the teaching process;
- discussing the results of students' direct satisfaction with teaching (the problem of replacing professional assessments with attitudes that may be based on comfort, liking and personal gain).

An appropriate distinction needs to be made between the conditions for quality teaching and the direct signs of good teaching.

Is it appropriate to think about the quality of teaching in the context of service satisfaction, and when?

The view of quality of teaching in (self)evaluation cannot be developed only in the context of efficiency, optimality, effectiveness and transparency of teaching (organisational-managerial and economic concept of quality); it is also important to consider professional and academic goals and effects of teaching.

To what extent (if at all) is it sensible to connect the quality of teaching with the integrity of the realisation of the curriculum, the contents, goals, outcomes and competences envisaged in it?

Is it appropriate to consider the quality of teaching in terms of resources or in terms of goals or outcomes that are set in advance, indisputable and increasingly decisive? What if the means and ways to achieve the goals become problematic? How then to strike a balance between teaching autonomy on the one hand and external control in terms of efficiency and productivity on the other?

In addition to student opinion, an important source for assessment is teacher reflection – reflection on the purposes and effects or quality of teaching. Professional and academic evaluation of teaching (imparting knowledge, systematising it, connecting it with other disciplinary knowledge, deepening it, generalising it, etc.) is important. Equally important is a discussion about the values and ideals of teaching, about what good teaching is. More specifically, the sources can be: expert survey, focus groups, interviews, external evaluations of teaching (conducted by colleagues in the field on the one hand or higher education didactics specialists on the other), teachers' diaries and professional comments of teachers on students' opinions.

It is important to consider what sets a higher education teacher's work apart from the work of teachers at lower levels of education. Does good teaching depend only on the professional skills that the teacher strengthens in the context of human resource development, or does it also have other qualities?

It is important to consider the educational attainment of students/graduates according to the level of qualification, socialisation and subjectification.

Is teaching focused on the introduction to the discipline and profession, on the general placement of the individual in society, or on the student as an individual? According to this, how is the view on the quality of teaching diversified (knowledge of different conceptual approaches to teaching with respect to the freedom of teaching)?

How are skills treated and developed – as professional abilities, in connection with knowledge and science, as abilities of independent learning and information processing, or as abilities of changing or developing oneself (a student)?

It is important to consider the impact of discipline on teaching, i.e. taking into account the criteria or characteristics of discipline-specific higher education didactics. Who is actually educated by teachers? Is it theoreticians, applied scientists, critics, creators ... How good are graduates in this specific respect?

Against this, it is further assessed whether the methods of introduction to the discipline and cultivation of skills are of good quality, for example:

- is the skill of spatial thinking or interpreting and creating maps sufficiently emphasised in the study of geography, specifically? How are these skills developed in practice (in field exercises), how in laboratories (in simulations, modelling and experiments) and how in lecture halls or in independent work;
- how does the study of history, in addition to historical topics aimed at the transfer of knowledge and learning central disciplinary assumptions, develop the emphasis on narrative, critical approach to and questioning of different ideological movements, interpretation, proving.

Without an open discussion with higher education teachers, it is difficult to formulate useful and well-founded recommendations for improvement that go beyond organisational measures. It is also difficult to navigate between (1) different concepts of quality (consistency, fitness for purpose, transformation etc.), (2) different approaches to teaching (traditional, critical, progressive, constructivist, professional etc.) and (3) different disciplinary specifics that characterise education (applicability, disinterest, critical approach, creativity etc.). It is therefore important to know the specifics of (1), (2) and (3).

We should avoid the following:

- insufficient number of assessments of end states, i.e. on precision, level of criticism, accuracy, verifiability, depth and balance of content in self-evaluation reporting. Which of the above is considered better and which is considered worse? Is there an expert opinion on professional topics? Or is the self-evaluation predominantly about documenting and listing data without reflection and evaluation;
- a shift to another characteristic, phenomenon or condition, when the attention in assessing the self-evaluation of study contents is shifted to the efficiency of self-evaluation in itself, to the listing of processes or elements of the quality system in general, to transparency and stakeholder inclusion. Although this is also important, especially in institutional issues of operation of quality assurance system, it cannot be the only important feature;
- somewhat stereotypical and superficial recommendations that communication with stakeholders and their participation in self-evaluation should be improved. It is necessary to identify the problem with the self-evaluation of studies: is it the lack of reflection on study contents, teaching or research? A lack of arguments supporting the quality of content, modification or implementation?

A good recommendation requires a thorough knowledge of the study content and elements characterising its delivery. This is what enables the recognition of potential deficiencies:

- are modifications, for instance, too favourable or too unfavourable for the expectations and needs of the external environment;
- are disciplinary criteria still complied with;
- are expectations and needs of students met, with a distinction made between direct wishes for comfort and satisfaction and expectations with professional/academic basis.

Standard 2: **SELF-EVALUATION REPORTS SHALL DEMONSTRATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TASKS PLANNED ON THE BASIS OF THE FINDINGS OF THE SELF-EVALUATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME.**

Assessment criteria:

The achievement of tasks related to the self-evaluation of a study programme in the last three years and:

- participation of stakeholders in adopting the measures for improvements, monitoring their implementation and drafting the self-evaluation report
- closure of the quality loop

Explanatory note:

The basis for a quality assessment against this standard is the clear and precise substantive findings in the assessment of Standard 1. It should be borne in mind in the evaluation of particular content (bracket a) of Standard 1) that students, higher education teachers and faculty assistants, non-educational staff, employers etc. all **play different roles or do not have the same (or even appropriate) capacities.**

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- a general assessment that the quality loop is closed/not closed without a clear justification;
- too much emphasis on the (lack of) participation of stakeholders, mainly students; none or very little on the participation of higher education teachers and faculty assistants and other stakeholders (non-educational staff);
- action plans, analyses of reports as a strength;
- unexplained or poorly explained finding that self-evaluation reports are well structured.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The essential part is a substantively completed and thorough self-evaluation or internal quality assessment which:

- brings together all relevant views on the content, modifications and implementation of the study, as well as its material and human resource conditions;
- takes into account the characteristics of the cycle and type of study;
- takes into account the disciplinary characteristics of the study (in the case of a university study) or of the discipline (i.e. the profession, in the case of a professional higher education study programme);
- takes into account different perspectives: those of teachers and researchers, students and representatives of the external environment, where the external environment must be carefully defined according to the complexity of the social relevance and the disciplinarity of the study. It is not always the economic sphere and the narrow field of work where graduates are mostly employed;
- also includes or integrates the substantive findings of the relevant Senate commissions.

Good self-evaluation is the result of a comprehensive assessment that includes documenting, analysing, evaluating and planning actions:

- with a balanced content;
- with the stress on argumentation and reflection of the situation;
- without phase, temporal and other shifts in modalities of presenting findings and assessments;
- without shifts related to the frequency of assessments (overly unbalanced in terms of areas of assessment);
- by a way of assessing that is not only based on indicators, but also seeks the intrinsic, symbolic value in what is being observed – in the content, modification and implementation of the study, and in the conditions for it;
- by using concepts of quality more deliberately and openly.

We need to move from assessing processes to a substantive discussion: towards the end of the self-evaluation cycle, the quality of the study needs to be seen from a broader perspective than just the process or management-organisational aspect of the PDCA (action plan, activities, implementation timelines, responsible persons and their supervisors). It is not only essential which working group is appointed to update the syllabi and which commission or department has to prepare new timetables by a certain date. What is important is the content and purpose of these measures, i.e. developing arguments and assessments as to why the study is fit for purpose and good, or in which content and implementation pillars of the study improvements should be considered and why.

As under the previous standard, there is often no analysis of how thoroughly and professionally (or if at all) the self-evaluation report addresses the development of study content. If it only lists changes, it is usually not discussed what they are based on and why they have been adopted, what are they intended to achieve, to improve. Such reflections are essential for good draft measures and for monitoring their implementation in terms of content as well.

If the measures in the self-evaluation are reasonable but not fully implemented, this does not mean that the quality loop is not closed. This is a shift to another characteristic. Still, how many measures can be postponed before the self-evaluation loses its purpose and relevance?

Quick escape routes can be problematic, such as redefining measures in a way that they are not difficult to implement – redefinition with phase shifts into conditionality and with temporal shifts into the future. Instead of writing that you are going to do something, you just write that you are going to plan something.

A fundamental condition for the closure of the quality loop is precise and comprehensive self-evaluation, which requires extending the horizon of self-evaluation beyond the data from enrolment services. For example, recommendations that the institution should draw up a new inventory or quality process flowchart or more transparent communication channels are questionable. In fact, an inventory or definition of administrative procedures cannot be a sufficient basis for a good study.

The closure of the quality loop also means linking the professional argument with the student argument and that of the external environment. The external environment is, however, not only the economic sphere, but also the social and cultural spheres, especially in study programmes that are not from applied and hard disciplines. So what do cultural workers, cultural institutions, civil initiative groups or non-governmental organizations think about the study content?

MODIFICATION AND UPDATING OF A STUDY PROGRAMME
(Article 22 of the Criteria)

Standard 3: **THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME, REVIEW AND IMPROVE IT BY TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY, SCIENTIFIC, PROFESSIONAL, RESEARCH OR ARTISTIC FIELDS AND DISCIPLINES (DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROFESSION) TO WHICH IT CORRESPONDS, BY EVALUATING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SET OBJECTIVES, COMPETENCES OR LEARNING OUTCOMES AND THE SOCIETY'S OBJECTIVES AND NEEDS FOR KNOWLEDGE – DEPENDING ON THE TYPE AND CYCLE OF A STUDY PROGRAMME. THE MODIFICATIONS AND UPDATES SHALL TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME AND MAINTAIN THE COHESION OF ITS CONTENTS OR COURSES.**

Assessment criteria:

(It shall be assessed whether the study programme is still complete in terms of content and structure upon the development, updating and modification of its content, whether the cohesion of the syllabi and curriculum with the objectives and competences of the study programme is preserved and whether the contents are connected horizontally and vertically (this shall be done subject to Article 17 of the Criteria).

(The assessment shall also concern how the scientific, professional, research or artistic work at the higher education institution impacts the updating of the study programme.)

Explanatory note:

If Standard 1 requires an assessment of all the elements of the self-evaluation of a study programme listed in the indents under a), Standard 3 (which is closely linked to Standard 1) delves even deeper into modifications and updates of the study programme or into keeping it complete and up-to-date.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the assessment findings are (partially) contradictory to those under Standard 1;
- no findings in accordance with the provision on the assessment and naming of the standard;
- mainly listing procedures and the role of students in self-evaluation rather than the suitability of content of study programme modifications;
- ill-considered or unsubstantiated proposals to modify the study programme, for example, to add more practical training to the first cycle university study programme while noting (or noting in the assessment of Standard 1) that the primary purpose of the programme is to provide the basis for continuation in the second-cycle study;
- it is not clear whether and how the scientific, professional, research or artistic work carried out at the institution (listing various projects, etc., without a clear indication of where they originate or how their content is linked to the modification of programme) influences the updating of the study programme;
- failure to take into account the type and cycle of the study programme when determining the impact of scientific, professional, research or artistic work on the modification of the programme.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

We should follow the guidelines for Standard 1, except that we no longer ask whether this is contained in the self-evaluation, but assess whether it is true for the study programme.

Let us reiterate the following:

- the modification of the study programme in terms of the correspondence of the study content to the discipline is often insufficiently addressed. Although this must already be assessed in the accreditation of the study programme (Standard 2), it should not be forgotten here either. What happened to it in the modification of the study programme? Is it still appropriate?
- modifications to make studies (more) interdisciplinary should be carefully assessed. (For more guidance on the assessment of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, see Standards 1 and 2 for the accreditation of a study programme.)

We should avoid the following:

- recommendations focusing first-cycle university studies on applied and special studies; emphasising the needs of the labor market; recommending the addition of professional and specialised courses at the expense of theoretical and basic ones; strengthening project work in the study etc. The need for its generality, breadth of content, theoretical orientation, introduction to science and opportunities for further study should not be overlooked;
- conceptual shift in assessing disciplinarity; it should not be assessed according to the economic concept of quality – when employability becomes a criterion for disciplinarity;
- shift to another characteristic, phenomenon, condition or phase shift in assessing the quality of scientific, professional, research or artistic work, so that attention is not diverted from the quality of activities and achievements to the quality of the collaboration or the organisation and material conditions in the field;
- shift between quality and quantity when we base the assessment of the quality of research on a mere count of publications and research projects, instead of extracting its intrinsic value, as well as its relevance to the field or to curricular change.

IMPLEMENTATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME (Article 23 of the Criteria)

Standard 4: **THE METHOD, FORM AND EXTENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME SHALL CORRESPOND TO ITS CONTENT, STRUCTURE, TYPE AND CYCLE, WHICH ALLOWS FOR HIGH-QUALITY ADJUSTMENTS AND THE PROVISION OF THE STUDY CONTENT, IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES AND RESOURCES (HUMAN RESOURCES AND MATERIAL RESOURCES).**

Assessment criteria:

a. methods and forms of teaching, their development or adjustment (including resources):
   - to various groups of students,
   - to various study needs and study modes (student-centered study and teaching),
   - to the needs of teachers and faculty assistants

b. number of completed contact hours determined by the study programme, or other types of work with students

c. study materials and their adjustment to the methods and forms of teaching and students' needs

(The assessment shall consider whether the study materials are adapted to e-study, distance study or other forms of study to and the needs of students, mostly students with various forms of disability.)

d. work of students in scientific, professional, research or artistic projects subject to Article 33 of the ZViS;

e. practical training of students

(The plan shall clearly demonstrate the anticipated organisation of the practical training, its course holders and the tasks of all participants (higher education teachers and faculty assistants, mentors of practical training, organisers of practical training and students). In relation to that, the implementation of such training in work environment or outside the higher education institution shall be assessed. The following shall be determined: number of hours of practical training and the implementation of such training in work environment, content of practical training, cooperation of the higher education institution with companies, and keeping records about it.)

(The assessment shall consider the satisfaction of all participants: students, mentors of practical training, providers or organisers of practical training at higher education institution and in companies.)

f. suitability of timetables, number of office hours or accessibility of higher education teachers and faculty assistants to students

g. appropriateness and qualifications of the staff in accordance with Article 13 of the Criteria

(During the visit of the higher education institution, employment agreements of higher education teachers and faculty assistants shall be verified. It shall be assessed whether the connection between teaching and scientific, professional, research, or artistic work allows for the high-quality transfer of knowledge to the educational process as well as the development of fields and disciplines. The relationship between teachers/students and students/faculty assistants, the mobility of teachers, faculty assistants and students shall also be assessed.)

(Third-cycle study programmes must ensure high research standards. The minimum research standards for third-cycle study programmes are the following:

- in the last five years, the higher education institution that implements (or will implement) a third-cycle study programme has obtained research or development or otherwise academically relevant projects funded from public resources, foreign resources or resources from the economy in the total minimum value of EUR 50,000. Eligible projects are those whose heads are or will be also course holders of third-cycle study programmes at this higher education institution.
- course holders of third-cycle study programme must be active in research, development or otherwise academically relevant activities for the last five years, at least to the extent that they comply with the necessary conditions at least for the appointment to the title of assistant professor set.

The fundamental starting point for a quality of research work is the ability to mentor doctoral students. The determination of the capability shall consider the workload of the course holders and their research work. A mentor must have high-level and current educational, scientific, and research references that correspond to their field.

The highest recommended number of doctoral students per mentor is 5 per doctoral study programme. It is also recommended that the mentor is a course holder or involved in research projects or programmes corresponding to their respective field.)

h. material conditions related to the implementation of the study programme, in accordance with Article 15 of the Criteria

Explanatory notes:

The compliance with the standard is also assessed in accordance with Article 13 (Human resources) and Article 15 (Material conditions) of the Criteria. The provisions under e) of this Standard require a particularly detailed assessment in the case of a professional higher education study programme. These provisions do not apply to third-cycle study programmes; they apply to others only where practical training is a compulsory part of the programme.

Under the provisions of point g), the conditions for mentoring doctoral students must be assessed, as the name implies, in the case of third-cycle study programmes. Mentors' scientific and research work and achievements related to the study programme should be assessed in detail and depth.

In accordance with Article 14 of the ZViS, the adequacy of FTEs must be established.

The suitability of enrolment conditions in accordance with Article 38 of the ZViS, Guidelines for determining the appropriate secondary school programmes for enrolment to university study programmes published on the Agency's website should be taken into account (https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Smernice-38.-clen-ZVIS.pdf).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- proposals for the modification of the programme do not belong under this standard;
- the assessment under point a) is deficient, nothing is said about the development of teaching methods and forms, the needs of teachers and faculty assistants etc.;
- the assessment under point d) is deficient, the statement that the institution has provided conditions for student work in accordance with Article 33 of the ZViS is not sufficient – e.g. projects should be assessed in terms of their content and complexity in relation to the cycle and type of the assessed programme;
- practical training, point e); nothing about the opinion (satisfaction) of the holders and mentors of this training, both at the institution and in the companies, only the student perspective being assessed;
- it is not clear whether the practical training is systematically organised, whether the institution has a proper plan for it, showing how it is organised and the tasks of all the participants to be assessed;
- active participation of practical training participants (lecturer or teacher, student, company mentor) is a prerequisite, not a strength;

- despite the insufficient number of contact hours (CH), which the institution did not replace by other forms of work with students, the inadequacy of the timetables or their implementation, no major deficiencies or non-compliances were found;
- only the students' view or opinion on the decline in the number of CH is presented, while the view of the programme providers is ignored;
- mere enumeration of the fields of higher education teachers who are study programme holders, without assessing their scientific, professional, research or artistic work and achievements in the field of the study programme;
- assessing only the scientific and research work of holders (nothing about their professional, development work), even though it is a professional higher education study programme – disregarding the cycle and type of study programme, as well as the provisions of the ZViS on higher education teachers and faculty assistants in such programmes;
- human resources are not assessed in accordance with all the provisions of Article 13 of the Criteria – most often the provisions under Standard 8 a) (educational and professional development of higher education teachers) are ignored, point b) (teachers' achievements) of the same Standard is inadequately assessed, and Standard 9 (non-educational staff) is deficiently assessed;
- no finding of (in)adequacy of FTE pursuant to Article 14 of the ZViS;
- the material conditions are not assessed according to all the standards set out in Article 15 of the Criteria – in particular, the provisions of Standard 16 (financial resources) and Standard 17 (the higher education institution's library: the suitability of the literature, the library stock, the professional support available in the library, the development of the library activity) are neglected or ignored.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

We should follow the guidelines for Standard 1, except that we no longer ask whether this is contained in the self-evaluation, but whether it is true for the study programme implementation.

Whereas in the accreditation of a study programme we can only assess the envisaged methods and forms of teaching, in this procedure we primarily assess the quality of teaching per se. The focus should not shift from the intrinsic value of teaching to the technical process and support for teaching. It is therefore important that teachers themselves make statements on the merits and value of teaching, as is already the case with students. For more details, see Standard 1 (assessment of teaching).

The appropriateness of the number and type of contact hours, the method of implementation and credit evaluation is assessed in light of the accredited state of affairs and any modifications of the study programme. The following should be taken into account:

- disciplinary or professional characteristics and criteria of individual courses/studies;
- study content of the course;
- competences and learning outcomes;
- cycle and type of study programme.

Where alternative, hybrid and distance learning modes of study are identified, we assess whether the didactics of such learning have been appropriately adapted, especially if there have been changes in the way the study programme has been implemented since accreditation.

The complexity of the study – the complexity and depth of the study content, the cognitive and practical skills, the complexity of the competences envisaged and the capacity to develop them in light of the different forms of pedagogical guidance, and the prior knowledge of the students is what dictates the circumstances in which the course/study is implemented, or should be the starting point for quality assessment. This must be accompanied by assessing the material conditions for the implementation of the study programme, in particular the library stock, databases and links for the study programme being assessed (see more in the area of assessment of material conditions (Standard 15) in the reaccreditation of an institution.

Assessing the implementation of practical training of students also requires a thorough knowledge of the content of the study programme, its type and cycle. It is based on the competences, knowledge and skills that a student needs to acquire. It should be established:

- whether the practical training meets the appropriate level of complexity and offers the student what is set out in the study programme – i.e. whether the work obligations match the graduate's profile;
- whether the company is suitable for providing practical training (from the qualifications of its mentors to the conditions for such training);
- whether mentoring and students' work are well demarcated so that students are appropriately active and autonomous in their work;
- whether the work performed and products made by students are good;
- whether the quality of such training is good, involving the participation of higher education teachers at the institution, mentors in companies and students;
- how it is evaluated by students as well as higher education teachers and mentors; what collective measures they take to monitor, assess or improve it.

What about the assessment of the research work of students in doctoral study programmes? Especially the following should be assessed and evaluated:

- the relevance of the projects at the institution to student research in terms of content and complexity;
- the quality of students' research work on the one hand, and the relevance (link to the study programme being assessed) and quality of the research and achievements of their mentors – course holders – on the other;
- quality of the sample of doctoral theses or doctoral research papers.

With regard to the quality of human resources, it is therefore important to assess, in terms of the end state phase, the quality of teaching as well as the quality of the scientific, professional, research or artistic work of teachers and researchers.

In third-cycle study programmes, the suitability of a mentor is strongly influenced by their reputation, international visibility and publications.

<u>We should avoid the following:</u>

- recommendations that say nothing about quality: for the quality of teaching, we should not just recommend the strengthening of connections among the teaching staff, for example by organising joint curriculum review meetings. Such a recommendation is only organisational. Instead, assessments could delve deeper into teaching (measures) and the accompanying beliefs and purposes of teaching (i.e. approaches to teaching and related concepts of quality). A simple way for an institution to respond to such a recommendation is to submit the

agenda of the next teachers' meeting, and the quality is accomplished. Similar is true for generic and indirect assessments such as: small size of student groups; teachers' communicative skills and dutifulness; positive attitudes; video content for studying; setting up technical assistance for teachers; encouraging the use of the latest methods to activate students (pars pro toto shift);

- the partial nature of the evaluations (pars pro toto shift), which also stem from the exclusive determination of the quality of teaching from student opinion, which is important, but not the only relevant one;
- shift to another characteristic, phenomenon or condition: in view of the reduced number of contact hours, is it acceptable to recommend or find quality in compensatory measures, such as increasing extra-curricular activities and administrative support for students? Can strengthening tutoring compensate for reducing the number of contact hours while keeping study content, competences and learning outcomes unchanged;
- shift in epistemic modality in the requirements for the ratio between the number of contact hours and the credits allocated to a course. Although such thinking may provide a good basis for roughly identifying problems, it is not directly based on regulations. It also does not rely on an understanding of the specific content and features of the study. It can vary from course to course how much and what work the student is expected to do on their own, how much explanation, practice, or independent work in seminars is needed;
- uncritical assessment of the implementation of studies: whether and when (a) cyclical implementation of courses, (b) reducing the number of contact hours, (c) combining full-time and part-time students, (d) or grouping students into classes on the basis of offering courses from one study programme to students from other study programmes as elective courses, resulting in larger classes with students of widely varying backgrounds, can be an advantage or a sign of quality at all? Is it permissible in such cases to follow the economic concept of quality and to recognise in such practices an increase in efficiency and optimisation of teaching? But is there not also a conceptual shift at hand, where the economic concept of quality replaces the academic one where professional and academic standards should be respected?

Standard 5: **PROTECTION OF RIGHTS OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE STUDY PROCESS SHALL BE ENSURED.**

Assessment criteria:

a. all students, when regularly meeting the requirements determined by a study programme, can uninterruptedly advance and complete their studies

   (The following is especially important in the assessment:

   - distribution of exam dates,
   - assessment criteria and methods are published in advance,
   - fairness and transparency of assessment,
   - different methods of assessment and help of the higher education institution in the development of knowledge of higher education teachers in this field,
   - possibility to appeal against grades and transparency of appeal procedures.)

b. all higher education teachers and faculty assistants shall enjoy the respect for their autonomy in teaching and research and shall receive help and counselling in their career development

c. provision of information to stakeholders in accordance with Standard 7 of Article 12 of the Criteria

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the provisions under (a) are assessed through data on the transition from one year to the next and the number of graduates;
- point a) is not assessed under all provisions in brackets;
- identification of assistance and advice in developing the career paths of higher education teachers and faculty assistants is only related to their mobility and habilitations (nothing is said about assistance, counselling, training in teaching, research, professional or artistic fields).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Quality teaching is closely connected to grading. The latter is extremely important both for students and teachers, so it should be assessed whether:

- it is appropriate in view of the content (type), cycle and complexity of the study programme or course;
- it gives the teacher a realistic insight into the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired by a student;
- it enables students to monitor their own progress, encourage them to do quality continuous work;
- it enables students to fulfil all the obligations of their studies to a high standard;
- it enables a clear insight into the acquisition of the competences or learning outcomes set out in the programme;
- it ultimately enables both teacher and student to identify the student's strengths, talents, aptitudes, specifics; and whether it encourages the student to take a more in-depth approach to studies, to develop their strengths, talents, etc.

How to think about the autonomy of higher education teachers in light of the possibility of interference in teaching and research by the management of institutions, the need to achieve organisational goals, the established forms of control (e.g. self-evaluation, contractual obligations), the increasing market orientation of teaching and especially research, and the changing forms of employment (increasing precariousness of employment)?

Rather than checking the respect for autonomy (more specifically, freedom to teach and research), we should encourage an open debate on what is left of the ideal of autonomy in practice, and how could it be defended or strengthened if this is meaningful for teachers.

SPECIFICS IN THE EVALUATION OF AN (INTERNATIONAL) JOINT STUDY PROGRAMME

EVALUATION OF AN (INTERNATIONAL) JOINT STUDY PROGRAMME

When evaluating, we should keep in mind a fundamental feature of an (international) joint study programme; what qualifies it as such in the first place (see the note on specifics in the accreditation of joint study programmes on pages 33 and 34). Therefore, assessment must be based on the specific or consortium agreement (hereinafter: agreement) concluded between the participating institutions at the time of the accreditation of the programme (the provisions of Article 20 of the Accreditation Criteria) when assessing a joint study programme of Slovenian institutions only, and the provisions of Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Criteria for International Cooperation, when assessing an international joint study programme. The examination of the implementation of the agreement should be linked to the assessment by areas and quality standards prescribed for the evaluation of the study programme.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in the assessment of both types of joint study programmes:

- the fundamental feature of the programme is not taken into account – it is assessed wrongly, as an ordinary programme;
- the provisions of the agreement or its content are not taken into account;
- lack of substantive assessment of joint self-evaluation, programme updating or modification; despite clear criteria for assessing the first and second standards of quality, there are no assessments of the direct quality of the study content and implementation to which the self-evaluation could have contributed or warranted this contribution;
- insufficient assessment of the educational, teaching, professional, research or artistic work of all participating institutions;
- lack of finding whether the educational, teaching, professional, research or artistic work at the individual participating institutions related to the programme under assessment is integrated into an organic, meaningful and high-quality whole;
- inadequate assessment of the programme implementation;
- assessment of the quality of content, programme implementation and study conditions only at the level of the Slovenian institution;
- lack of assessment of the added quality created by the programme as a result of the integration or cooperation of institutions, and lack of explanation as to whether such a programme achieves this quality by overcoming deficiencies in the content, implementation, staffing or material capacities of the individual institution, or by creating an added dimension to the studies that results from the synergy of all the participating institutions in the consortium, and which an ordinary study programme would not be able to create, despite the quality of the resources;

in international joint study programmes, especially:

- lack of position on the quality of the international dimension of the programme/study or its contribution to internationalisation.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The assessment should be guided by the identification of the so-called added value created by the cooperation of several institutions (see definition of the characteristics of (international) joint study programmes) in all areas of assessment and according to all the quality standards prescribed for the evalua-

tion of a study programme. In relation to that, the implementation of the agreement should be examined. It should be established whether:

- the agreement among institutions practically transcends the educational, research and creative capability of individual participating institutions with their levers of mobility;
- the commitments made in the agreement are implemented in the self-evaluation, modification, updating and implementation of the study programme;
- the cooperation between the institutions is continuous (ongoing) and comprehensive, or whether the coordination of this cooperation is of good quality;
- the self-evaluation of the study programme is a product of all the participating institutions; in particular, recommendations to improve the quality of both the content and the implementation of the programme;
- there have been changes or redistributions of parts of the study programme determined at the time of accreditation to be implemented by individual institutions, and why? How do any redistributions affect the quality of the programme (taking into account, in particular, the teaching, professional, research and material conditions at individual institutions);
- whether the overall self-evaluation report contains expert findings on the actual quality of the study – on the quality of its content, its modifications, its implementation and the key conditions for it, and the educational attainment of the graduates; and not only or predominantly findings on the effectiveness and transparency of procedures and regulations on the one hand and the fulfilment of stakeholders' needs on the other;
- in which segments does the cooperation of different institutions influence (ensure) added value (in terms of content, teaching, professionalism, research/art, implementation) and how.

Important:

When evaluating an international joint study programme, we assess the impact of the international dimension on its quality and development. Does this influence, and how it influences the following:

- enriching the content, implementation and conditions of study;
- educational attainment, intercultural or international competences and experience or graduates,
- quality of teaching and the professional, scientific, research or artistic work of the study programme holders and the students enrolled in the programme – the latter depends on the type and cycle of the programme.

Specifics in the evaluation of a study programme implemented as transnational higher education – THE

As this is an accredited study programme implemented abroad by a Slovenian institution, the starting point for the assessment must be the implementation of the THE contract concluded by the institution prior to its entry in the Agency's register of such contracts. We assess compliance with commitments to maintain the expected level of quality of study programme, which we link to the assessment by areas and standards of quality prescribed for the evaluation of the study programme. In addition to these, the provisions of Articles 13, 14 and 15 of the International Cooperation Criteria must be taken into account.

II.2.2 INITIAL ACCREDITATION AND REACCREDITATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

The initial accreditation and each reaccreditation of an institution shall be valid for a maximum of five years. The external evaluation of an institution is an essential part of the reaccreditation process.

For the **initial accreditation of an institution**, the quality standards must be met by the founder: it must have a formally adopted mission, vision and strategy with clear objectives for the development of the institution it wishes to accredit. The compliance with the quality standards is assessed in three areas for the initial accreditation of an independent institution. In the case of the initial accreditation of a university, the founder must also comply with the quality standards in several areas of assessment required for the reaccreditation of the institution.

During the initial accreditation process, it is compulsory to perform an inspection of the premises or equipment in which the institution will carry out its activities.

The draft study programmes that the institution intends to deliver, which must be submitted with the application for accreditation, are used in assessing the suitability of the premises, the equipment, the higher education teachers, the providers of the intended studies, or the conditions for the studies. Taking into account the type of institution to be accredited (professional college, faculty, university), it must be determined whether it will be able to carry out the educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activities in accordance with the founder's classification of the field(s) of study according to KLASIUS and the scientific field(s) according to Frascati.

Any outstanding questions about the application will be clarified during the site visit to the institution.

The process of an institution's reaccreditation assesses the institution's overall performance and its progress since the last accreditation. There are more areas of assessment than in initial accreditation (five), and they are the same for independent institutions and universities.

The mandatory part is the site visit, which usually lasts several days or is split into two parts. Two visits are carried out when an institution has a wide range of activities and a large number of study programmes, or when there is a need to assess a situation that could not be clarified during the first visit. It is necessary to establish the quality of the institution in all areas of assessment, from its overall functioning to the quality of its educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activities, and to pay particular attention to the in-depth substantive assessment of the self-evaluation at the level of the institution and at the level of the study programmes, the implementation, updating and modification of which are subject to a more detailed assessment in the reaccreditation process (in case of smaller institutions, this may be done in the context of one visit, in case of larger institutions, it may be done in the second visit).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY STANDARDS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BY AREA OF ASSESSMENT AND TYPE OF ACCREDITATION/EVALUATION

INITIAL ACCREDITATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION	REACCREDITATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION
OPERATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION (Articles 7 and 12 of the Criteria)	
1. The founder has a formally accepted mission, vision and strategy with a strategic plan containing clear and verifiable organisational and implementation objectives enabling the planned implementation of higher education activities.	**1.** A higher education institution shall successfully fulfil its mission in the Slovenian and international higher education area. By achieving organisational and implementation objectives?, it shall maintain the quality and development of higher education activities. In initial reaccreditation, the mission, vision and strategy of a higher education institution shall demonstrate that the obligations of the founder are continuously complied with.
2. The earmarked and planned financial resources shall enable the high-quality development of higher education activities.	**2.** The internal organisation of a higher education institution shall ensure the participation of higher education teachers and faculty assistants, researchers and non-educational staff, students and other stakeholders in the management and development of the activities of a higher education institution.
3. The internal organisation of the higher education institution shall be such as to enable the cooperation of employees, students and other stakeholders in the management and implementation of the activities of the higher education institution.	**3.** A higher education institution shall demonstrate a high quality of scientific, professional, research or artistic activities and the related important achievements in the fields and disciplines where it implements these activities.
4. The practical training of students in a work environment, if envisaged by study programmes, shall be well planned. There shall be sufficient resources provided for its implementation.	**4.** The practical training of students in a work environment, if it is part of educational activities, shall be well organised and implemented. There shall be resources available for its implementation.
5. The internal quality assurance system shall be devised in a manner that enables the closure of the quality loop in all areas of the higher education institution's operation.	**5.** The higher education institution shall monitor the needs for knowledge and employment needs in the environment. It shall provide information regarding employment possibilities in the fields suitable for the competences or learning outcomes of graduates.
	6. The internal quality assurance system shall enable the closure of the quality loop in all areas of operation of a higher education institution.
	7. A higher education institution shall inform the stakeholders and the public about its study programmes and activities in a timely manner.
HUMAN RESOURCES (Articles 8 and 13 of the Criteria)	
6. Higher education teachers shall be ensured for all areas of study or for all compulsory and internal elective courses determined in draft study programmes.	**8.** Higher education teachers, researchers and faculty assistants required for the high-quality implementation of teaching, research and other work are ensured.

INITIAL ACCREDITATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION	REACCREDITATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION
7. The scientific, professional, research or artistic work of course holders and providers of study programmes corresponds to the fields and disciplines for which the institution is being established and from which stem the draft study programmes.	**9.** Professional-technical and administrative staff (hereinafter: non-educational staff) are provided for efficient assistance and counselling.
	STUDENTS (Article 14 of the Criteria)
	10. The higher education institution shall provide its students adequate assistance and counselling.
	11. Students shall be ensured the appropriate conditions for high-quality study, scientific, professional, research or artistic work and extracurricular activities.
	12. The higher education institution shall protect students' rights.
	13. Students shall participate in the assessment and updating of the contents of higher education institution activities and their implementation.
MATERIAL CONDITIONS (Articles 9 and 15 of the Criteria)	
8. The founder shall provide suitable premises for the implementation of higher education activities.	**14.** The higher education institution shall provide suitable premises and equipment for the implementation of its activities.
9. The founder shall provide suitable technical, technological and other equipment for the implementation of higher education activities.	**15.** Adjustments shall be made for students with various forms of disability.
10. Suitable adjustments shall be made for students with various forms of disability.	**16.** Adequate and stable financial resources shall be provided for the implementation and further development of higher education activities.
11. Library services of the higher education institution shall be provided.	**17.** The library of the higher education institution shall have suitable academic, professional and scientific literature and shall provide high-quality library services.
	QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT, MODIFICATION, UPDATING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDY PROGRAMMES (Article 16 of the Criteria)
INITIAL ACCREDITATION OF A UNIVERSITY The founder must demonstrate that the educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activities are well-developed. The assessment shall consider compliance with: • Standards for the initial accreditation and Standard 3 for reaccreditation in the field of the higher education institution's activity, • Standards from other areas for the reaccreditation of the higher education institution.	

ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE STANDARDS FOR THE INITIAL ACCREDITATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

The provisions of Article 14 of the Slovenian Higher Education Act (ZViS) must be consistently observed when assessing the achievement of quality standards for the initial accreditation of an institution.

Unlike other procedures, there is no gray field in which the most frequent inadequacies in assessment are listed, for the assessment according to the standards for the initial accreditation of an institution. The reason for this is the extremely small number of initial accreditations of institutions, or the insufficient sample of accreditation reports to make a relevant analysis.

OPERATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION (Article 7 of the Criteria)

Standard 1: **THE FOUNDER HAS A FORMALLY ADOPTED MISSION, VISION AND STRATEGY WITH A STRATEGIC PLAN CONTAINING CLEAR AND VERIFIABLE ORGANISATIONAL AND IMPLEMENTATIONAL OBJECTIVES ENABLING THE PLANNED HIGHER EDUCATION ACTIVITY.**

Assessment criteria:

a. position of the higher education institution in the higher education and broader social space

b. cohesion of the content of the mission, vision and strategy with the strategic plan

c. feasibility of the objectives defined in the strategic plan

   (The mission, vision and strategy with a strategic plan must clearly demonstrate the planned development of the higher education institution especially in the educational and scientific, professional, research or artistic area for which the institution is being established. The following shall be assessed:

   - feasibility of the objectives determined in the strategic plan for all areas of operation of the higher education institution, as well as for the internal quality assurance system or quality assurance system, and
   - justification (support) of the strategic plan by the financial projection and analysis of other material and human resources of the founder.)

d. draft study programmes to be implemented by the higher education institution

   (The study programme shall demonstrate: connectedness with the missions, vision and strategy of the founder, capability of creating scientific achievements and connectedness with the environment in which the higher education institution shall operate (cooperation with the academic community, economy and non-economy in the fields and disciplines for which the institution is being established and to which the draft of the study programme belongs).)

Explanatory notes:

The mission, vision and strategy are adopted by the founder through a strategic plan – the adopted mission, vision and strategic plan are not a strength – they are a condition that must be fulfilled even if the institution is not yet established or operational.

The draft study programme(s) must be made in accordance with the law and Articles 17 and 18 of the Criteria (study programme accreditation, page 20 to 32), and also contain the draft curriculum (curicula) and syllabi.

The founder must provide an explanation of their connection or cooperation with the environment, tie it in with the planned number or students and attach an analysis of the needs for knowledge and objectives of society in the fields and disciplines of the draft study programmes.

(A methodologically justified analysis may be performed by the founder itself or ordered from competent ministries, chambers or associations. The analysis must demonstrate a connection between learning outcomes in the draft study programmes and the findings of the profession regarding the following:

- the employability of graduates **in the case of accreditation of professional study programmes;**
- the needs for knowledge or further training.)

The assessment of the achievement of the standard is linked to the assessment against all other quality standards.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

To properly assess according to this standard, an in-depth look at the planned development of the institution is necessary, as the following needs to be established:

- how the institution will develop, whether it will be able to achieve the vision, mission and strategic objectives set by the founder;
- whether the strategic orientations are reflected in the activities to be carried out by the institution and are linked to the draft study programme;
- whether the institution's development planning is linked to the orientations in the Slovenian and international higher education area (for example: whether the institution will cooperate with other institutions; whether it will strive for the quality of educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activities; what will be its contribution to the development and quality of a particular activity in the wider area).

It is also important to look at the history of the development of the initiative and the conditions for the establishment of the institution, as well as the state of their current scientific, professional, research or artistic relevance:

- whether the institution is being established on the basis of existing and sufficiently comprehensive scientific, professional, research or artistic foundations in relation to the intended study programmes;
- which segment of higher education it fits into and how it profiles itself in relation to the societal role it intends to play and whether it will be able to play it well;
- how it intends to organise its fields of expertise or disciplines and all its activities; how it intends to delimit or integrate them and how it intends to develop them;
- how it will maintain institutional autonomy and academic freedom;
- to which norms and ideas is it committed and how will it evolve.

Without a substantive assessment, it is not possible to assess whether strategic planning is feasible and comprehensive and whether the monitoring of the institution's activities or the achievement of its strategic objectives will be adequate.

For the purposes of this and the following standards, the type of institution and the expected size or diversification of the planned activities are the main factors to be taken into account:

- which scientific, professional, research or artistic activities are prescribed by the ZViS and the Accreditation Criteria or are characteristic of the type of institution being established;
- which fields of study and scientific, professional, research or artistic fields or disciplines will the institution need to develop in light of the draft study programmes.

For a comprehensive assessment of the draft study programmes, in addition to the explanatory note to point d) in brackets, the basic guidelines for assessing the quality of the intended content of the study programme in the chapter on its accreditation should also be taken into account. The assessment of the relevance of organisational objectives to draft study programmes depends on their structure, discipline, cycle, type and the links between the intended objectives and competences on the one hand and the study content and learning outcomes on the other.

Standard 2: **THE EARMARKED AND PLANNED FINANCIAL RESOURCES ENABLE THE HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider the financial projection of the founder which demonstrates the resources earmarked for the financing of all anticipated activities of a higher education institution, especially educational, professional, scientific, research or artistic activities, by taking into consideration the following:

- anticipated number of students enrolled,
- number of higher education teachers and faculty assistants and other staff,
- duration of the study programme extended by one year,
- basic infrastructure for education and professional, scientific, research, or artistic activities for the relevant field.)

Explanatory note:

The financial projection must underpin the strategic plan and ensure the future development and quality of the institution.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

In addition to the strategic plan, the draft study programmes, their type, cycle and the field or discipline to which they correspond are relevant for assessment against this standard. Only by carefully examining the draft study programmes, the anticipated number of students, teachers, researchers and professionals will we be able to determine whether and how much funding is needed for the basic infrastructure required for the quality work of the institution; be it the educational and scientific, professional, research or artistic activities related to the draft study programmes.

Assessing the reliability of sources is also important. We consider whether it is appropriate:

- for the founder to rely solely on tuition fees for its funding – not neglecting the projected number of students enrolled;
- for the founder to rely on obtaining a concession to carry out its activities – what if one is not granted?

How reliable are other possible sources of funding for the institution? Does the founder also have its own resources, which are long-term and stable?

Standard 3: **THE INTERNAL ORGANISATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION IS DEVISED AS TO ENABLE THE PARTICIPATION OF EMPLOYEES, STUDENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS IN THE MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider whether the memorandum demonstrates a suitable internal organisation and concept of the internal quality assurance system of the higher education institution. In addition, the composition of the bodies of the institution shall be reviewed, especially with regard to the representation of students in them.

The statutes must clearly demonstrate the following:

- rights and obligations of members of the bodies of the higher education institution,
- rights of students to participate in decision-making,
- ensured equal protection of rights of all students, higher education teachers and faculty assistants and other employees – concept of the organisation of appeal bodies and appeal procedures,
- determination of procedures, rights and obligations of the founder and students and other stakeholders upon the cessation of operation or withdrawal of accreditation of the higher education institution, termination or withdrawal of accreditation of a study programme.)

Explanatory note:

The founder must attach the draft memorandum of association and the statute of the institution to the application. The reason for submitting a draft document has to do with the fact that the institution has not yet been fully established and these documents could not have been adopted by competent bodies in accordance with the ZViS.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Although the exercise of the rights and obligations set out in the memorandum and the statutes of the institution are assessed in the process of reaccreditation of the institution, in the process of initial accreditation we have to determine whether it will be able to operate legally. We consider the provisions in the memorandum and the statutes from a substantive point of view and establish whether they provide a sound basis for integrated action in practice.

In addition to the clarity of the definitions of competences, tasks and rights, it is also important that they are correct.

Standard 4: **THE PRACTICAL TRAINING OF STUDENTS IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT, IF ENVISAGED BY STUDY PROGRAMMES, SHALL BE WELL PLANNED. SUFFICIENT RESOURCES SHALL BE AVAILABLE FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION.**

Assessment criteria:

- suitability of companies for the implementation of practical training
- interactions of practical training with the fields and disciplines the draft study programmes refer to

Explanatory notes:

The standard is applied selectively. Practical training should always be assessed when setting up a higher education institution or an institution that intends to implement higher education professional study programmes (an important component of these programmes, which distinguishes them most from other (university) programmes); or programmes that have practical training as a compulsory component. For doctoral programmes, assessment against this standard is not relevant.

The founder must attach any agreements regarding practical training for all draft study programmes containing such training. These agreements must constitute concrete **binding agreements**, not just letters of intent or similar.

The founder must provide justification of the suitability of the companies with which it has concluded agreements on practical training regarding their material, financial and human resources (suitable premises and equipment and ability to offer the appropriate mentoring of students and their financing). It must also justify the interaction of the practical training with the fields and disciplines the draft study programmes refer to.

Assessment against this standard is primarily concerned with assessing the strategic orientations of the institution and its development plans; it is closely linked to the content of the draft study programmes of which practical training is a compulsory part.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The type of institution or the type, cycle and content of the draft study programmes must be taken into account in the assessment. We first verify the following:

- whether practical training is a compulsory component of the draft study programmes, or
- whether an assessment against this standard is warranted at all.

It is necessary to determine whether the practical training will be of good quality, appropriate in content and scope, and whether it will be adequately resourced. Whether this education or work of the practical training mentors:

- will be in line with the content of the draft study programmes;
- will suitably complement and connect the practical content of the draft study programmes to the work environment;
- will be at an appropriate level of difficulty and will it offer the student what is specified in the draft study programmes – i.e. will it fit the graduates' profile.

We should also establish:

- how many agreements the founder has with companies suitable for practical training in relation to the planned number of enrolled students;
- whether the agreements with the companies adequately define the rights, obligations and duties of all participants of the practical training.

Suitable companies are those that can offer students training appropriate to the content, complexity or cycle of their studies; that have good quality facilities and staffing conditions for practical training, and in particular suitably educated and qualified mentors.

A higher professional study that is highly applied and in which the study environment is inextricably linked to the work environment, with activities and projects that are part of the work environment, is an exception. The applicant can argue, on the basis of the projects and the practical training syllabus, that the workplace is part of the study environment.

Standard 5: **THE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IS DEVISED IN A MANNER ENABLING THE CLOSURE OF THE QUALITY LOOP IN ALL AREAS OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION'S OPERATION.**

Assessment criteria:

(The manual shall demonstrate the concept of:

- the methodology for collecting data, their analysis and evaluation,
- monitoring the satisfaction of employees, students and representatives of the external environment,
- assurance and improvement of the quality of the higher education institution activities
- planning, implementing and monitoring measures for improvement towards development and progress, namely for all areas covered by the Agency's quality standards.

Apart from the above, the following is important:

- regular collection and analysis of data on the learning outcomes of students and the education process as a whole as well as other related activities,
- that management, all higher education teachers and faculty assistants, students and other stakeholders assess the quality of their work and the work of other stakeholders,
- identification of deficiencies in implementing the activity and deviations from planned activities and achievements, regular notifications to students and other stakeholders regarding the measures for quality improvement, planning of periodic self-evaluations.)

Explanatory notes:

The founder must attach the quality manual of the institution or the relevant internal quality assessment document (may be in draft form). It must explain the self-evaluation plan of the institution.

Although at first glance it may seem that in the process of the initial accreditation of an institution we are only assessing the internal quality system in formal terms, or only the formal

procedures without considering the substantive aspect, we can nevertheless anticipate whether the participation of stakeholders (students, higher education teachers, non-teaching staff, etc.) will be adequate, as their role and influence on the development of the institution must also be clearly evident from the regulation. We can also establish whether and how the institution will assess all its activities.

The assessment against this standard is linked to the assessment against all the quality standards in all the areas of assessment specified for the initial accreditation of the institution, taking into account the draft study programmes it will implement.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Determine whether the self-evaluation will be sufficiently in-depth, critical and comprehensive. Whether it will include a balanced assessment of the educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activities of the institution; also depending on the fields, type and cycle of study programmes it will offer, or what the founder aims to strategically develop. What are its strategic (educational, professional, research, creative) objectives?

Will the self-evaluation also include an assessment and a look at the development of the staff, library activities, as well as the premises, equipment and financial management of the institution?

The initial accreditation also assesses whether and how the institution will evaluate the study programmes it will implement. Is it possible to see from the draft quality manual:

- how the content of the study programmes will be assessed and updated as part of the self-evaluation, and who will be involved in this process;
- whether the achievement of competences or learning outcomes will be analysed; whether the professional view of educators will be balanced with the students' view of their own progress in their studies and the quality of the knowledge and skills acquiring process;
- whether employers will be involved in the assessment of practically-oriented study programmes.

We also assess how in-depth the self-evaluation of the scientific, professional, research or artistic work of the institution will be. Whether the institution will (self-)evaluate the content, impact and relevance of research, in addition to the conditions for research and artistic work and, for example, research planning.

Will the institution (self-)evaluate the quality of teaching and how?

The quality manual must also show the (self-)evaluation of material, human and financial resources, based on all the activities to be carried out by the institution. We assess whether the institution will also evaluate the quality of resources outside itself (for example: the material conditions and the qualifications of the mentors for practical training in companies, if it will implement study programmes with compulsory practical training).

Finally, we determine whether the quality manual constitutes the basis for a good, comprehensive self-evaluation, which will include documenting, analysing, evaluating and planning measures with a balance of content and an emphasis on reasoning and reflection.

HUMAN RESOURCES (Article 8 of the Criteria)

Standard 6: **HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHERS SHALL BE ENSURED FOR ALL AREAS OF STUDY OR FOR ALL COMPULSORY AND INTERNAL ELECTIVE COURSES SET OUT IN THE DRAFT STUDY PROGRAMMES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. the validity of appointment to titles of higher education teachers and appropriateness of the field in which the titles are awarded in view of the courses whose holders they will be

   (Higher education teachers must have valid appointments to the title for the field for which the higher education institution is being established and from which stem the courses in the draft study programmes whose holders and providers they will be.)

b. human resources plan

   (The human resources plan shall demonstrate the following:

   - that the human resource structure corresponds to the cycle and type of the draft study programme,
   - the type of anticipated employment of higher education teachers and faculty assistants,
   - the employment equivalent of higher education teachers in accordance with the law
   - researcher code*.)

* Higher education teachers at professional colleges and foreign higher education teachers do not need to obtain a researcher code.

c. structure of the temporary senate

   (For the formation of a senate of a higher education institution, a sufficient number of higher education teachers is ensured, as well as the number of researchers if so determined by the draft statutes. The rules for the election of senate members shall ensure equal representation of all fields and disciplines of a higher education institution.)

d. consideration of the minimum standards of the Agency in the draft criteria of the higher education institution for the appointment to titles

   (The Agency's minimum standards are the fundamental conditions that may be expanded, upgraded, deepened, tightened, etc., by the criteria.)

Explanatory notes:

The type of institution and draft study programmes and their cycle are important in assessing the standard. It must be considered which higher education teachers may be course holders of different types of study programmes in accordance with Article 52 of the ZViS; this also determines whether the founder's human resources plan is appropriate.

Article 14 of the ZViS must be taken into account for the type of employment and the determination of the FTE, which vary according to the type of institution.

A valid appointment to title means that the course holder in the draft programme has obtained it at another accredited institution. It must comply with the provisions of Article 52 of the ZViS,

which defines who can teach in each type and cycle of programme. The mere fact that an appointment to title procedure has been initiated does not mean that the standard or criterion for its assessment has been met.

Exceptions to the need to provide researcher codes:

- the founder does not need to specify the codes if a professional college is being established or if the draft higher professional study programmes are attached;
- codes are also not required for foreign higher education teachers.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

It should be established:

- what are the characteristics of the types and cycles of the draft study programmes and what activities will the institution need to develop in this context (professional, scientific, research or artistic);
- whether the appointment to title of the individual envisaged course holder is appropriate in light of the scientific, professional, research or artistic work which defines the specific characteristics of the cycles and types of study programmes, taking into account all the draft study programmes.

We also consider whether the following is ensured:

- the suitability of appointments to titles (habilitations) in terms of the draft study programmes and the fields of study that the institution intends to develop;
- the level or structure of habilitation titles in relation to the intended cycles and types of study programmes and the type of institution (adequacy of the proportion of full and associate professors, consideration of the competences of lower titles, e.g. lecturers, in relation to whether the institution is, e.g. a professional college, a faculty or a university, or whether it is a higher professional or doctoral degree programme);
- adequate and equal representation of all the disciplines envisaged in the provisional senate;
- a quality human resources structure that is sufficiently stable and native.

For more detailed guidance on assessing the appropriateness of appointments to titles, see the explanatory notes for the accreditation of a study programme (Standard 4, page 28 and 29).

In order to determine the correctness of the creation of the provisional senate, we need to look beyond the draft statutes of the institution. The provisional senate's establishment is dictated by the draft study programmes and the fields of study that the institution intends to develop.

Avoid temporal shifts: quality should not be judged on the basis of promises that certain staff will obtain their titles in time to enable them to participate in the education and research process, or on the basis of promises that the founder will conclude a cooperation agreement with another institution to provide external higher education teachers or researchers. For example, the HR plan should not include individuals who are currently still PhD students and who are expected to be course holders or department chairs at some point. It should also not include outside associates with whom only letters of intent are concluded.

Let us not forget that, according to the ZViS, all course holders envisaged in the draft study programmes must have a valid appointment to title.

Standard 7: **THE SCIENTIFIC, PROFESSIONAL, RESEARCH OR ARTISTIC WORK OF COURSE HOLDERS AND PROVIDERS OF STUDY PROGRAMMES CORRESPONDS TO THE FIELDS AND DISCIPLINES FOR WHICH THE INSTITUTION IS BEING ESTABLISHED AND FROM WHICH STEM THE DRAFT STUDY PROGRAMMES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. the report on the scientific, professional, research or artistic work of course holders and providers of study programmes in the last five years and the suitability of this work

b. the programme of scientific, professional, research or artistic work for the following accreditation period

   (For the establishment:

   - of professional colleges, the assessment will focus on professional work,
   - of faculties, it shall focus on scientific, research or artistic work,
   - of academies, it shall focus on artistic work,
   - of universities, it shall focus on scientific and research work.

   The suitability of work of higher education teachers shall be assessed mainly in relation to the courses whose holders or providers they shall be, and the fields and disciplines in which the higher education institution shall perform its activities. It shall be demonstrated by research achievements, their publications, quotes, artworks, exhibitions, events, products or services that are recognised, relevant, contemporary and visible, namely for the field in which they will be active as teachers. The type, cycle and content of the draft study programme, study or artistic field, scientific discipline and particularities characteristic for a field or discipline shall be considered in the assessment.

   Important achievements are those recognised as such by the academic community or profession from the relevant field because they have a profound and significant impact on the development of disciplines or the profession and the development of knowledge or art. A high-quality scientific, professional, research or artistic activity is connected to them.

   The programme of scientific, professional, research or artistic work shall be verifiable and feasible, and its content pursues the objectives according to the type of higher education institution, field and cycle of the anticipated study programmes.)

c. assurance of minimum research standards and compliance with the conditions for mentoring when a higher education institution will implement third-cycle study programmes

   (Third-cycle study programmes must ensure high research standards. The minimum research standards for third-cycle study programmes are the following:

   - The higher education institution that implements (or will implement) a third-cycle study programme has, in the last five years, obtained research or development or otherwise academically relevant projects funded from public resources, foreign resources or resources from the economy in the total minimum value of EUR 50,000.
   - The course holders of third-cycle study programmes must be active in research, development or otherwise academically relevant activities for the last five years, at least to the extent that they comply with the necessary conditions at least for the appointment to the title of assistant professor set by the Agency's minimum standards.

The fundamental starting point for a high level of quality of research work at the doctoral study level is the capability of mentoring doctoral students. In the determination of capabilities, the workload of the course holders and their research work is considered. A mentor must have high-level and current educational, scientific and research references that correspond to their field.

The highest recommended number of doctoral students per mentor is 5 per doctoral study programme. It is also recommended that the mentor is a course holder or involved in research projects or programmes corresponding to their respective field.)

Explanatory notes:

The criteria for assessing compliance with the standard (provided in parentheses) are extensive and quite precise, as the **proven quality of the intended study programme providers (human resources)** is of paramount importance for the initial accreditation of an institution. **Human resources are assessed in a similar way to the process of reaccreditation of an institution, i.e. they are assessed according to their end state (already achieved and recognised professional, scientific, research or artistic work, valid decisions on their appointment to title, etc.), unlike the individual standards in the field of the institution's activities.**

It must be considered which higher education teachers may be course holders of different types of study programmes in accordance with the ZViS; this also determines whether they are required to carry out primarily professional (lecturers, senior lecturers) or scientific research or artistic work (assistant professors, associate professors and full professors).

The founder must provide evidence of adequate scientific, research, professional or artistic work (depending on the type and cycle of the draft study programmes) by the intended programme holders; in accordance with Article 14 of the ZViS, it must provide adequate human resources. This is evidenced with a report on their main or applied research or art work carried out in the last five years for the areas for which the higher education institution is being established and to which the draft study programmes refer. In addition to the report, the founder must have a programme of professional or research or artistic work in these areas.

The anticipated course holders and providers must be active scientifically, professionally, in research or artistically in all fields of all draft study programmes. This activity should be assessed on its merits and not just based on the number of projects, studies, etc.

The Research Activity Database is a useful tool for assessing according to this standard.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Let us recall that when assessing according to this standard, we do not focus only on the conditions of the professional, scientific, research or artistic work of the intended course holders, but also on its content and significance.

Important for the assessment of the quality of teachers' scientific, professional, research or artistic work is the assessment of the value, visibility and quality of their professional, research or artistic achievements.

It is important to establish:

- whether the higher education teachers are active as scientists, professionals, researchers or artists in the field of courses whose holders they will be;

- the characteristics of the types and cycles of the draft study programmes and what activities (professional, scientific, research or artistic) will the teachers need to evidence in this context;
- whether the proposed course holders have a high quality and recognised track record in the fields to be developed or in the draft study programmes and courses;
- how staff performance is reflected in draft syllabi.

When an institution is going to offer doctoral programmes, the research work of the supervisors has to be assessed in light of the research opportunities for students – i.e. the quality of the achievements of the mentors – the course holders.

The quality of the planned course holders' scientific, professional, research or artistic work is therefore **assessed against the end state**.

We should avoid the following:

- Basing the assessment of the quality of the research work simply on the number of publications and research projects, without recognising the intrinsic value and achievements related to the content of the accredited study programme (shift between quality and quantity);
- shifting to another characteristic, phenomenon, condition or phase in assessing the quality of scientific, professional, research or artistic work, to avoid diverting attention from the quality of activities and achievements to, for example, the quality of the material conditions for this work.

Several guidelines for a proper assessment are written in the part referring to an institution's re-accreditation (Standard 8, page 83 to 86).

MATERIAL CONDITIONS (Article 9 of the Criteria)

Standard 8: **THE FOUNDER SHALL PROVIDE SUITABLE PREMISES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES**

Assessment criteria:

(The suitability of the premises will be assessed by taking into consideration the planned activities of the higher education institution, the draft study programmes, human resources and the anticipated number of students enrolled. Therefore, the suitability of lecture halls, laboratories, workshops and other premises intended for the educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activities of the higher education institution will be determined, as well as the suitability of the premises intended for the management, support services, higher education teachers and faculty assistants, students and their bodies.)

Explanatory note:

The founder must provide sufficient suitable premises for all the activities of the institution. If the founder does not have its own premises, it must have valid lease agreements. The leases' durations are also checked.

The provision of premises is a fundamental condition under Article 14 of the ZViS, therefore the founder must provide proof of ownership or lease of premises and a plan for the implementation of the study programme if the premises are at different locations.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

It should be established:

- whether the premises are suitable for the implementation of the draft study programmes. The type of study programme and the field of study must be taken into account. Some programmes require special facilities (e.g. laboratories, special classrooms);
- whether the size of the premises is appropriate for the number of students expected;
- whether the institution owns the premises or the lease agreements are adequate. Whether the lease contracts are concluded for a minimum of five years and will enable the institution to carry out its educational and other work without interruption;
- whether the founder has sufficient premises to carry out all the institution's activities: educational, professional, scientific, research or artistic (depending on the type of institution);
- what about the facilities for teachers and non-educational staff? Are they provided?

Standard 9: **THE FOUNDER SHALL PROVIDE SUITABLE TECHNICAL, TECHNOLOGICAL AND OTHER EQUIPMENT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES**

Assessment criteria:

(The suitability of the equipment will be assessed by taking into consideration the planned scientific, professional, research or artistic activities of the higher education institution, the draft study programmes, the anticipated method of their implementation and the anticipated number of students enrolled. If the higher education institution will implement online studies or distance studies or other special forms of study, the founder must prove that it has suitable equipment for such methods of implementing study programmes.)

Explanatory note:

The standard has to be met, which means that the founder's assurances that it will do so after accreditation are not sufficient. **This a fundamental condition under Article 14 of the ZViS**, therefore the founder must provide proof of ownership or lease of equipment and a list of owned and leased equipment.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

In making this assessment, we take into account the suitability of the equipment in relation to the content of the draft study programmes or the fields of study and activities to be carried out by the institution. Some programmes or activities require special equipment (audiovisual, laboratory, etc.). Is the equipment sufficient for the number of students anticipated? Is it suitable and up-to-date?

The assessment of equipment is also relevant if the higher education institution plans to implement online studies or distance studies or other special forms of study. We should assess:

- whether the computer software will enable students to study smoothly and to access and use: chat rooms, forums, group work, interactive assessments, videoconferencing lectures and tutorials, simulations, etc.;
- whether the equipment has the capacity required to carry out online studies or other hybrid formats.

More detailed guidelines are given when renewing the accreditation of an institution (Standard 14, page 93 to 94).

Standard 10: **SUITABLE ADJUSTMENTS WILL BE MADE FOR STUDENTS WITH VARIOUS FORMS OF DISABILITY**

Assessment criteria:

Adjustments to the premises and equipment as well as communication and information accessibility

(The assessment shall consider the access to lecture halls, laboratories, the student affairs office, library, common areas – lifts, ramps, etc., and the adjustment of the facilities – sanitary facilities for the disabled, driveways, parking areas, panels with inscriptions in Braille, voice notifications in lifts, etc.).

Explanatory note:

In making this assessment, we take into account specific guidelines developed in cooperation with various organisations for people with disabilities, also published on the Agency's website: **Guidelines for Accessibility in Tertiary Education in the Republic of Slovenia:** https://www.nakvis.si/akreditacije-in-evalvacije-v-visokem-solstvu/zakonodaja/.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

We determine whether the premises and equipment are adapted for students with different types of disabilities (ramps, toilets, lifts, grab rails, etc.) or whether the founder has other special equipment for them. Will the adjustments allow for more autonomy in studying, better integration into the study environment?

Depending on the specificities of a particular draft study programme, it may also be justified to consider whether its content and composition allow students with different forms of disability to study there at all.

Standard 11: **THE LIBRARY SERVICES OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ARE PROVIDED**

Assessment criteria:

a. academic, professional and scientific literature and a development plan for the library activities and services

b. qualifications of library employees

(The assessment shall consider the suitability of academic, professional and scientific literature from the fields of the draft study programmes or the fields and disciplines to be developed by the institution, and a plan for further development of the library of the higher education institution.)

Explanatory notes:

The **same conditions apply to the higher education library**, required by an institution to carry out its activities, regardless of whether it is **a public or private institution**.

According to the provisions of **Article 14 of the ZviS, the founder must provide students and employees with the library services of a higher education institution** whose library activities support the study, professional, research and artistic processes of the higher education institution. Simply possessing agreements with various general libraries is inadequate.

When assessing the qualifications of the library staff, we should not forget about their qualifications in accordance with Article 54 of the ZViS, which stipulates that institutions must have librarians who are faculty assistants.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The initial accreditation of an institution must assess or determine the quantity and quality of the material in relation to the activities to be developed by the institution and the draft study programmes submitted by the founder. We must ask ourselves whether the academic, professional and scientific literature or materials are appropriate for the types and cycles of draft study programmes and the professional, scientific, research or artistic activities that the institution will undertake.

We verify whether the following is clearly defined in the development plan for the library activities and services:

- the status and tasks of the higher education library;
- the responsibility for the library's operation and evaluation of its activities;
- development objectives, taking into account the strategic development and objectives set by the founder.

We establish whether the library will provide:

- access to textbooks, required and recommended literature, graduate theses and international professional and scientific literature;
- dissemination of library materials and information;

- a place for students and other users to study or work;
- education, assistance and advice to users, including those with special needs, in the use of library materials, information resources and other services.

Does the plan show how the library will select, acquire, organise and provide access to diverse, reliable, quality and relevant information sources and information? How will it supplement the library collection (compulsory study materials, international professional, scientific literature and databases, graduate theses, publications by higher education teachers and faculty assistants and by the institution's researchers – depending on the type of institution or study programmes it will implement)? Will it provide users with access to electronic resources relevant to the institution's study programmes and scientific, professional, research or artistic work? Will the conditions for entering bibliographic data on the achievements of the institution's employees into COBISS.SI be met?

Since the founder must provide the services of the institution's higher education library, it must also be assessed whether a library worker is also ensured. We should verify that the library worker has the appropriate training in accordance with Article 54 of the ZViS and is qualified to implement the library development plan.

We should avoid the following notions that:

- the "traditional" library no longer plays the role it did in the past, as study literature or materials can be obtained online;
- a "traditional" library can be completely replaced by a virtual one, and that it is sufficient for the founder to only have a suitable library worker.

ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE STANDARDS FOR THE REACCREDITATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

OPERATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION
(Article 12 of the Criteria)

Standard 1: **THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL SUCCESSFULLY FULFIL ITS MISSION IN THE SLOVENIAN AND INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION AREA. BY ACHIEVING ORGANISATIONAL AND IMPLEMENTATION OBJECTIVES, IT SHALL MAINTAIN THE QUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES.**

IN INITIAL REACCREDITATION, THE MISSION, VISION, AND STRATEGY OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL DEMONSTRATE THAT THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE FOUNDER ARE CONTINUOUSLY COMPLIED WITH.

Assessment criteria:

a. consistency of strategic planning with the mission, national and European guidelines
b. feasibility and comprehensiveness of strategic planning
c. adequacy of the method of assessing the implementation of strategic planning

(The document shall clearly demonstrate the educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic objectives. In relation with the mission and vision, further strategic planning of the higher education institution activities, monitoring of set objectives and commitments with implementation deadlines and persons responsible shall be assessed; the strategic plan shall also include a timeline for the monitoring of activities and improved achievement of objectives since the previous accreditation of the institution. The following shall also be assessed:

- success in fulfilling the mission in the Slovenian and international higher education area;
- participation of internal stakeholders (management, higher education teachers and faculty assistants, researchers, students and other staff of the higher education institution) and external stakeholders (e.g. employers, competent ministries, chambers, associations, etc.) in strategic planning; successful completion of strategic plans since the previous accreditation of the institution, or a relation between the set objectives and the actual development of the higher education institution.)

Explanatory note:

Mission, vision and strategy is adopted by the institution by a strategic plan.

Assessment against this standard is linked to assessment against other quality standards; for example, a substantive connection of strategic planning and its implementation in the field of the institution's educational, professional, scientific, research or artistic work.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- most often, the assessment under criterion a) is omitted altogether;
- there is no substantive assessment, just listing or copying of statements from documents;

- lack of insight into the past and future of the institution, lack of evaluation of its development in this context;
- adopted mission, vision and strategic plan is not a strength – it is a condition that must be met.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

An insight into the past development of the institution is necessary because we need to find out the following:

- how it has developed, whether it pursues its vision and strategic goals set;
- whether there have been (radical) changes in its development and why;
- how any changes or expansion of activities are explained and justified in its documents, or whether this is reflected in the institution's future development planning;
- whether its orientations are evident from the activities it carries out and related to the study programmes it implements or plans to implement;
- whether its past development and the planning of its future development are linked to the trends in the Slovenian and international higher education area and how this is reflected (for example: the institution's cooperation with other institutions; the improved quality of the institution's educational, professional, research or artistic activities; its contribution to the development and quality of a particular activity in the wider area).

Once this is established, we assess the views and opinions of stakeholders on the development of the institution, which will also give us insight into their (lack of) participation in the implementation of the strategy and strategic planning.

Without a substantive assessment, we cannot assess whether the strategic planning is feasible and comprehensive, and whether the monitoring of the institution's activities and the improvement of the achievement of objectives since the last accreditation are adequate.

In recommending the strengthening of centralisation or integration of core and support activities at an institution, careful consideration must be given to the protection of autonomy and academic freedom, which chairs or other smaller units organised according to fields of study or disciplines make an important contribution to preserving. The demarcation of responsibilities between the senate and the administrative board should also be safeguarded in such a way that the senate is responsible for academic and professional issues.

The assessment against this and the following standards should take into account the type of institution, its status, size and other institutional specificities.

Standard 2: **THE INTERNAL ORGANISATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL ENSURE THE PARTICIPATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHERS AND FACULTY ASSISTANTS, RESEARCHERS AND NON-EDUCATIONAL STAFF, STUDENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS IN THE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider the representation of stakeholders in the bodies of the higher

education institution, especially students, and the exercise of their rights and duties, whereby it shall be important to ensure:

- equality,
- mutual cooperation and respect,
- consideration of the needs of stakeholders.

The higher education institution shall be organised and shall operate in accordance with the law and its statutes, which shall clearly define the competences, tasks, rights (to participation, legal protection or appeal, etc.) and obligations of the management, employees and students in the bodies of the higher education institution.)

Explanatory note:

The contents of the provisions of the formally adopted memorandum of association and the statutes of the institution need to be verified in practice. Assessment against this standard is linked to the assessment of human resources and students, as well as of the institution's operation, especially in the area of self-evaluation.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- often just a statement that the powers, rights, obligations etc. are clearly defined in the memorandum;
- emphasising the small size of the institution or the small number of students, which in itself should mean that the standard is met; moreover, that the operation is above-average; without justification.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Although the exercise of some of the rights and obligations laid down in the memorandum and the statutes of the institution will also be assessed in the areas of human resources and students and in the self-evaluation, it is at this point that we need to assess the integrity of the operation of the institution in accordance with the rules laid down by the institution itself. We should look at the provisions in the memorandum and the statutes from a substantive point of view and determine the actual situation in practice. The latter is very important because the mere fact that a certain regulation exists does not in itself say anything.

In addition to the clarity of the definitions of competences, tasks and rights, it is also important that they are correct.

We should pay attention to the following:

We should also assess how things are done in practice when a regulation (act) is flawed – even in areas it does not cover. We may find that the institution is doing a better job than the regulation suggests, which is crucial for quality. In this case, the institution only has to formalise its conduct, so this is not a non-compliance or major deficiency in its operation according to Article 45 of the Accreditation Criteria.

Standard 3: **THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL DEMONSTRATE THE HIGH QUALITY OF ITS SCIENTIFIC, PROFESSIONAL, RESEARCH OR ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES AND THE RELATED IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE FIELDS AND DISCIPLINES WHERE IT IMPLEMENTS THESE ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider the quality, development and progress of the scientific, professional, research or artistic activities according to the type and size of the higher education institution, and the type, cycle and number of study programmes it implements.

Important achievements are those recognised as such by the academic community or profession from the relevant field because they have a profound and significant impact on the development of disciplines or the profession and the development of knowledge or art. They are a result of high-quality scientific, professional, research or artistic activities.)

Explanatory notes:

The assessment concerns the work of the institution, i.e. the higher education teachers, faculty assistants and researchers who are employed there and/or who also work in a scientific, professional, research or artistic capacity. Work "native" to another institution does not count. The institution must plan, implement, monitor and, where necessary, improve this work. This is demonstrated by the fact that it is mentioned in publications by researchers or in the works of artists active at the institution.

We should evaluate the importance (influence, value of the recognition, impact, usability) of the achievements. The standard or its assessment is quite clear – **it is a demonstration of scientific, professional, research or artistic work, which must be assessed on its merits according to the Criteria.**

The assessment of compliance with this standard is mainly linked to the assessment against the quality standards on human resources, students and library activities, and, of course, to self-evaluation of scientific, professional, research or artistic work, also taking into account the strategic orientations of the institution, plans for its future development, its specific features (depending on the type, the fields it develops, etc.); it is about close substantive connections with the study programmes and development work carried out by the institution.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- assessment only at the level of course holders who "bring" their scientific, professional, research or artistic activity with them or carry it out at another institution;
- there is often no substantive assessment of scientific, professional, research or artistic work, but simply a listing or copying of titles of projects, research, etc. from documents; if an institution has a large number of these, the experts assess this work to be adequate, often even excellent, without any assessment of its value, impact, importance, etc.;
- assessment does not consider the type of the institution, or the type and cycle as well as the content of the study programmes implemented;
- in academies or other "artistic" institutions, scientific and research work is assessed, while artistic work is mentioned only occasionally, as if by chance.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Scientific, professional, research or artistic work should be assessed at the level of the institution, not at the level of individuals responsible for study programmes.

We should check the following:

- which scientific, professional, research or artistic activities are prescribed by the ZViS and the Accreditation Criteria or are characteristic of the type of institution being assessed;
- which fields of study and scientific, professional, research or artistic disciplines the institution must develop in relation to the activity for which it is accredited or has accredited study programmes;
- which are the characteristics of the types and cycles of study programmes provided by the institution, and which related activities should be developed (professional, scientific, research or artistic);
- whether the scientific, professional, research or artistic activity is relevant to quality education in accordance with Article 33 of the ZViS, which defines the specific features of cycles and types of study programmes – taking into account all study programmes delivered by the institution;
- whether scientific, professional, research or artistic activity brings about innovation in its discipline or field of study, whether new knowledge is created that has an impact on the development of the discipline or professional field;
- whether the institution has a track record of quality and recognition in the activities it develops.

We should not assess only the conditions for professional, scientific, research or artistic work and, for example, its planning and related administrative and organisational aspects, but above all its content, weight or significance in its own right. In assessing the quality of research and creative work, we should distinguish between the characteristics of different cognitive features of disciplines and different criteria according to their origin. For more information, see the Guidelines for the assessment of the evaluation of a study programme (Standard 1, page 37).

We should avoid the following:

- shift to another characteristic, phenomenon or condition, when in assessing the quality of scientific, professional, research or artistic work, the attention is diverted from the quality of activities and achievements in this field to the quality of the collaboration or the organisation and material conditions;
- shift between quality and quantity, common in counting publications and research or other projects, which is then the basis of direct statement of the assessment of quality of scientific, professional, research or artistic work without recognising the intrinsic value of the assessed research work and achievements.

Standard 4: **PRACTICAL TRAINING OF STUDENTS IN A WORK ENVIRONMENT, IF IT IS PART OF THE EDUCATION ACTIVITY, SHALL BE WELL ORGANISED AND IMPLEMENTED AS SUCH. THERE SHALL BE RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION.**

Assessment criteria:

a. systemic regulation of practical training of students and its implementation

(The description or documents shall clearly demonstrate the organisation of practical training, its providers and the tasks of all participants (higher education teachers and faculty assistants, mentors at the employers, organisers of practical training and students). In relation to that, the implementation of such training in work environment shall be assessed.)

b. satisfaction of participants in practical training

(The assessment shall consider the satisfaction of all participants: students, mentors of practical training, providers or organisers of practical training at higher education institution and in companies.)

Explanatory notes:

The standard is applied selectively. Practical training should always be assessed in case of professional colleges and institutions implementing professional higher education study programmes (it is an important component of these programmes, which distinguishes them most from other (university) programmes) or programmes with practical training as a compulsory component. The standard does not apply in doctoral study programmes.

To assess the satisfaction of participants in practical training, please refer to the web link where the relevant documentation is published, or to the self-evaluation report of the institution. **"Satisfaction"** covers more than satisfaction with the delivery of practical training – it is **principally about assessing the quality of the training, its relevance in terms of content and scope.**

Institutions often recognise work placement for employed students, which is something to pay particular attention to. A work placement may be recognised only if it is relevant in terms of content, complexity, scope, quality, etc., or if it is in line with the content of the study programme. Recognition of work placement must be documented by the institution; the documents must clearly list all of the above.

The assessment against this standard is mainly linked to the assessment against the quality standards on human resources and students, taking into account the strategic orientations of the institution, plans for its development and self-evaluation; it is about close substantive connections with the study programmes implemented by the institution where practical training is a compulsory component.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- assessment does not consider the type of the institution, or the type and cycle as well as the content of the study programmes implemented;
- institutions are recommended to increase the number of hours (credits) for practical training and closer links with the economy or employers without justification; lack of in-depth and weighty reflection, especially on the education activities of the institution, content, type and cycle of study programmes in relation to the competences or learning outcomes for which they educate;
- the assessment of the satisfaction of participants in practical training often ends with assessing the satisfaction of students and, in some cases, of mentors in companies (nothing about the satisfaction or professional opinion of teachers, employers, etc.);
- assessment of satisfaction is insufficient; it focuses on satisfaction with the delivery of practical training, but ignores its quality and relevance to the content of the study programme etc.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Before the assessment, we should check the characteristics of the type of institution or the study programmes it implements, and:

- whether practical training is their compulsory component;
- whether an assessment against this standard is warranted at all.

In order to adequately assess the systemic regulation of practical training, its organisation and the other elements required to assess compliance with the standard, it is not sufficient to examine the plans for practical training and find that they contain all the necessary elements. What is written in these documents needs to be assessed in practice:

- whether the practical training is provided in accordance with the content of the study programmes that the institution implements and of which it is a compulsory component;
- whether the practical content of the study programme is adequately linked to the working environment, and whether the programme enhances and develops certain competences – i.e. how practice is aligned with the practical orientation of the study;
- whether the practical training is of an appropriate level of complexity and offers the student what is set out in the study programme – i.e. whether the work obligations match the graduate's profile;
- how many companies are suitable for practical training in relation to the number of enrolled students;
- the quality of cooperation between higher education teachers, providers or organisers of practical training, students, mentors and other representatives of companies (from defining the training in line with the study programme, monitoring its progress, assessment and documentation to (self-)evaluation);
- how the knowledge, skills and competences acquired are evaluated by higher education teachers – providers of practical training – and by company representatives (mentors), in addition to the students;
- what is the relationship, taking into account the field of study, between the student's independent and mentored work; between the student's active work and observation; between simulation or work in a fictitious environment and practice in a real working environment;
- do the contracts adequately define the rights, obligations and duties for all participants in practical training?

Suitable companies are those that can offer students training relevant to the content, complexity or cycle of their studies, that have good material and human resource conditions for practical training, and especially suitably educated and qualified mentors for such training.

It should be recalled that practical training must be carefully assessed according to the European sectoral directives issued for training in specific fields (health, veterinary medicine, architecture, etc.).

A higher professional study that is highly applied and in which the study environment is inextricably linked to the work environment, with activities and projects that are part of the work environment, is an exception. The applicant can argue, on the basis of the projects and the practical training curriculum, that the workplace is part of the study environment.

We should avoid the following:

- pars pro toto shift: merely describing the organisation and course of practice without an actual assessment of its content. For example, the finding that students are satisfied with the variety of practical training opportunities and that such training provides them with the opportunity to perform specific tasks is indicative of the fact that training is appropriate in professional terms and that there are potentials for training, but it cannot be an indication of the suitability of the working environments, the quality of the organisation of the training or the quality of its implementation.

Standard 5: **THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL MONITOR THE NEEDS FOR KNOWLEDGE AND EMPLOYMENT NEEDS IN THE ENVIRONMENT. IT SHALL PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING EMPLOYMENT POSSIBILITIES IN THE FIELDS SUITABLE FOR THE COMPETENCES OR LEARNING OUTCOMES OF GRADUATES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. cooperation of the higher education institution with the environment or employers and its own graduates

   (The assessment shall consider whether this cooperation is a suitable basis for the constant monitoring of the needs for knowledge or graduates, monitoring the adequacy of acquired competences or learning outcomes, prompt notification of students regarding this topic and helping students to plan their professional path.)

b. development of job centres, alumni clubs or other forms of organisation

Explanatory note:

The standard is selectively applied; unlike Standard 4, it is mandatory for all institutions providing first- and second-cycle study programmes to be assessed against it, regardless of whether practical training is a compulsory component of these programmes. When dealing with the latter, the institution's engagement with the wider environment is assessed, for example: the needs for knowledge and competences for which it educates, the relevance to the environment, the impact on its development, etc.

The assessment is mainly linked to the quality standards on students, taking into account the strategic orientations of the institution and plans for its development; it is about close substantive connections with the higher education institution's study programmes, their self-evaluation, modification and updating.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- assessment does not consider the type of the institution, or the type and cycle as well as the content, field and discipline of the study programmes;
- institutions are recommended to establish closer links with the economy or employers without in-depth and weighty reflection, especially on the content, field and discipline of the study programme and the competences or learning outcomes for which it educates;

- a finding that there is cooperation, but nothing on whether it is adequate for monitoring the needs for knowledge, graduates, etc.; i.e. what is listed in brackets under criterion a).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Since this standard is also applied selectively, let us first ascertain whether and which first- and second-cycle study programmes the institution implements. Consider the difference between first-cycle professional higher education programmes on the one hand, and first-cycle university programmes and second-cycle study programmes on the other. Only then will we be able to assess the standard or provision under (a) accordingly:

- in higher professional education, we will put more emphasis on assessing cooperation with employers and the actual employability or employment rate of graduates;
- in the case of first-cycle university education and masters education, we put more emphasis on the assessment of the institution's engagement with the wider environment to identify the needs for knowledge, competences, etc., that such education offers.

Standard 6: **THE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM SHALL ENABLE THE CLOSURE OF THE QUALITY LOOP IN ALL AREAS OF OPERATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION.**

Assessment criteria:

a. understanding of the meaning and role of an internal quality assurance system

   (The manual shall demonstrate the internal quality assurance system of the higher education institution. The assessment shall consider whether the quality loop is closed, which shall be reflected as:

   - methodologic, comparable and verifiable collection of data, their analysis and assessment of quality of the activities of the higher education institution,
   - monitoring the satisfaction of higher education teachers and faculty assistants, researchers, professional and other staff, students and external stakeholders,
   - participation, accountability and exercise of the rights and obligations of stakeholders in self-evaluation procedures,
   - planning, implementation and monitoring of measures for the assurance and improvement of the quality of the activities of the higher education institution or for the improvement of the development and progress, elimination of deficiencies and non-compliances.)

b. self-evaluation report for the last completed self-evaluation period, measures based on self-evaluation in the period since the previous accreditation, and the plan of improvements for the following self-evaluation period;

   (The self-evaluation report shall demonstrate that the higher education institution assesses:

   - the content of study programmes, their modification and updates,
   - the appropriateness of the implementation of study programmes,
   - the success of its students (their progress, transition rate, attainment of competences or learning outcomes...),

- the scientific, professional, research or artistic work of the higher education institution,
- the adequacy and diversity of material and human resources, and financial success,

and that it

- documents the established deficiencies and flaws and proposals for improvements,
- eliminates the established deficiencies and flaws, and improves the quality of the educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic activities and other activities of the institution,
- analyses its achievements.

The fulfilment of the roles, rights and duties of stakeholders set in advance shall be also assessed in the self-evaluation.)

c. the internal quality assurance system enables and promotes the development, integration and updating of the educational, scientific, research or artistic activities and the impact of these activities on the environment

(The assessment shall be based on the self-evaluation report, information about the educational, scientific, professional, research or artistic work and the modifications of study programmes.

It is a more detailed assessment of the development of the activities of the higher education institution in terms of of content. The following shall be determined:

- whether the internal quality assurance system allows for accurate and critical assessments of the situation, which supports the development of the scientific, professional, research or artistic activities and their contents, and
- the satisfaction of stakeholders with the internal quality assurance system.)

Explanatory notes:

The assessment of documents such as the quality manual and the self-evaluation report **should focus on the content or quality of the self-evaluation.**

Compliance with the standard should be assessed in its entirety, not just in part (usually formally – self-evaluation processes, regulations, procedures, etc.). **The emphasis must be on substantive assessment; the assessment criteria clearly and unequivocally refer to this.**

The assessment is linked to assessment against all quality standards in all areas of the institution's assessment, taking into account the study programmes it implements – **on this basis, the experts propose the evaluation of individual study programmes** (usually on the second visit to the institution).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the assessment focuses only on the internal quality system in formal terms (as evidenced mainly by the institution's quality manual or related regulations), or only on formal procedures without substance;
- finding that there is stakeholder involvement, but nothing about whether it is appropriate – listing the participants in the self-evaluation without identifying their role, influence, opinions, requirements, etc.;

- no indication of whether the self-evaluation is in-depth, analytical, critical, etc. or whether and how all the activities of the institution are assessed;
- no findings on the impact of students, teachers and other staff and other (external) stakeholders on the development and quality of the institution's activities;
- frequent reference to surveys without substantive assessment of the results (furthermore, surveys are not the only way of obtaining opinions, suggestions, solutions, etc.);
- a cursory statement that the quality loop is closed without any substantive justification for this conclusion.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

We should assess whether the self-evaluation is sufficiently in-depth, critical and comprehensive. Is it balanced in covering the content of all the institution's activities – from educational to scientific, professional, research or artistic; this also depends on the type and cycle of its study programmes and/or on what it wants to develop strategically – what are its strategic objectives? Does it also include an assessment and a look at the development of the human resources, library activities, as well as the premises, equipment and financial management of the institution?

It is important to consider how the quality system at the institution accommodates different concepts of quality and how well their use is adapted to the specific areas of assessment.

Detailed guidelines for the assessment of self-evaluation of the content of study programmes, their modification and updating, and the adequacy of their implementation are written in the evaluation of the study programme (Standard 1, page 36 to 39, and Standard 3, page 43); here, let us just point out once again that in the procedure of reaccreditation, we should assess first and foremost whether, and how (in terms of the depth of their content) the institution evaluates all its study programmes:

- whether the evaluation of study contents takes into account the cycle and type of study, disciplinary criteria or professional criteria (profession in the case of professional higher education study);
- whether the content of study programmes is updated correctly according to the original purpose of the study;
- whether the effects (suitability, quality...) of accredited contents or modifications are considered comprehensively and what is the opinion of various stakeholders about them.

Self-evaluation of the success of its students (their progress, transition rate, attainment of competences or learning outcomes etc.): What is the analysis of achieving competences and/or learning outcomes? We should make sure that it is not only about listing average grades and rate of transition/completion of studies. It is important to analyse the findings of higher education teachers, students' and graduates' views (including employers' in the case of higher professional education) on the competences or learning outcomes acquired. Is the professional view of teachers balanced with the students' view of their own progress in their studies and the quality of acquiring knowledge and skills?

The (self-)evaluation of the scientific, professional, research or artistic work of the institution is important, as is the (self-)evaluation of the adequacy of the implementation of study programmes in conjunction with the assessment of the quality of teaching. For more information, see the evaluation of a study programme (Standard 1). The guidelines should be used for assessment at the institutional level.

The (self-)evaluation of material, human and financial resources must be based on all the activities carried out by the institution. We should not forget specific equipment, if needed, and whether the institution also evaluates the quality of these resources outside itself (for example: the material conditions and the qualifications of the mentors for practical training in companies when it implements study programmes with compulsory practical training).

It is not enough to look at the closure of the quality loop only from a PDCA perspective. A substantively completed and thorough self-evaluation or internal quality assessment is described under the evaluation of a study programme (Standard 2, page 40 to 41).

Standard 7: **THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL INFORM THE STAKEHOLDERS AND THE PUBLIC ABOUT ITS STUDY PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES IN A TIMELY MANNER.**

Assessment criteria:

Accessibility, content, reliability, comprehensibility and accuracy of the information about the activities of a higher education institution, especially the information regarding study programmes, their implementation and the scientific, professional, research or artistic activities from the fields and disciplines of these programmes.

(The assessment shall consider the content, reliability, comprehensibility and accuracy of the information regarding the activities of the higher education institution and its accessibility to potential and actual students, graduates, higher education teachers and faculty assistants, researchers, non-education staff, other stakeholders and the broader public.)

(Besides the general information on study programmes, enrolment and selection procedures, course and completion of study, the assessment shall concern whether potential and actual students and other stakeholders receive sufficient information regarding the following:

- teaching methods and study modes, competences or learning outcomes achieved by students or graduates,
- methods and opportunities for scientific, professional, research or artistic work of students,
- classification of study programmes in SQF, EQF and EHEQF,
- employability of graduates, needs for their knowledge or the possibilities for continuing studies.)

Explanatory note:

Rather than listing the different forms of providing information, the content, reliability, comprehensibility and relevance of the information should be assessed; it should be established whether it is relevant to those to whom it is intended.

The most frequent example of inadequacy in assessment:

A bare enumeration of the different forms of information provision, without any assessment of the information (the standard is not assessed according to the assessment provisions).

The guidelines for a proper assessment:

Against this quality standard are set out in great detail in the Criteria or application form, and are generally followed in the assessment; we should take care to ensure that the information on the institution's activities is timely, relevant and useful for different stakeholder groups. It should also be tailored to different groups (in terms of content, according to the needs of each group of students, etc.).

HUMAN RESOURCES (Article 13 of the Criteria)

Standard 8: **HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHERS AND FACULTY ASSISTANTS AND RESEARCHERS SHALL BE PROVIDED FOR A QUALITY PERFORMANCE OF THE EDUCATIONAL, RESEARCH AND OTHER WORK.**

Assessment criteria:

a. educational and professional development of higher education teachers and faculty assistants since the previous accreditation

   (The assessment shall consider the assistance of the higher education institution to higher education teachers and faculty assistants in their career development (which also includes the training of higher education teachers regarding the assessment of the students' knowledge, developing and implementing high-quality teaching methods, preparing study materials, etc., with consideration to the work with different groups of students or their needs). It shall be determined whether the higher education institution keeps relevant registers and evidence (regarding education, training, etc.).

   It shall also be assessed whether academic freedom and fairness of higher education teachers and faculty assistants are ensured.)

b. scientific, professional, research or artistic achievements of higher education teachers and faculty assistants

   (Research or artistic achievements in the period since the last accreditation shall be assessed. Copies of databases, such as cobiss or sicris, shall not constitute a report. Please provide a link to the report if it has been published.)

   (The quality of the work of course holders and providers of study programmes shall be assessed especially in relation to the field of the courses where they are course holders of providers, in relation to the type, cycle and content of a study programme, academic or artistic field, scientific discipline and particularities characteristic of the field or discipline. It shall be demonstrated by research achievements, their publications, quotes, artworks, exhibitions, events, products or services that are recognised, relevant, contemporary and visible, namely for the field in which they are active as teachers. If the higher education institution implements third-cycle study programmes, it shall ensure the compliance with minimum research standards and conditions for mentoring doctoral students.)

c. criteria of the higher education institution for appointment to titles and fields in which the titles are awarded

(The assessment shall consider whether the criteria comply with or exceed the minimum standards of the Agency, whether the appointment procedures are efficient and transparent and whether the structure of the fields in which the titles are awarded ensures a stable human resource structure and its development.)

(The assessment shall consider whether the selection of the senate members reflects equal representation of all fields and disciplines of the higher education institution.)

d. type of employment of higher education teachers and faculty assistants

Explanatory notes:

The type of institution and the type and cycle of study programmes are important in assessing whether the standard is complied with, especially for point b). It must be considered which higher education teachers may be course holders of different types of study programmes in accordance with the ZViS; this also determines whether they are required to carry out primarily professional (lecturers, senior lecturers) or scientific research or artistic work (assistant professors, associate professors and full professors).

Article 14 of the ZViS must be taken into account for the type of employment and the determination of the FTE, which vary according to the type of institution.

The view of higher education teachers and faculty assistants on meeting the quality criteria or standards in the area of human resources is important.

The Research Activity Database is a useful tool for assessing the standard.

The assessment against this standard is mainly linked to the quality standards on the institution's activities (Standard 3) and self-evaluation of the institution (Standard 6). It is also related to students (Standard 11) and material conditions.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the standard is only partially assessed (omitting the assessment against individual points, most often a) and b));
- inadequate assessment of the standard under point a); it is not enough to simply list plans or evidence of human resources training – the content (relevance) of the training needs to be assessed in light of the views of higher education teachers and faculty assistants;
- human resources assessment is not linked to the characteristics of the type of institution or the study programmes it implements;
- it is not clear from the assessment that the higher education teachers are active as scientists, professionals, researchers or artists in the fields of all study programmes implemented by the institution;
- mere enumeration of projects, programmes, achievements etc. without assessing their content;
- assessment of scientific and research work, even though the institution implements only higher professional study programmes;

- assessment of mainly scientific and research work, even though the institution implements only study programmes from artistic fields;
- mixing or equating scientific and research work with work in practical education or professional work.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The guidelines for the assessment of scientific, professional, research or artistic work are listed in Standard 3; the difference is that we shift to identifying this work for individual holders of study programmes. This means that an individual can "bring some projects along", i.e. that it is not necessary that all of them are native to the institution being assessed.

Let us stress again that an assessment of the end state is important for the quality of teachers' scientific, professional, research or artistic work – an assessment of the value, visibility and quality of their professional, research or artistic achievements.

It is important to establish:

- for teaching in which type (taking into account the specifics of the programme) and cycle of study programme is the quality of the course holders assessed; which work they must predominantly do in addition to teaching (professional, research or artistic);
- whether the higher education teachers are active as professionals, researchers or artists in the field of courses whose holders they are.

When the institution implements doctoral study programmes, we must assess the research work of the holders with a view to the possibilities for the research work of students in these programmes, in particular:

- the relevance of the projects to their work in terms of content and complexity;
- the quality of students' research work on the one hand, and the relevance (link to the study programme implemented by the institution) and quality of the research of their mentors – course holders – on the other;
- quality of achievements of mentors – course holders;
- quality of the sample of doctoral theses or doctoral research papers.

In assessing the quality of human resources, it is therefore important to assess, in terms of the end state phase, the quality of teaching as well as the quality of the scientific, professional, research or artistic work of teachers and researchers.

When assessing how pedagogical and professional development of higher education teachers and faculty assistants has been ensured since the last accreditation, we should not only look at the number of training courses or events; an assessment of content is also needed. The assessment should be based on self-evaluation and expert opinions of stakeholders.

It should be established:

- what higher education teachers need, what they think of the education, training, seminars, etc. that the institution offers or has included in the human resources training plan;
- whether the institution has consulted with and taken into account the needs of higher education teachers and faculty assistants when planning and selecting training and related events;
- how the training was evaluated (especially by those it targeted).

We should avoid the following:

- shift between quality and quantity: basing the assessment of the quality of research on the number of publications and research projects – without recognising its intrinsic value and achievements;
- phase shift focusing on the introduction of staff interviews, the form and extent of employment or the teacher education plan. Instead of addressing the pedagogical and research competences of teachers, the focus is shifted to assessing the accompanying conditions.

Standard 9: **PROFESSIONAL-TECHNICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF (HEREINAFTER: NON-EDUCATIONAL STAFF) SHALL BE PROVIDED FOR EFFICIENT ASSISTANCE AND COUNSELLING.**

Assessment criteria:

a. type and suitability of the assistance and counselling provided to students and other stakeholders

b. number, field of work and qualification structure of non-educational staff

   (The assessment shall consider whether the number, work area and qualification structure of non-educational staff correspond to the difficulty of tasks they perform, number of students enrolled and diversification of the higher education institution, i.e. the fields and disciplines where they perform their activities.)

c. education and training of non-educational staff

   (The assessment shall consider the help of the higher education institution in the career development of non-educational staff, especially the help in working with different groups of stakeholders with consideration of their needs. It shall be determined whether the higher education institution keeps registers on the implementation of the plan and evidence regarding education or training).

Explanatory note:

All points must be assessed in accordance with the provisions laid down. The view of non-educational staff on compliance with this quality standard is important.

The most common inadequacy in the assessment:

Omission of the assessment under c).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The assessment of non-educational staff is closely linked to the size of the institution and the diversity of its activities, or the number, type and cycle of the study programmes it implements, the modes of delivery of education, the needs of different groups of students, etc. Different types and

appropriateness of support and advice to students and other stakeholders, as well as the number and educational structure of non-educational staff depend on this.

In addition to the already known and permanent tasks carried out by the staff in the student affairs offices, whose assessment resulted in a positive outcome, it is important to consider the following:

- what is the type and cycle of a study programme where we assess the quality of the work of non-educational staff done to assist in the organisation (e.g. organising practical training, field exercises, seminars, projects; setting up laboratories, etc.);
- are non-educational staff appropriately trained for the types of assistance they offer.

Non-educational staff are a diverse group. They also include people who support higher education more indirectly and are not in regular contact with students. These are computer technicians, janitors and those who help the management and take care of the material and staffing conditions. All professional staff members need good material conditions for their work. Their workload should be adequate and they should be provided with appropriate organisational support. The quality of their cooperation also depends on the final quality of professional support.

When assessing how professional development or training of non-educational staff has been ensured, we should not only count the training courses or events; an assessment of content is also needed. The assessment should be based on self-evaluation and opinions of stakeholders.

It should be established:

- what training they need for the work they perform, what they think of the education, training, seminars, etc. that the institution offers or has included in the staff training plan;
- whether the institution has consulted with and taken into account the needs of staff when planning and selecting training and related events;
- how the training was evaluated (especially by those it targeted).

STUDENTS (Article 14 of the Criteria)

Standard 10: **THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL PROVIDE ITS STUDENTS ADEQUATE ASSISTANCE AND COUNSELLING.**

Assessment criteria:

a. consideration of the diversity and needs of students in the establishment and determination of the content of counselling or assistance

   (The assessment shall consider whether the higher education institution takes into account the diversity of students and their needs (full-time, part-time, special needs, foreign students, students with various forms of disability). This concerns the following:

   - types and content of assistance and counselling services,
   - methods of assistance and counselling,

- accessibility of services or non-educational staff,
- accessibility of higher education teachers and faculty assistants.)

b. timely and efficient notification of students

(Students shall promptly receive information for an uninterrupted and effective study as well as information concerning the operation of the higher education institution, including the operation of the internal quality assurance system. The provision of information shall be assessed by taking into consideration Standard 7 regarding the assessment area "operation of a higher education institution".)

c. monitoring the satisfaction of students with services

Explanatory note:

The students' view of how the standard is being complied with is important for a proper assessment (against all points and assessment provisions). This applies to the assessment against all quality standards prescribed in the area of students. Findings should not be based solely or mainly on the results of student surveys, which are often not even representative.

The assessment of compliance with this standard is mainly linked to the assessment against the quality standards on staff and the institutions' operation (Standards 6 and 7).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the student perspective is not reflected in the findings, or is reflected only partially;
- the identification of the monitoring of students' satisfaction with the services is not substantiated – "satisfaction" means taking position on quality, adequacy, comprehensiveness of the services etc., taking into account the criteria under a) and b).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

In assessing this standard, we must also take into account the characteristics and content of all study programmes which the institution implements, the ways in which studies are conducted, the different groups of students that may be present (full-time, part-time, foreign, special needs, etc.), and we must compare the findings of the assessment against Standards 6, 7, 8 and 9, in particular, with the views of the students. It is therefore important to get the view of all stakeholders (staff and students) on the same issue. Only by considering all the opinions in depth can we make an objective assessment on the assistance and advice given to students – the same applies, of course, to the other standards.

We should not be satisfied with merely listing the types or modes of assistance and advisory services, but should evaluate them in terms of their content, taking into account what is listed in paragraph one. The same applies to the accessibility of services or of non-educational staff and higher education teachers and faculty assistants; for example, being accessible electronically at any time, or vice versa, does not mean much in itself. Likeability, comfort, narrow or personal interests etc. should not be exclusively equated with quality, as they are only one aspect of quality, not always important for the quality of education.

Standard 11: **STUDENTS SHALL BE PROVIDED APPROPRIATE CONDITIONS FOR HIGH-QUALITY STUDY, SCIENTIFIC, PROFESSIONAL, RESEARCH OR ARTISTIC WORK AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. implementation of study and conditions for it according to the needs and expectations of students

   (The expectations and needs of students regarding the course of study or the implementation of the study programme and the conditions for it shall also be assessed according to the form and type of the study (full-time, part-time, e-study, distance study).)

b. enabling the suitable professional, artistic and research work of students

   (The assessment shall consider the participation of students in researches, projects and other academic events, depending on the type and cycle of a study programme with regard to Article 33 of the ZViS.)

c. conditions for extracurricular activities

Explanatory note:

The assessment of compliance with this standard is mainly linked to the assessment against the quality standards on human resources, material conditions and the institution's operation (Standards 3, 4, 5 and 6).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- insufficient assessment against criterion under b); the professional, artistic and research work of students must be assessed on the basis of its content – taking into account the characteristics and specific features of the study programmes implemented by the institution;
- partial assessment of standard under b) is written under "human resources", although it should be under "students".

Guidelines for proper assessment:

When assessing the provisions of this standard, students' views should be compared with the findings of higher education teachers and other stakeholders, or with the self-evaluation findings of the institution.

In assessing the implementation and conditions of study, we should consistently bear in mind that the expectations and needs of students must be realistic and justified. Expectations should be linked to improving quality, not to reducing the demands on educational staff to perform the tasks required by the programme, to achieve learning outcomes or competences, or to facilitate the work of students.

What is the students' view on monitoring their progress in their studies, including transitions, acquisition of competences or learning outcomes? Is the view of one's own progress in study and the quality of knowledge and skills acquisition comparable to the professional view of teachers?

If there are significant differences, we should find out why it is so, what they mean and what the implications are; we should compare opinions before making a decision.

When assessing students' views on teaching methods and formats, we must also consistently take into account the content, characteristics and specific features of the programmes implemented by the institution. The complexity of the study – the complexity and depth of the study content, the cognitive and practical skills, the complexity of the students' competences envisaged and the capacity to develop them in light of the different forms of pedagogical guidance, and the prior knowledge of the students is what dictates the circumstances in which the course/study is implemented, or should be the starting point for quality assessment. This must be accompanied by an assessment of the material conditions for the implementation of the study programme in the following area of assessment, in particular the library stock, databases and links for the study programme being assessed.

What about students' opinion on practical training? It is not only a question of their opinion on the (in)adequacy of the organisation of this training; they should also answer the following questions:

- whether the practical training is likely to lead to the acquisition of the competences, knowledge, skills and competences specified in the programme, or whether such training is appropriately demanding;
- whether the company is suitable for providing such training (from the qualifications of its mentors to the conditions for practical training);
- whether the quality of such training is good, involving the participation of higher education teachers at the institution, mentors in companies and students;
- whether they are entrusted with an appropriate degree of autonomy and responsibility in their practical work;
- how they evaluate what they created or made in their practical work;
- whether such training makes a graduate capable of autonomous work?

Students' views on research are also important, especially in doctoral study programmes. Does the institution allow them to study in accordance with Article 33 of the ZViS, which defines the specific features of cycles and types of study programmes? What is their opinion on the content and complexity of research or the research project they are involved in, on the quality of their own research? Do they have suitable mentors available for the latter?

What is students' opinion on the assessment of their work? Do they think that:

- it gives the teacher a realistic insight into the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired;
- it enables students to monitor their own progress, encourages them to do quality continuous work and take an in-depth approach to their studies;
- it allows students to fulfil all their obligations; that the examination periods are timetabled accordingly;
- it leads to the acquisition of the competences or learning outcomes set out in the programme;
- it enables the identification of the students' strengths or specifics?

Important:

When assessing students' satisfaction with teaching, we should be careful not to be satisfied with views that might be based on comfort, liking and personal gain while ignoring the expertise in this area. Is it appropriate to think about the quality of teaching in the context of service satisfaction, and when?

The view of the quality of teaching cannot be developed only in the context of efficiency, optimality, effectiveness and transparency (organisational-managerial and economic concept of quality); it is also important to consider professional and academic goals and effects of teaching.

In addition to student opinion, a particularly important source for assessment is teacher reflection – reflection on the purposes and effects or quality of teaching. Professional and academic evaluation of teaching (imparting knowledge, systematising, correspondence to the discipline, deepening, generalising etc.) is important. Equally important is a discussion about the values and ideals in teaching, about what good teaching is. More specifically, the sources can be: expert survey, focus groups, interviews, external evaluations of teaching (conducted by colleagues in the field on the one hand or higher education didactics specialists on the other), teachers' diaries and professional comments of teachers on students' opinions.

It is important to consider the impact of discipline on teaching, i.e. taking into account the criteria or characteristics of disciplinary-specific higher education didactics. Who is actually educated by teachers? Is it theoreticians, applied scientists, critics, creators ... How good are graduates in this respect?

More information on teaching can be found in the evaluation of a study programme (Standard 1, assessment of teaching, page 37 to 39).

Standard 12: **THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL PROTECT STUDENTS' RIGHTS.**

Assessment criteria:

a. operation of the bodies of the higher education institution in this area

b. mechanisms for the recognition and prevention of discrimination of vulnerable groups of students and discrimination based on personal circumstances and beliefs of students

   ((The assessment shall consider the transparency, timeliness and objectivity of the operation of the higher education institution bodies in the protection of students' rights (besides the bodies determined by law, especially the appeals body of the higher education institution, various study-related committees, etc.) and timely notification of students thereof.)

c. cooperation of student representatives in the bodies of the institution with other students

   (The assessment shall consider the organisation, transparency, timeliness and prompt cooperation of students' representatives with other students – obtaining opinions and correct representation of the prevailing interests of students.)

Explanatory note:

The assessment of compliance with this standard relates mainly to the assessment of the institution's operation (Standard 2).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- listing the bodies of the institution without assessing their operation;
- indicating that students have representatives everywhere, but nothing about whether they are carrying out their role well, subject to the provisions in brackets under point c).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The finding that an institution is organised in accordance with the rules does not imply the quality of its operations. It is necessary to assess how the institution's authorities operate, whether they protect the rights of all students, inform them in a timely manner about their rights and obligations, possible consequences, possibilities for complaints, deadlines for complaints. Does the institution consistently comply with the provisions of acts and its statutes when dealing with students? Are the decisions of these bodies objective or impartial and timely?

We must therefore obtain students' views on the functioning and content of all the important bodies of the institution. Pay particular attention to students' observations on whether the institution prevents and identifies different forms of discrimination against students, how effectively it takes action, and whether it adequately protects victims and punishes perpetrators.

In addition to discrimination against vulnerable groups of students on the basis of personal beliefs and circumstances, we also determine whether the institution ensures the sexual integrity of its students, and whether it has a zero tolerance policy on sexual harassment of any kind. How is the institution organised, what measures are taken and how quickly are they taken when such harassment is detected?

Similarly to the institutional bodies, the finding that students are represented in the institutional bodies in accordance with the ZViS does not imply quality. Student representatives should answer questions such as:

- are your suggestions and views properly taken into account when decisions are taken;
- can you participate equally in the debate and make decisions on all issues, especially those affecting students;
- do you consistently present students' opinions, proposals and views at the institution: how you obtain them or what do you to obtain them;
- do you and how you regularly inform students about the work of the bodies and the decisions taken?

We obtain an assessment of the work of the student representatives from the rest of the students and from other stakeholders in the governing bodies and compare the answers of the two groups to be able to ascertain the reality of the situation.

Standard 13: **STUDENTS SHALL PARTICIPATE IN THE ASSESSMENT AND UPDATING OF THE CONTENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ACTIVITIES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION.**

Assessment criteria:

a. participation of students in drafting the mission, strategic guidelines, self-evaluation of a higher education institution and study programmes as well as their modification

   (The assessment shall consider whether the students participate in:

   - drafting the mission and strategic guidelines of the higher education institution,
   - the self-evaluation of the of the activities of the higher education institution, making suggestions for improvements and further development and whether their suggestions are processed and considered,

- the evaluation of the implementation of study programmes and in their modification, renewal and updating.)

b. methods of ensuring participation in the self-evaluation and updating of activities

(Student surveys, their analysis and notification of students of the findings is just one form of obtaining the opinions of students.)

Explanatory note:

The assessment of compliance with this standard relates mainly to the assessment of the institution's operation (Standard 6).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- assessing student participation only through surveys and representatives in the institution's bodies;
- the standard is not assessed against all the provisions in brackets in point a).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

See the guidelines for assessing the self-evaluation of an institution (Standard 6, page 81 to 82) and refer to the guidelines for assessing against standards for study programme evaluation where they concern students.

MATERIAL CONDITIONS (Article 15 of the Criteria)

Standard 14: **THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL PROVIDE SUITABLE PREMISES AND EQUIPMENT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

(The premises and equipment shall be assessed by taking into consideration the needs of the educational, scientific, research or artistic activities, method of implementing study programmes, number of students enrolled and needs of human resources. The maintenance and updating of the equipment and software shall also be assessed, especially when the higher education institution implements e-study or distance study. At the visit of the higher education institution, the ownership or lease agreements shall be checked.)

Explanatory note:

The institution must have sufficient and appropriate premises and equipment to carry out all its activities. If it does not have its own premises, it must have valid lease agreements. The leases' durations are also checked.

The most common inadequacy in the assessment:

Determining the suitability of premises and equipment only for the educational activity (the provisions in brackets in the criteria for assessing the standard are not fully taken into account).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The assessment of the adequacy of the premises and equipment is set out as part of the initial accreditation of the institution (Standards 8 and 9, page 67 and 68).

This section is devoted to a reflection on the quality assessment of laboratories in applied fields of study. The first requirement for a good laboratory is space. This affects the amount of equipment that can be installed in the laboratory. The suitability of the equipment depends not only on the requirements of the scientific research work, but also on the specificities of study programmes which include laboratory exercises.

If the study programme is training for employability (especially higher professional studies), it is essential that students will work in the laboratory with the same or similar equipment as in the work environment. Computers are not as important as the technology and software. The number of pieces and the value of the technological equipment are also more important than the provision of tools for the job.

If the study is scientific, the question of the quality of the equipment is linked to the criteria of scientific research in the field. Students are trained to handle more expensive and sophisticated equipment, superior to that in industry, so that it can be used to produce science. Such equipment produces scientific results that lead to innovation and applications within five to ten years. As a basic guideline, if we consider the value of such equipment, individual pieces, depending on the field, cost upwards of EUR 50,000. A good scientific laboratory is a testing ground that is also not found in companies. Companies do not usually have such sophisticated equipment.

The laboratory needs an operating licence. Considering the number of places for enrolment, it should be able to accommodate enough people. It should be adequately lit and adequate safety must be ensured.

If an institution has well-equipped laboratories, it is likely to spend most of its resources on laboratory equipment.

These quantitative criteria cannot be exclusive to the assessment of quality, which is certainly multifaceted. But they can be helpful.

Standard 15: **ADJUSTMENTS SHALL BE MADE FOR STUDENTS WITH VARIOUS FORMS OF DISABILITY.**

Assessment criteria:

a. adjustments of the premises and equipment

b. communication and information accessibility

(The adjustments to the premises and equipment as well as the communication and information accessibility shall enable students suitable participation in the study and the fulfilment of their needs.)

c. adjustments of study materials and the implementation of the study

(The assessment shall consider whether the adjustments allow students to study in an appropriate manner and enable the fulfilment of their needs.)

Explanatory note:

The standard must be met in particular under criteria a) and b). Failure to meet the standard because an institution has no disabled persons constitutes a major deficiency or non-compliance. Only in the assessment under point c) can it be concluded that adjustments to the delivery of studies and materials are not yet in place because the institution does not have any students with disabilities.

The assessment of compliance with this standard relates mainly to the assessment of quality standards relating to students.

The most common inadequacy in the assessment:

Although the institution is found not to meet the standard, the report states that this is understandable due to its small size, its "young age" and the fact that it has no disabled students enrolled.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

In making this assessment, we take into account specific guidelines developed in cooperation with various organisations for people with disabilities, also published on the Agency's website: **Guidelines for Accessibility in Tertiary Education in the Republic of Slovenia:** https://www.nakvis.si/akreditacije-in-evalvacije-v-visokem-solstvu/zakonodaja/.

Standard 16: **ADEQUATE AND STABLE FINANCIAL RESOURCES SHALL BE PROVIDED FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider whether the financial plan enables a smooth operation and development of the higher education institution and whether it has been drafted with consideration of the following:

- funding sources of the higher education institution,
- actual and anticipated number of students enrolled,
- number of higher education teachers and faculty assistants and other staff,
- infrastructure for the educational and scientific, professional, research or artistic activities from the relevant field,

- infrastructure for the support activity,
- development and improvement of the quality of the higher education institution activities,
- further development and potential planned expansion of higher education activities.)

Explanatory note:

The assessment also covers the institution's estimate for the next four years, or for a period to be determined by contract with the ministry responsible for higher education (where public funding is involved). The standard should also be assessed in light of the planned development of the institution (strategic orientations, etc.).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- despite the identified under-funding, no shortcomings were detected;
- the standard is not assessed in accordance with the provisions in brackets.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

At this point, it should be pointed out that a number of institutions have been found to be under-funded – including public institutions whose activities are financed from the budget. Nevertheless, we assess the standard against all the provisions for assessment and point out any deficiencies; we also explain these.

We consider whether it is appropriate:

- for the institution to rely solely on tuition fees for its funding – not neglecting the number of students enrolled;
- for the institution to rely on obtaining a concession to carry out its activities – what if one is not granted (a likely outcome in view of the rate of granting concessions in the past decade).

How reliable are other possible sources of funding for the institution?

When making recommendations for diversifying funding and, in particular, for strengthening market funding, the effects of the impact of funders on the autonomy, academic freedom and the smooth research of doctoral students (if the institution also has a doctoral programme) must be carefully assessed, and the type of institution and, in particular, its fields of study and research, which may span pure disciplines, must also be taken into account.

Standard 17: **THE LIBRARY OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SHALL HAVE SUITABLE STUDY, PROFESSIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE AND SHALL PROVIDE QUALITY LIBRARY SERVICES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. suitability of the study, professional and scientific literature

b. library stock, accessibility of the material, information bibliographic support and access to databases

(The suitability of the literature, library stock and accessibility of the material, information support and the access to databases shall be assessed with consideration of the following:

- scientific, professional, research or artistic fields of the higher education institution,
- type and cycle of study programmes it implements,
- mode of study or implementation of study programmes,
- number and needs of students, higher education teachers and faculty assistants, and other staff.)

c. professional assistance by library staff

(During the visit to the higher education institution, the proof of education of library staff shall be assessed. Any proof of training of library staff for counselling and assistance to students and other stakeholders shall also be assessed.)

d. development of library activities

(The development of these activities shall be assessed in the field of study programmes.)

Explanatory notes:

The same conditions apply to the higher education library, required by an institution to carry out its activities, regardless of whether it is **a public or private institution.**

When reaccrediting an institution, it must be determined whether it complies with the provisions of **Article 14 of the ZViS**, which prescribes a higher education library. Simply possessing agreements with various general libraries is inadequate.

The assessment of compliance with this standard relates mainly to the assessment of quality standards relating to human resources, students and the institution's operation (Standard 3).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- failure to assess against all assessment criteria (provisions in brackets);
- although the institution is still in the process of setting up a proper library (for example, it does not even have core literature), no major deficiencies or non-compliances are identified.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The assessment of the higher education library should be sufficiently detailed; the quantity and quality of the material in relation to the activities developed by the institution and the study programmes it offers.

It should be established:

- whether the library is adequately stocked in terms of the field and discipline of the study programme, and whether the literature or materials are appropriate to the type and cycle of the programme;
- whether the materials are suitable for the form of education and whether they meet the number and needs of students, higher education teachers and faculty assistants, and other staff;

- the state of information support and access to databases;
- whether the library reading room capacity is adequate.

The assessment checks that:

- the organisational structure of the institution clearly identifies the status and tasks of the higher education library, and defines the responsibilities for its operation and evaluation of its activities; the development of the library and the plan for its development are or have clearly defined objectives, taking into account the strategic development of the institution and the objectives it has set itself (Standard 1);
- the library provides:
  - access to textbooks, required and recommended literature, diploma theses and international professional and scientific literature;
  - dissemination of library materials and information;
  - a place for students and other users to study or work;
  - education, help and advice on how to use the library and information resources;
  - support for users with special needs;
- the higher education library has a publicly accessible website with up-to-date information on its activities and stock, information resources and services;
- it ensures the entry of bibliographic data on the scientific, research and professional achievements of the institution's employees into COBISS.SI;
- it has sufficient user spaces;
- it provides a wireless internet connection;
- it has equipment adapted to specific user groups (e.g. blind and partially sighted, mobility impaired);
- its operating hours are adequate.

In addition to determining whether and how library materials are substantively related to the institution's academic, scientific, professional, research fields or the arts, it is also important to determine how the library selects, acquires, organises and provides access to diverse, reliable, quality and relevant information resources and information. How does it grow its collection? Does it provide users with access to electronic resources relevant to the institution's study programmes and scientific, professional, research or artistic work?

The library collection consists of library materials held by the library itself and resources for which it provides remote access, at least for a limited period of time. On-site and remote access must be provided for:

- compulsory study material,
- international scientific literature collections and databases, alone or in cooperation with other libraries,
- final theses of graduates and the publications of the institution's higher education teachers, faculty assistants and researchers.

It should be noted that library materials obtained through interlibrary loan and materials listed in the library catalogue, although freely available on the internet, are not part of the library's collection. The higher education library provides users with free access or remote access to the reference collection and at least one copy of the required study material.

It is necessary to also check the adequacy of the library staff's qualifications in accordance with Article 54 of the ZViS. Their capacity to implement the library development plan is important. We also assess whether they are receiving ongoing professional development or how the institution is providing for their professional development.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT, MODIFICATION, UPDATING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDY PROGRAMMES (Article 16 of the Criteria)

The area shall be assessed according to the quality standards and assessment criteria for the evaluation of study programmes.

Explanatory note:

The assessment is explained in the evaluation of the study programme (page 34 to 49). For universities and larger institutions with a wide range of activities, we determine which study programmes to evaluate based on the findings report for the institution. These should be programmes whose evaluation, updating and implementation, or the scientific, professional, research or artistic work of their course holders, related to the study programme or its subjects, should be assessed in more detail.

External evaluation of a college shall be carried out at least every five years. It differs from the external evaluation of an institution in that it is a separate procedure and is not part of the reaccreditation procedure. The latter is not within the competence of the Agency but of the ministry competent for higher education.

The process of an **external evaluation of a college** assesses the college's overall performance and its progress since the last evaluation. There are five areas of assessment, same as for the reaccreditation of an institution.

The mandatory part is the site visit to a college, which usually lasts two days. The visit should identify the quality of the college in all areas of assessment, paying particular attention to the fundamental characteristic of higher vocational education, which is strongly practice-oriented (education for the labour market, 40% of each higher vocational study programme is devoted to practical education in the working environment), and, of course, also to an in-depth substantive assessment of the self-evaluation, both at the level of the college and of the study programmes it implements.

ASSESSMENT ACCORDING TO QUALITY STANDARDS FOR EVALUATION OF A HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGE

OPERATION OF THE COLLEGE (Article 6 of the Criteria)

Standard 1: **THE COLLEGE SHALL SUCCESSFULLY FULFILL ITS MISSION IN THE SLOVENIAN AND INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION AREA. BY ACHIEVING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES, IT SHALL MAINTAIN THE QUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. consistency of the strategy with the mission, local, national and European guidelines

b. feasibility and comprehensiveness of the strategy

c. adequacy of the method of assessing the implementation of the strategy

d. regular professional and development cooperation with other colleges and/or other professional organisations

(The document shall clearly demonstrate the educational, professional or artistic objectives. In relation with the mission and vision, further strategic planning of the college activities, monitoring of set objectives and commitments with implementation deadlines and persons responsible shall be assessed; the strategic plan shall also include a timeline for the monitoring of activities and improved achievement of objectives since the external evaluation.

The following shall also be assessed:

- success in fulfilling the mission in the local, Slovenian and international higher education area;
- participation of internal stakeholders (management, lecturers and faculty assistants, students and other staff of the college) and external stakeholders (e.g. graduates, employers, competent ministries, chambers, associations, etc.) in strategic planning;
- successful completion of strategic plans since the previous external evaluation, or a relation between the set objectives and the actual development of the college;
- success in regular professional and development cooperation with other colleges and/or other professional organisations.)

Explanatory note:

Assessment against this standard is linked to assessment against other quality standards; for example, a close substantive connection of strategic planning and its implementation in the field of the college's educational, professional or artistic work.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- most often, the assessment under criterion a) is omitted altogether;
- there is no substantive assessment, just listing or copying of statements from documents;
- lack of insight into the past and future of the college, lack of evaluation of its development in this context;
- adopted mission, vision and strategic plan is not a strength – it is a condition that must be met.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

An insight into the past development of the college is necessary because we need to find out the following:

- whether it pursues its vision, mission and strategic goals;
- whether there have been changes in its development and why;
- how any changes or expansion of activities are explained and justified in its documents, or whether this is reflected in the college's future development planning;
- whether its orientations are evident from the activities it carries out and related to the study programmes it implements or plans to implement;
- whether the past development of the college and the planning of its future development are linked to the trends in the Slovenian and international higher education area and how this is reflected (for example: the college's cooperation with companies or labour market, other colleges and economic or public institutions; the improved quality of the institution's educational, professional or artistic activities; its contribution to the development and quality of a particular activity or profession).

Once this has been established, we assess the opinions of stakeholders on the development of the college, which will also give us insight into their (lack of) participation in the implementation of the strategy and strategic planning.

Without a substantive assessment, we cannot assess whether the strategic planning is feasible and comprehensive, and whether the monitoring of the college's activities and the improvement of the achievement of objectives since the last evaluation are adequate.

The assessment against this and the following standards should take into account the status, size and any other specifics of the college.

Standard 2: **THE INTERNAL ORGANISATION OF THE COLLEGE SHALL ENSURE THE PARTICIPATION OF LECTURERS, OTHER PROFESSIONAL STAFF, NON-EDUCATIONAL STAFF, STUDENTS, GRADUATES, EMPLOYERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS IN THE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider the representation of stakeholders in the bodies of the college, especially students, and the exercise of their rights and duties, whereby it shall be important to ensure:

- equality,
- mutual cooperation and respect,
- consideration of the needs of stakeholders.

The college shall be organised and shall operate in accordance with the law and its memorandum of association, which shall clearly define the competences, tasks, rights (to participation, legal protection or appeal, etc.) and obligations of the management, employees and students in the bodies of the college.)

Explanatory note:

The contents of the provisions of the formally adopted memorandum of association and other regulations of the college need to be verified in practice. It should be noted that this area is regulated more precisely by the regulations of the competent ministry than in the area of higher education. For example, the adequacy of the memorandum of association is verified by the ministry in its own procedures.

The governing bodies, their exact composition and competences are set out in Articles 7 to 15 of the ZVSI; it should be taken into account whether the college is organised as an educational institution or as an organisational unit of an institution. In the case of a private college, the organisational possibilities are wider: according to Article 6 of the ZVSI, it can be an educational institution, a company, an organisational unit thereof... The mandatory bodies of the college depend on this. They do not include the student council.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- often just a statement that the rights, obligations etc. are clearly defined;
- emphasising the small size of the college or the small number of students, which in itself should mean that the standard is met; moreover, that the operation is above-average; without justification.

Assessment against this standard is linked to the assessment of human resources and students, as well as of the college's operation, especially in the area of self-evaluation.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Although the exercise of some of the rights and obligations are also to be assessed in the areas of human resources and students and self-evaluation, it is at this point that we need to establish the integrity of the operation of the college in accordance with the rules laid down by the college itself or by the competent ministry. We should look at the provisions from a substantive point of view and determine the factual situation in practice. The latter is very important because the mere fact that a certain regulation exists does not in itself say anything.

In addition to the clarity of the definitions of competences, tasks and rights, it is also important that they are correct.

We should pay attention to the following:

We should also assess how things are done in practice when a regulation is insufficient – even in areas it does not cover. We may find that the college is doing a better job than the regulation suggests, which is crucial for quality. In this case, the college only has to formalise its conduct, so this is not a non-compliance or major deficiency according to Article 21 of the Criteria.

Standard 3: **A COLLEGE SHALL DEMONSTRATE A HIGH QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT OR ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES AND THE RELATED IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE FIELDS WHERE IT IMPLEMENTS THESE ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider the quality, development and progress of the educational, professional, development or artistic activities in view of the study programmes implemented by the college. Important achievements are those recognised as such by the profession from the relevant field because they have a profound and significant impact on the development of the profession and the development of knowledge or art. They are a result of high-quality professional, development or artistic activities.)

Explanatory notes:

The focus is on the work of the college, i.e. the lecturers and other professional staff who work or are active there as professionals or artists. Work "native" to another college or institution does not count. The college must plan, implement and monitor this work, determine its value or quality and, where necessary, improve it. It can demonstrate this through high-profile services, products, practical projects etc. by the staff active in the college.

Given the specific features of higher vocational education, professional and/or artistic and development activities should be developed in conjunction with the economy/employers, and educational activities should take into account the principles of didactics in the field of vocational education.

We should evaluate the importance (influence, value of the recognition, impact, usability) of the achievements. The standard is quite clear – IT IS THE DEMONSTRATION of the quality of

educational, professional or artistic work, which must be assessed on its merits according to the Assessment Criteria.

The assessment under this standard is mainly linked to the assessment against the quality standards on human resources, students and library activities, and, of course, to self-evaluation of professional, development or artistic work, also taking into account the strategic orientations of the college and plans for its future development; it is about close substantive connections with the study programmes and development work carried out by the college.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- assessment only at the level of lecturers who "bring" their professional or artistic activity with them or carry it out at another college or institution;
- there is often no substantive assessment of professional or artistic work, but simply a listing or copying of titles of projects etc. from documents; if a college has a large number of these, the experts assess this work to be adequate, often even excellent, without any assessment of its value, impact, importance, etc.;
- the assessment of this part does not take into account the content of the study programmes that the college implements.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Educational, professional, development or artistic work should be assessed at the level of the college, not at the level of individual lecturers or instructors. Given the strong practice orientation of higher vocational education, we should assess the connection of this work with the cooperation with the economic and non-economic sector.

It should be established:

- which fields of study or professional or artistic fields the college should develop, depending on the activity in which the study programmes are based or on the fundamental characteristics of the programmes it implements;
- whether the college has a track record of quality professional or artistic achievements in the activities it develops.

We should not assess only the conditions for educational, professional, development or artistic work and, for example, its planning and related administrative and organisational aspects, but above all its content and significance in its own right. The quality of this work in higher education is assessed primarily through its applicability – the segment where knowledge already generated is transferred into practice and where innovation and adaptability to the economic and non-economic sectors and the labour market are important.

We should avoid the following:

- shift to another characteristic, phenomenon or condition, when in assessing the quality of professional, development or artistic work, the attention is diverted from the quality of activities and achievements in the field to the quality of the collaboration or the organisation and material conditions for such collaboration;
- shift between quality and quantity, common in counting projects, products, services etc., which is then the basis of direct statement of the assessment of quality of scientific, development or artistic work without recognising its intrinsic value.

Standard 4: **THE PRACTICAL TRAINING OF STUDENTS IN A WORK ENVIRONMENT SHALL BE WELL ORGANISED AND IMPLEMENTED. THERE SHALL BE RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION.**

Assessment criteria:

a. implementation of practical training

(The description or documents shall clearly demonstrate the organisation of practical training, its providers and the tasks of all participants (lecturers – organisers of practical training, practice mentors and students). In relation to that, the implementation of such training in work environment shall be assessed.)

b. contracts concluded with various partners (companies, institutes, institutions and other organisations, hereinafter: companies) for the practical training of students

(The assessment shall concern the suitability of the companies where students undertake their practical training and the cooperation between the college or the organiser of the practical training and the companies. At the visit, specific tripartite agreements on students' practical training and any other cooperation agreements between the college and companies shall be checked.)

c. continuous verification of the qualifications and competences of practice mentors

(The assessment shall concern how colleges verify the qualifications, suitability and competence of practice mentors. It shall be checked whether the college organises training, round tables and other forms of working meetings with mentors.)

d. satisfaction of participants in practical training

(The assessment shall consider the satisfaction of all participants: students, mentors of practical training, lecturers – organisers of practical training at colleges and in companies.)

Explanatory notes:

Practical training is an essential part of higher vocational education and should always be assessed thoroughly and in depth.

To assess the satisfaction of participants in practical training, please refer to the web link where the relevant documentation is published, or to the self-evaluation report of the college. **"Satisfaction"** covers more than satisfaction with the implementation of practical training – it is **principally about assessing the quality of the training, its relevance in terms of content and scope,** while taking into account the content of study programmes.

Colleges often recognise work placement for employed students, which is something to pay particular attention to. **A work placement may be recognised only if it is relevant in terms of content, complexity, scope, quality, etc., or if it is in line with the content of the study programme, learning outcomes or competences to be obtained by students and graduates.** Recognition of work placement must be documented by the college; the documents must clearly list all of the above.

The assessment under this standard is mainly linked to the assessment against the quality standards on human resources and students, taking into account the strategic orientations of the college, plans for its future development and self-evaluation; it is about close substantive connections with the study programmes implemented by the college.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the content of study programmes is not sufficiently taken into account in the assessment;
- the assessment of the satisfaction of participants in practical training often ends with assessing the satisfaction of students and, in some cases, of mentors in companies and employers (too little or nothing about the satisfaction and especially professional opinion of all lectures, not only organisers of practical training);
- satisfaction assessment is flawed; it focuses on satisfaction with the delivery of practical training, but ignores its quality, content and relevance;
- the assessment of the recognised work placement for students already in employment is inadequate – there is no finding as to whether it is appropriate in terms of content and complexity or whether it is in line with the study programme.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

In order to adequately assess the systemic regulation of practical training, its organisation and the other elements required to assess the standard, it is not sufficient to examine the plans for practical training and find that they contain all the necessary elements. What is written in these documents needs to be assessed in practice:

- whether the practical training is provided in accordance with the content of the study programmes that the college implements;
- whether the practical training is of an appropriate level of complexity and offers the student what is set out in the study programme – i.e. whether the work obligations match the graduate's profile;
- how many companies are suitable for practical training of students in relation to the number of enrolled students;
- whether practical training contracts are of the required standard and whether their number is sufficient for all students;
- the quality of cooperation between lecturers – organisers of practical training, other lecturers, students, mentors and other representatives of companies (employers) – from defining the practical training in line with the study programme, monitoring its progress, assessment and documentation to (self-)evaluation;
- how the knowledge, skills and competences acquired in practical training are evaluated by lecturers, company representatives (mentors) as well as employers, in addition to the students.

Suitable companies are those that can offer students practical training relevant to the content and complexity of their studies; that have good material and human resource conditions, and especially suitably educated and qualified mentors for such training.

Continuous verification of the qualifications and competences of practice mentors is important.

<u>We should pay attention to the following:</u>

- recognition of work placement to students who are already employed. It should be checked whether it corresponded to the content, complexity and scope set out (prescribed) in the study programme.

We should avoid the following:

- pars pro toto shift: merely describing the organisation and course of practice without an actual assessment of its content. For example, the finding that students are satisfied with the variety of practical training opportunities and that such training provides them with the opportunity to perform profession-specific tasks is indicative of the fact that training is appropriate in professional terms and that there are potentials for training, but it cannot be an indication of the suitability of the working environments, the quality of the organisation of the training or the quality of its implementation.

Standard 5: **THE COLLEGE SHALL MONITOR THE NEEDS FOR KNOWLEDGE AND EMPLOYMENT NEEDS IN THE ENVIRONMENT. IT SHALL PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING EMPLOYMENT POSSIBILITIES IN THE FIELDS SUITABLE FOR THE COMPETENCES OR LEARNING OUTCOMES OF GRADUATES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. cooperation of the college with the environment or employers and its own graduates

   (The assessment shall consider whether this cooperation is a suitable basis for the constant monitoring of the needs for knowledge or graduates, monitoring the adequacy of acquired competences or learning outcomes, prompt notification of students regarding this topic and helping students to plan their professional path.)

b. monitoring employment, employability and competitiveness of graduates

   (The adequacy of monitoring the employability, employment, competences and career paths of graduates is assessed, as well as the appropriateness of using the findings to plan enrolment according to labour market needs.)

c. development of job centres, alumni clubs or other forms of organisation

   (The assessment shall consider job centres, graduate clubs or other forms of organisation and their operation.)

Explanatory note:

Unlike in higher education, where the standard is selectively applied, assessment against it is of paramount importance in college evaluation. We should not forget that higher vocational education is designed to meet the demonstrated needs of the economic and non-economic sectors and to provide graduates with immediate employment in accordance with the occupational standards on the basis of which the higher vocational study programmes have been developed or adopted by the competent minister.

The assessment under this standard is mainly linked to the assessment against the quality standards on students, taking into account the strategic orientations of the college and plans for its future development; it is about close substantive connections with the study programmes implemented by the college, their self-evaluation, modification and updating.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the content of study programmes implemented by the college is not sufficiently taken into account in the assessment;
- the assessment of the employment, employability and competitiveness of graduates in light of labour market needs is not sufficiently in-depth and well-founded;
- a finding that there is cooperation, but nothing on whether it is adequate for monitoring the needs for graduates, etc.; what is listed in brackets under criterion a).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

In making the assessment, we should be aware of the relevance of this standard for higher vocational education. It should be established:

- how high-quality and productive is the cooperation with employers and whether it is permanent (continuous);
- whether the college, in cooperation with them, annually determines the actual employment prospects of graduates and plans enrolment places accordingly;
- whether employers demonstrate a need for graduates only in the immediate area or more widely;
- what the future employment rate of graduates will be, taking into account the evolution of the profession and the situation of employers;
- how the college nurtures, supports and monitors the career development of graduates.

Standard 6: **THE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM SHALL ENABLE THE CLOSURE OF THE QUALITY LOOP IN ALL AREAS OF OPERATION OF A COLLEGE.**

Assessment criteria:

a. understanding of the meaning and role of an internal quality assurance system

   (The manual shall demonstrate the internal quality assurance system of the college. The assessment shall consider whether the quality loop is closed, which shall be reflected as:

   - methodologic, comparable and verifiable collection of data, their analysis and assessment of quality of the activities of the college,
   - monitoring the satisfaction of lecturers and faculty assistants, professional and other staff, students and external stakeholders,
   - participation, accountability and exercise of the rights and obligations of stakeholders in self-evaluation procedures,
   - planning, implementation and monitoring of actions for the assurance and improvement of the quality of the activities of the college or for the improvement of the development and progress, elimination of deficiencies and non-compliances.)

b. self-evaluation report for the last completed self-evaluation period, actions based on self-evaluation in the period since the previous external evaluation (or establishment), and the plan of improvements for the following self-evaluation period;

(The self-evaluation report shall demonstrate that the college assesses:

- content of study programmes,
- appropriateness of the implementation of study programmes,
- success of its students (their progress, transition rate, attainment of competences or learning outcomes...),
- professional, development or artistic work of the college,
- adequacy and diversity of material and human resources, and financial success,

and that it

- documents the established deficiencies and flaws and proposals for improvements,
- eliminates the established deficiencies and flaws, and improves the quality of the educational, professional, development or artistic activities and other activities of the college,
- analyses its achievements.

The fulfilment of the roles, rights and duties of stakeholders set in advance in the self-evaluation shall be also assessed.)

c. the internal quality assurance system enables and promotes the development, integration and updating of the educational, professional, development or artistic activities and the impact of these activities on the environment

(The assessment shall be based on the self-evaluation report and information about the educational, professional, development or artistic work.

It is a more detailed assessment of the development of the activities of the college in terms of of content. The following shall be determined:

- whether the internal quality assurance system allows for accurate and critical assessments of the situation, which supports the development of the educational, professional, development or artistic activities and their contents, and
- the satisfaction of stakeholders with the internal quality assurance system.)

Explanatory notes:

The assessment of documents such as the quality manual and the self-evaluation report **should focus on the content or quality of the self-evaluation: how in-depth and comprehensive it is, what analyses and arguments are used to assess its quality, and how content-oriented are the planned actions resulting from the assessments.**

The standard should be assessed in its entirety, not just in part (usually formally – self-evaluation procedures, regulations etc.). **The emphasis must be on substantive assessment; the assessment criteria clearly and unequivocally refer to this.**

The assessment against this standard is linked to the assessment against all the standards in all the areas of assessment of the college.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the assessment focuses only on the internal quality assurance system in formal terms (as it is evident mainly from the college's quality manual or related regulations), or only on formal procedures without substance;

- finding that there is cooperation, but nothing about whether it is appropriate – listing the participants in the self-evaluation without recognising their role, influence, opinions, requirements, etc.;
- no indication of whether the self-evaluation is in-depth, analytical, critical, etc. or whether and how all the activities of the college are assessed;
- no findings on whether the actions resulting from the self-evaluation are of good quality, meaningful and linked to the content of the higher vocational education activities;
- no findings on the impact of students, lecturers, other staff, employers and other (external) stakeholders on the development and quality of the college's activities;
- frequent reference to surveys without a substantive assessment of survey results (furthermore, surveys are not the only way of obtaining opinions, suggestions, solutions, etc.);
- a cursory statement that the quality loop is closed without any substantive justification for this conclusion.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

We should establish whether the self-evaluation is sufficiently in-depth, critical and comprehensive. Is it balanced in covering the content of all the college's activities – from educational to professional, development or artistic; this also depends on the study programmes it implements and on what it wants to develop strategically – what are its strategic objectives? Does it also include an assessment and a look at the development of the human resources, library activities, as well as the premises, equipment and financial management of the college?

The self-evaluation of the content of a given study programme, its modification and updating, and the adequacy of its implementation are assessed in more detail in the evaluation of the study programme (especially under Standard 20), while here it should be assessed whether and how (in terms of the depth of their content) the college evaluates all the study programmes it implements:

- whether the evaluation of study contents takes into account the criteria of the professional field (profession);
- whether the content of study programmes is updated correctly according to the original purpose of the study;
- whether the effects (suitability, quality...) of accredited contents or modifications are considered comprehensively and what is the opinion of various stakeholders about them.

Self-evaluation of the success of its students (their progress, transition rate, attainment of competences or learning outcomes etc.): What is the analysis of achieving competences and/or learning outcomes? We should make sure that it is not only about listing average grades and rate of transition/completion of studies. It is important to analyse the findings of lecturers and other professional staff, mentors of practical training in companies and employers, and students' and graduates' opinions on the competences or learning outcomes acquired. Is the professional view of education providers balanced with the students' view of their own progress in their studies, the quality of practical training and/or acquiring knowledge and skills?

Self-evaluation of the professional, developmental or artistic work (hereafter: professional work) of the college must be in-depth:

- does it contain a reflection on the quality, importance and effects of the professional work;
- is its relevance for the study field or programme actually assessed?

It is not appropriate to self-evaluate only the conditions for professional work and, for example, its planning, administrative and organisational aspects; it is the content and relevance for practice, development and innovation that needs to be (self-)evaluated.

The (self-)evaluation of the adequacy of study programme implementation in conjunction with the assessment of the quality of teaching cannot only comprise:

- counting pedagogical and andragogical trainings, lecturer exchanges, average grades, rates of transition and completion of studies;
- discussing the results of students' direct satisfaction with teaching and implementation of study programmes (the problem of replacing professional assessments with attitudes that may be based on comfort, liking and personal gain).

It is also necessary to assess whether the study is of high quality, the study is of an appropriate level of complexity, depth, focus or practicality for its type.

The (self-)evaluation of material, human and financial resources must be based on all the activities carried out by the college. We should not forget specific equipment, if needed, and whether the college also evaluates the quality of these resources outside itself (for example: the material conditions and the qualifications of the mentors for practical training in companies).

It is not enough to look at the closure of the quality loop only from a PDCA process perspective. The important part is a substantively completed self-evaluation or internal quality assessment which:

- brings together all relevant perspectives on the college's activities and development;
- takes into account different perspectives: those of lecturers and other professional staff, students and representatives of the external environment (employers);
- also includes or integrates the substantive findings of the relevant (study) commissions.

Good self-evaluation is the result of a comprehensive assessment that includes documenting, analysing, evaluating and planning actions:

- with a balanced content;
- with the stress on argumentation and reflection of the situation;
- without phase, time and other shifts in modalities of presenting findings and assessments;
- without shifts related to the frequency of assessments (overly asymmetric in terms of areas of assessment);
- by a way of assessing that is not only based on indicators, but also seeks the intrinsic value in what is being observed;
- by using concepts of quality more deliberately and openly.

We need to move from assessing processes (action plan, activities, implementation timelines, holders and their supervisors) to a substantive discussion: towards the end of the self-evaluation cycle, the quality of study needs to be seen from a broader perspective. The content and purpose of the actions taken by the college as a result of self-evaluation are important. **This concerns developing arguments and assessments as to why the college's activity is fit for purpose and good, or in which content and implementation aspects improvements should be considered and why.**

If the actions in the self-evaluation are reasonable but not fully implemented, this does not mean that the quality loop is not closed. This is a shift to another characteristic.

The condition for the closure of the quality loop is precise and comprehensive self-evaluation.

The closure of the quality loop also means linking the professional argument with the student argument and that of the external environment (economic and non-economic sectors).

We should pay attention to the following:

For example, recommendations that the college should draw up a new inventory or quality process flowchart or more transparent communication channels are questionable. In fact, an inventory or definition of administrative procedures cannot be a sufficient basis for quality work of a college.

Quick escape routes can be problematic, such as redefining actions in a way that is not difficult to implement – with phase shifts into conditionality and with time shifts into the future. Instead of writing that you are going to do something, you just write that you are going to plan something.

Standard 7: **THE COLLEGE SHALL INFORM THE STAKEHOLDERS AND THE PUBLIC ABOUT ITS STUDY PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES IN A TIMELY MANNER.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider the content, reliability, comprehensibility and accuracy of the information regarding the activities of the college and its accessibility to potential and actual students, graduates, lecturers and other professional staff, non-education staff, other stakeholders and the broader public.)

Besides the general information on study programmes, enrolment and selection procedures, course and completion of study, the assessment shall concern whether potential and actual students and other stakeholders receive sufficient information regarding the following:

- teaching methods and study modes, competences or learning outcomes achieved by students or graduates,
- methods and opportunities for professional, development or artistic work of students,
- employability of graduates, needs for their knowledge or the possibilities for continuing studies.)

Explanatory note:

Rather than listing the different forms of providing information, the content, reliability, comprehensibility and topicality of the information should be assessed; it should be established whether it is relevant to those to whom it is intended.

The most frequent example of inadequacy in assessment:

A bare enumeration of the different forms of information provision, without any assessment of the information (the standard is not assessed according to the assessment provisions).

The guidelines for a proper assessment:

Against this quality standard are set out in great detail in the Criteria or application form, and are generally followed in the assessment; we should take care to ensure that the information on the college's activities is indeed timely, relevant and useful for different stakeholder groups. It should also be tailored to different groups (in terms of content, according to the needs of each group of students, etc.).

HUMAN RESOURCES (Article 7 of the Criteria)

Standard 8: **LECTURERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONAL STAFF ARE PROVIDED TO IMPLEMENT HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING, PROFESSIONAL, DEVELOPMENT OR ARTISTIC WORK.**

Assessment criteria:

a. educational and professional development of lecturers and professional staff since the previous external evaluation has been ensured

   (The assessment shall consider the assistance of the college to lecturers and professional staff in their career development (which also includes the training of lecturers regarding the assessment of the students' knowledge, developing and implementing high-quality teaching methods, preparing study materials, etc., with consideration to the work with different groups of students or their needs). It shall be determined whether the college keeps relevant registers and evidence (regarding education, training, etc.).

b. lecturers' achievements in the professional field

   (The quality of the work shall be assessed especially in relation to the field of the courses where they are providers, in relation to the content of a study programme, study or artistic field and particularities characteristic of the field. It shall be demonstrated by professional publications, professional projects, artworks, exhibitions, events, products or services that are recognised, relevant, contemporary and visible, namely for the field in which they are active as lecturers.)

c. type of employment of lecturers and other professional staff

Explanatory notes:

The director or head teacher and the lecturer – organiser of practical training must have full employment in accordance with Point 2 of Article 26 of the ZVSI.

The view of lecturers and other staff on meeting the quality criteria or standards in the area of human resources is important.

The assessment against this standard is mainly linked to the assessment against the standards on the operation and self-evaluation of the college. It is also related to students and material conditions.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- omitting the assessment against individual points, most often b;
- inadequate assessment according to the standard under point a); it is not enough to simply list plans or evidence of human resources training – the content (relevance) of the training needs to be assessed in light of the views of lecturers;
- it is not clear from the assessment that the lecturers are active as professionals or artists in the fields of all study programmes implemented by the college;
- mere enumeration of projects, programmes, achievements etc. without assessing their content.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The guidelines for the assessment of professional or artistic work are listed in Standard 3; the difference is that we shift to identifying this work for individual lecturers of study programmes. This means that an individual can "bring some projects along", i.e. that it is not necessary that all of them are native to the college being evaluated.

Let us stress again that an assessment of the value, visibility and quality of professional or artistic achievements is important for the quality of lecturers' professional or artistic work.

It is important to assess:

- for teaching in which study programme (taking into account the specifics or content of the programme) is the quality of the course lecturers assessed; which work they must predominantly do in addition to teaching (professional or artistic);
- whether the lecturers are active as professionals or artists in the field of study programmes whose holders they are.

In assessing the quality of human resources, it is therefore important to assess, in terms of the end state, the quality of teaching as well as the quality of the professional or artistic work of lecturers.

When assessing how pedagogical and professional development of lecturers has been ensured since the last accreditation, we should not only look at the number of training courses or events; an assessment of content is also needed. The assessment should be based on self-evaluation and expert opinions of stakeholders.

It should be established:

- what the lecturers need, what they think of the education, training, seminars, etc. that the college offers or has included in the human resources training plan;
- whether the college has consulted with and taken into account the needs of lecturers when planning and selecting training and related events;
- how the training was evaluated (especially by those it targeted).

We should avoid the following:

- shift between quality and quantity, when the assessment of the quality of professional work is based only on a count of publications, projects, products etc. – without recognising its value and importance;
- phase shift focusing on the introduction of staff interviews, the form and extent of employment or the lecturer education plan. Instead of addressing the pedagogical and professional competences of lecturers, the focus is shifted to assessing the accompanying conditions.

Standard 9: **NON-EDUCATIONAL STAFF SHALL BE PROVIDED FOR EFFICIENT ASSISTANCE AND COUNSELLING.**

Assessment criteria:

a. type and suitability of the assistance and counselling provided to students and other stakeholders

b. number, field of work and qualification structure of non-educational staff

(The assessment shall consider whether the number, work area and qualification structure of non-educational staff correspond to the difficulty of tasks they perform, number of students enrolled and diversification of the college, i.e. the fields where they perform their activities.)

c. education and training of non-educational staff

(The assessment shall consider the help of the college in the career development of non-educational staff, especially the help in working with different groups of stakeholders with consideration of their needs. It shall be determined whether the college keeps registers on the implementation of the plan and evidence regarding education or training).

Explanatory note:

The compliance with the standard shall be assessed on all points in accordance with the prescribed provisions, and the non-educational staff's view of it is important.

The student affairs clerk must have a regular employment relationship in accordance with Point 2 of Article 26 of the ZVSI.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The assessment of non-educational staff is also closely linked to the size of the college and the diversity of its activities, or the number of the study programmes it implements, the modes of delivery of education, the needs of different groups of students, etc. Different types and appropriateness of support and advice to students and other stakeholders, as well as the number and educational structure of non-educational staff depend on this.

In addition to the already known and permanent tasks carried out by the staff in the student affairs offices, whose assessment is established and good, it is important to consider the following:

- what is the study programme where we assess the quality of the work of non-educational staff done to assist in the organisation (e.g. organising practical training, seminars, projects; setting up laboratories, etc.);
- are non-educational staff appropriately trained for the types of assistance they offer;
- whether the number of non-educational staff is sufficient for quality work, or whether their burden may be excessive.

When assessing how professional development or training of non-educational staff has been ensured, we should not only count the training courses or events but also assess their content. The assessment should be based on self-evaluation and opinions of stakeholders.

<u>It should be established:</u>

- what training they need for the work they perform, what they think of the education, training, seminars, etc. that the college offers or has included in the human resources training plan;
- whether the college has consulted with and taken into account the needs of non-educational staff when planning and selecting training and related events, and how the non-educational staff evaluated the training targeting them;
- whether they have adequate material resources and good conditions to do their work.

STUDENTS (Article 8 of the Criteria)

Standard 10: **THE COLLEGE SHALL PROVIDE ITS STUDENTS ADEQUATE ASSISTANCE AND COUNSELLING.**

Assessment criteria:

a. consideration of the diversity and needs of students in the establishment and determination of the content of counselling or assistance

   (The assessment shall consider whether the college takes into account the diversity of students and their needs (full-time, part-time, special needs, foreign students, students with various forms of disability). This concerns the following:

   - types and content of assistance and counselling services,
   - methods of assistance and counselling,
   - accessibility of services or non-educational staff,
   - accessibility of lecturers and other professional staff.)

b. timely and efficient notification of students

   (Students shall promptly receive information for an uninterrupted and effective study as well as information concerning the operation of the college, including the operation of the internal quality assurance system. The provision of information shall be assessed by taking into consideration Standard 7 regarding the assessment area "operation of a college".)

c. monitoring the satisfaction of students with services

d. assistance in conclusion of practical training contracts

Explanatory note:

The students' view of how the standard and all standards in the "Students" field are being complied with is important for proper assessment (against all points and assessment provisions). Findings should not be based solely or mainly on the results of student surveys, which are often not even representative.

The assessment against this standard relates mainly to the assessment against the quality standards on human resources and of the college's operation.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the student perspective is not reflected in the findings, or is reflected only partially;
- the identification of the monitoring of students' satisfaction with the services is not substantiated – "satisfaction" means taking position on quality, adequacy, scope of the services etc., taking into account the criteria under a) and b).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

In assessing this standard, we must also take into account the number, specifics and content of the study programmes which the college implements, the ways of implementing education,

the different groups of students that may be present (full-time, part-time, foreign, special needs, etc.), and we must compare the findings of the assessment against Standards 6, 7, 8 and 9, in particular, with the views of the students. It is therefore important to get the view of all stakeholders (staff and students) on the same issue. Only by considering all the opinions in depth can we make an objective assessment on the assistance and advice given to students – the same applies, of course, to the other standards.

We should not be satisfied with merely listing the types or modalities of assistance and advisory services, but should evaluate them in terms of their content, taking into account what is listed in paragraph one. The same applies to the accessibility of services or of non-educational staff and lecturers and other professional staff; for example, being accessible electronically at any time, or vice versa, does not mean much in itself. Likeability, comfort, narrow or personal interests etc. should not be exclusively equated with quality, as they are only one aspect of quality, not always important for the quality of education.

Standard 11: **STUDENTS SHALL BE PROVIDED APPROPRIATE CONDITIONS FOR HIGH-QUALITY STUDY, PROFESSIONAL, DEVELOPMENT OR ARTISTIC WORK AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. implementation of study and conditions for it according to the needs and expectations of students

   (The expectations and needs of students regarding the course of study or the implementation of the study programme and the conditions for it shall also be assessed according to the form and type of the study (full-time, part-time, e-study, distance study).)

b. enabling the suitable professional, artistic and development work of students

   (Students' participation in projects and other events relevant to the development of the college shall be assessed.)

c. conditions for extracurricular activities

d. providing adequate and quality practical training for students

   (Students must be provided with adequate and high-quality practical training in companies to the annual extent of 400 hours. If the student cannot find a suitable employer on their own, the college shall help them.)

Explanatory note:

The assessment against this standard is mainly linked to the assessment against the quality standards on human resources, material conditions and the college's operation (Standards 3, 4, 5 and 6).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- insufficient assessment of criterion under b); the professional or artistic work of students must be assessed on the basis of its content – taking into account the college's study programmes;
- insufficient assessment of the quality of students' practical training, taking into account the suitability of the employer and the qualifications of the mentors in the companies.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Students' views should be compared with the findings of lecturers, especially organisers of practical training, mentors in companies and employers, or with the college's self-evaluation findings.

In assessing the implementation and conditions of study, we should consistently bear in mind that the expectations and needs of students must be realistic and justified. Expectations should be linked to improving quality, not to reducing the demands on educational staff to perform the tasks required by the programme, to achieve learning outcomes or competences, or to facilitate the work of students.

What is the students' view on monitoring their progress in their studies, including transitions, acquisition of competences or learning outcomes? Is the view of one's own progress in study and the quality of knowledge and skills acquisition comparable to the professional view of teachers? If there are significant differences, we should find out why it is so; we should compare opinions before making a decision.

When assessing students' views on teaching methods and formats, we must also consistently take into account the characteristics of programmes (compulsory nature of practical training in companies) and specific features of the study content. The complexity of the study – the complexity and depth of the study content, the cognitive and practical skills, the complexity of the competences envisaged and the capacity to develop them in light of the different forms of pedagogical guidance, and the prior knowledge of the students is what dictates the circumstances in which the course/study is implemented, or should be the starting point for quality assessment. This must be accompanied by assessing the material conditions for the study programme in the following area of assessment, in particular the library stock, databases and links for the study programme being assessed.

What about students' opinion on practical training? In addition to their opinion on the (in)appropriateness of the organisation of this training, they should answer the following questions:

- is the practical training likely to lead to the acquisition of the competences, knowledge, skills and competences specified in the programme, or is such training appropriately complex;
- is the company suitable for providing such training (from the qualifications of its mentors to the conditions for it);
- is the quality of such training good, involving the participation of the college lecturers, mentors in companies and students;
- are they entrusted with an appropriate degree of autonomy and responsibility in their practical work;
- how they evaluate what they created or made in their practical work;
- is this training a good base for autonomous work in the profession?

What is students' opinion on the assessment of their work? Do they think that:

- it gives the lecturer an actual insight into the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired;
- it allows students to monitor their own progress, encourages them to do quality continuous work and take an in-depth approach to their studies;
- it allows students to fulfil all their obligations; that the examination periods are timetabled accordingly;
- it enables the acquisition of the competences or learning outcomes set out in the programme;
- it allows for the identification of the strengths or specifics of individual students?

Important:

When assessing students' satisfaction with teaching or mentoring in practical training outside the college, assessment of their work etc., we should be careful not to be satisfied with views that might be based on comfort, liking and personal gain while ignoring the expertise in this area.

In addition to student opinion, a particularly important source for assessment is lecturer reflection – reflection on the purposes and effects or quality of teaching. Professional evaluation of teaching (imparting knowledge, systematising, deepening, generalising etc.) is important. Equally important is a discussion about what good teaching is. More specifically, the sources can be: expert survey, focus groups, interviews, external evaluations of teaching, lecturers' diaries and professional comments of lecturers on students' opinions.

It is important to consider the impact of profession on teaching; in higher vocational education, it is mostly about educating applied professionals. How good are graduates in this respect?

Standard 12: **THE COLLEGE SHALL PROTECT STUDENTS' RIGHTS.**

Assessment criteria:

a. operation of the bodies of the college in this area

b. mechanisms for the recognition and prevention of discrimination of vulnerable groups of students and discrimination based on personal circumstances and beliefs of students

   (The assessment shall consider the transparency, timeliness and objectivity of the operation of the college bodies in the protection of students' rights (besides the bodies determined by law, especially the appeal body of the college, various study-related committees, etc.) and timely notification of students thereof.)

c. cooperation of student representatives in the bodies of the college with other students

   (The assessment shall consider the organisation, transparency, timeliness and prompt cooperation of students' representatives with other students – obtaining opinions and correct representation of the prevailing interests of students.)

Explanatory note:

The assessment against this standard relates mainly to the assessment of the college's operation (Standard 2).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- listing the bodies of the college without assessing their operation;
- indicating that students have representatives everywhere, but nothing about whether they are carrying out their role well, subject to the provisions in brackets under point c).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The finding that the college is organised in accordance with the rules does not imply the quality of its operations. It is necessary to assess how the college's authorities operate, whether they protect the rights of all students, inform them in a timely manner about their rights and obligations, possible consequences, possibilities for complaints, deadlines for complaints. Does the college consistently comply with the provisions of regulations when dealing with students? Are the decisions of these bodies objective or impartial and timely?

We must therefore obtain students' views on the functioning and content of all the important bodies of the college. Pay particular attention to students' observations on whether the college prevents and identifies different forms of discrimination against students, how effectively it takes action, and whether it adequately protects victims and punishes perpetrators.

In addition to discrimination against vulnerable groups of students on the basis of personal beliefs and circumstances, we also determine whether the college ensures the sexual integrity of its students, and whether it has a zero tolerance policy on sexual harassment of any kind. How is the college organised, what actions are taken and how quickly are they taken when such harassment is detected?

A mere finding that students are represented in the college bodies in accordance with the ZViS does not imply quality. Student representatives should answer questions such as:

- are your suggestions and views properly taken into account when decisions are taken;
- can you participate equally in the debate and make decisions on all issues, especially those affecting students;
- do you consistently present students' opinions, proposals and views at the college: how you obtain them or what do you do to obtain them;
- do you and how you regularly inform students about the work of the bodies and the decisions taken?

We should also assess the work of student representatives based on the opinion of the rest of the students and compare the answers of the two groups to be able to determine the factual situation.

Standard 13: **STUDENTS SHALL PARTICIPATE IN THE ASSESSMENT AND UPDATING OF THE CONTENTS OF COLLEGE ACTIVITIES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION.**

Assessment criteria:

a. participation of students in drafting the mission, strategic guidelines, self-evaluation of a college and study programmes

(The assessment shall consider whether the students participate in:

- drafting the mission and strategic guidelines of the college,
- the self-evaluation of the of the activities of the college, making suggestions for improvements and further development and whether their suggestions are processed and considered,
- evaluation of the implementation of study programmes.)

b) methods of ensuring participation in the self-evaluation and updating of activities

(Student surveys, their analysis and notification of students of the findings is just one form of obtaining the opinions of students.)

Explanatory note:

The assessment against this standard is mainly linked to the assessment against the quality standards on the institution's activities (Standard 6) and standards on internal quality assurance and improvement and study programme implementation.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- assessing student participation only through surveys and representatives in the college's bodies;
- the standard is not assessed against all the provisions in brackets in point a).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

See the guidelines for assessing the self-evaluation of a college in Standard 6 and refer to the guidelines for assessing the compliance with the standards for study programme evaluation where they concern students.

MATERIAL CONDITIONS (Article 9 of the Criteria)

Standard 14: **THE COLLEGE'S PREMISES AND EQUIPMENT ALLOW FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ALL ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

(The premises and equipment shall be assessed by taking into consideration the needs of the educational, professional, development or artistic activities, method of implementing study programmes, number of students enrolled and needs of human resources. The maintenance and updating of the equipment and software shall also be assessed, especially when the college implements e-study or distance study.)

Explanatory notes:

The college must have sufficient and appropriate premises and equipment to carry out all its activities. If it does not have its own premises, it must have valid lease agreements. The leases' durations are also checked.

Online tools, software and any necessary licences for study are important, as well as assessing and advising on the use of computer applications – some tools are better suited to particular fields of study. The quality of distance study cannot be good without appropriate applications.

The most common inadequacy in the assessment:

Determining the suitability of premises and equipment only for the implementation of the educational activity (the provisions in brackets in the criteria for assessing the standard are not fully taken into account).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

We should draw attention to the assessment of the material conditions of colleges that are not independent but are, for example, organisational units of school centres. Their premises, equipment and library are usually shared by a secondary school and a college or, in some cases, a professional college. We should establish whether such conditions are of good quality and appropriate, as they also serve other programmes and thus a larger number of secondary- and tertiary-level students. We should therefore consider who actually uses all the premises and equipment, and how much use can in practice be attributed to the college under assessment. For example, a look at the timetable of courses of a higher vocational programme can show whether there are problems with premises and equipment, even if they are sufficient at first glance.

Standard 15: **ADJUSTMENTS SHALL BE MADE FOR STUDENTS WITH VARIOUS FORMS OF DISABILITY.**

Assessment criteria:

a. adjustments of the premises and equipment

b. communication and information accessibility

   (The adjustments to the premises and equipment as well as the communication and information accessibility shall enable students suitable participation in the study and the fulfilment of their needs.)

c. adjustments of study materials and the implementation of the study

   (The assessment shall consider whether the adjustments allow students to study in an appropriate manner and enable the fulfilment of their needs.)

Explanatory note:

The standard must be met in particular under criteria a) and b). Failure to meet the standard because a college has no disabled persons constitutes a major deficiency or non-compliance. Only in the assessment under point c) can it be concluded that adjustments to the implementation of studies and materials are not yet in place because the college does not have any students with disabilities.

The most common inadequacy in the assessment:

Although the college is found not to meet the standard, the assessment reports that this is understandable due to its small size, its "young age" and the fact that it has no disabled students enrolled.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

In assessing against this standard, we take into account specific guidelines developed in cooperation with various organisations for people with disabilities, also published on the Agency's website: **Guidelines for Accessibility in Tertiary Education in the Republic of Slovenia**: https://www.nakvis.si/akreditacije-in-evalvacije-v-visokem-solstvu/zakonodaja/.

Standard 16: **ADEQUATE AND STABLE FINANCIAL RESOURCES SHALL BE ENSURED FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ACTIVITIES.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment considers whether the financial plan enables the smooth operation and development of the college and whether it has been drafted with consideration of the following:

- sources of funding of the college,
- actual and anticipated number of students enrolled,
- number of lecturers, other professional staff and non-educational staff,
- infrastructure for education and professional, development or artistic activities for the relevant field,
- infrastructure for the support activity,
- development and improvement of the quality of the college,
- further development and potential planned expansion of higher vocational education activities.)

Explanatory note:

The college's assessment for the next four years, or for a period to be determined by contract with the competent ministry (where public funding is involved), is also assessed. Compliance with the standard should also be assessed in light of the planned development of the college (strategic orientations, etc.)

The most frequent example of inadequacy in assessment:

The standard is not assessed in accordance with the provisions in brackets.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

At this point, it should be stressed that a number of colleges have been found to be under-funded – including public colleges whose activities are financed from the budget. Nevertheless, we assess the standard against all the provisions for assessment and point out any deficiencies; we also explain these.

It should be established:

- whether it is appropriate for the college to rely solely on tuition fees for its funding – not neglecting the number of students enrolled;
- what is the role of the economic and non-economic sectors in financing regarding needs for graduates;
- whether the college relies on obtaining a concession to carry out its activities – what if one is not granted, which is a very likely outcome in view of the number of colleges providing education under the same study programmes and the rate of granting concessions in the past decade;
- how reliable are other possible sources of funding for the college.

Standard 17: **THE LIBRARY OF THE COLLEGE SHALL HAVE SUITABLE STUDY AND PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE AND SHALL PROVIDE QUALITY LIBRARY SERVICES.**

Assessment criteria:

a. suitability of the study and professional literature

b. library stock, accessibility of the material, information bibliographic support and access to databases

   (The suitability of the literature, library stock and accessibility of the material, information support and the access to databases shall be assessed with consideration of the following:

   - professional or artistic fields of the college,
   - study programmes it implements,
   - mode of study or implementation of study programmes,
   - number and needs of students, lecturers and faculty assistants, and other staff.)

c. professional assistance by library staff

   (During the visit to the college, the proof of education of library staff shall be assessed. Any proof of training of library staff for counselling and assistance to students and other stakeholders shall also be assessed.)

d. development of library activities

   (The development of these activities shall be assessed in the field of study programmes.)

Explanatory note:

The assessment against this standard relates mainly to the assessment against the quality standards on human resources, students and the college's operation (Standard 3).

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- failure to assess a standard against all assessment criteria (provisions in brackets);
- although the college is still in the process of setting up a proper library (for example, it does not even have core literature), no major deficiencies or non-compliances are identified.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

The assessment of the library should be sufficiently detailed; we should determine and assess the quantity and quality of the material in relation to the activities developed by the college and the study programmes it offers. We should be particularly careful in assessing the suitability of a library in a college that is an organisational unit of a school centre, a company, etc.

It should be established:

- whether the library is adequately stocked in terms of the field of the study programmes, and whether the literature or materials are appropriate;
- whether the materials are suitable for the form of education and whether they meet the needs of students, lecturers and other professional staff;
- the state of information support and access to databases;
- whether adequate reading room capacity is available.

We should avoid the following:

- views that the "traditional" library no longer plays the role it did in the past, as study literature or materials can be obtained online;
- that a "traditional" library can be completely replaced by a virtual one, and that it is sufficient for the college to only have a suitable library worker.

The assessment checks that:

- the organisational structure of the college clearly identifies the status and tasks of the library, and defines the responsibilities for its operation and evaluation of its activities;
- the development of the library and the plan for its development show or have clearly defined objectives, taking into account the strategic development of the college and the objectives it has set itself (Standard 1);
- the library provides:
  - access to textbooks, required and recommended literature, diploma theses and international professional literature;
  - dissemination of library materials and information;
  - a place for students and other users to study or work;
  - education, help and advice on how to use the library and information resources;
  - support for users with special needs in using its services;
- the library has a publicly accessible website with up-to-date information on its activities and stock, information resources and services;

- it ensures the entry of bibliographic data on the professional achievements of the college's employees into COBISS.SI;
- it provides a wireless internet connection;
- it has equipment adapted to specific user groups (e.g. blind and partially sighted, mobility impaired);
- its operating hours are adequate.

In addition to determining whether and how library materials are substantively related to the college's study, professional or artistic fields, it is also important to determine how the library selects, acquires, organises and provides access to diverse, reliable, quality and relevant information resources and information. How does it grow its collection? Does it provide users with access to electronic resources relevant to the college's study programmes and professional or artistic work?

It should be noted that materials obtained through interlibrary loan and materials listed in the library catalogue, although freely available on the internet, are not part of the library's collection. The library provides users with free access or remote access to the reference collection and at least one copy of the required study material.

Library workers must have the appropriate training and be qualified to implement the library development plan. We also assess whether they are receiving ongoing professional development or how the college is providing for their professional development.

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDY PROGRAMMES (Article 10 of the Criteria)

Standard 18: **THE COLLEGE SHALL EVALUATE THE CONTENT, STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME TO BE DELIVERED.**

Assessment criteria:

a. the self-evaluation of a study programme to be delivered enables its development and updating by maintaining its relevance and creating a high-quality educational environment

   (It shall be assessed whether the planning of the self-evaluation of the study programme to be delivered and the related tasks are focused mainly on the following:

   - assessment of the suitability of the implementation of the study programme, methods and forms of educational work and the work of students,
   - evaluation of the students' load, their advancement and completion of the study, and state-approved documents,
   - comparison of the achieved and planned competences or learning outcomes or the assessment of the justification of their modification,
   - assessment of the suitability of testing and assessing knowledge,

- assessment of the study conditions and/or study environment and counselling services,
- assessment of the expectations, needs and satisfaction of students, lecturers, professional staff, non-educational staff as well as stakeholders from the environment,
- identification of the needs for knowledge and employment needs in the environment in accordance with Standard 5 of Article 6 of the Criteria;
- analysis of the enrolment, transfers and completion of the study;
- assessment of the professional, development or artistic work and the relevance and extent of achievements in the field of the study programme.)

b. methods and procedures of collecting and analysing information or proposals for the modification of a study programme to be delivered

c. appropriate provision of information to stakeholders on implementing the planned tasks or on the findings and results of the self-evaluation of a study programme

Explanatory notes:

The basis for the assessment of the standard is the self-evaluation of the study programme and/or a report on it. Position must be taken on the content of self-evaluation, taking into account the bracketed provisions in point a); the assessment of self-evaluation procedures alone is not appropriate.

The planning of the self-evaluation may be evident from the self-evaluation plan or the annual work plan of the college or another relevant document.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the assessment of compliance with the standard does not take into account all the provisions under (a), or there is only a brief indication that the evaluation of the programme is regular and adequate;
- as a rule, no information about the evaluation of methods and forms of teaching, adequacy and forms of assessment, topicality and scope of achievements of professional or artistic work in the field of study programme;
- as a rule, no information about the quality or substance of the planned actions;
- uncritical listing of elements of self-evaluation without the evaluation of their contents – what is assessed is mostly the procedure, persons responsible for individual tasks etc. and not the content;
- ignoring the views, opinions, suggestions etc. of lecturers, other professional staff and employers in individual provisions of this standard;
- assessment of the provisions under points b) and c) is clearly dominated by the student aspect;
- assessment of the provision under point c) points out only the methods of communication, without an assessment of suitability (taking into account the characteristics of each stakeholder group);
- small number of enrolled students as a strength (it is a fact that cannot constitute a strength in itself).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Self-evaluation must be sufficiently comprehensive, which means that the assessment of the educational, professional, development or artistic activities required for the study programme must be balanced in terms of content. Self-evaluation must provide an answer to the question of whether and how the college wants to develop the study programme to be delivered.

We should assess whether the (self)evaluation contains a thorough and sufficiently comprehensive reflection of the following:

- whether the evaluation of study contents takes into account the criteria of the professional field (profession);
- how the modifications of content affect the correspondence of the curriculum with the professional field, the integrity and balance of its content;
- how do changes in the implementation of the study affect the transmission of the envisaged knowledge and the achievement of outcomes, goals and competences, especially in view of reducing the number of contact hours or even practical classes;
- whether the effects (suitability, quality...) of accredited contents or modifications are considered comprehensively and what is the opinion of various stakeholders about them.

(Self)evaluation or assessment of quality of competences or learning outcomes:

What is the analysis of achieving competences and/or learning outcomes? Is it only about listing average grades and rates of transition/completion of studies?

Does it include the reflection of lecturers and other professional staff on the examination and assessment of knowledge and results and on how good students are in their studies?

What is the students' and graduates' opinion on achieving competences or learning outcomes? Is the professional view balanced with the students' view of their own progress in their studies and the quality of acquiring knowledge and skills?

The (self)evaluation of education is important not only at the qualification (competence) level, but also at the levels of socialisation and subjectification. It is a reflection on approaches to teaching, the placement of graduates in society, their social and personal skills, and personal growth. In the opinion of experts and in the opinion of graduates, does the college successfully prepare them for autonomous life in society?

(Self) evaluation or assessment of professional and creative work (hereinafter: professional work):

- how thorough is the self-evaluation of professional work?
- is it based solely on bibliometrics in connection with strategic goals?
- does it include a reflection on the meaning, content and impact of the professional work assessed?

Is the transfer of knowledge into practice and its relevance for the field of study or programme, even the course, actually assessed (when it makes sense, when it is not a basic, general course)?

Is the assessment focused only on professional work and accompanying processes such as planning of the work, conditions for it, progress monitoring, administrative and organisational challenges – i.e. are there phase shifts? What needs to be (self)evaluated is especially the content or importance of the professional work – the segment in which already created knowledge is

transferred into practice and when we speak of innovation and the needs of the economic and non-economic sectors.

(Self)evaluation of the quality of teaching cannot be just about the following:

- counting pedagogical and andragogical trainings, lecturer exchanges, average grades, rates of transition and completion of studies;
- discussing the results of students' direct satisfaction with teaching (the problem of replacing professional assessments with attitudes that may be based on comfort, liking and personal gain).

An appropriate distinction needs to be made between the conditions for quality teaching and the direct signs of good teaching. Is it appropriate to think about the quality of teaching in the context of service satisfaction, and when?

The view of quality of teaching in (self)evaluation cannot be developed only in the context of efficiency, optimality, effectiveness and transparency of teaching (organisational-managerial and economic concept of quality); it is also important to consider professional goals and effects of teaching.

In addition to student opinion, an important source for assessment is lecturer reflection – reflection on the purposes and effects or quality of teaching. Professional evaluation of teaching (imparting knowledge, systematising, correspondence to the profession, deepening, generalising etc.) is important. Equally important is a discussion about the values and ideals of teaching, about what good teaching is. More specifically, the sources can be: expert survey, focus groups, interviews, external evaluations of teaching (conducted by colleagues in the field on the one hand or higher vocational education didactics specialists on the other), teachers' diaries and professional comments of lecturers on students' opinions.

It is important to consider the impact of profession on teaching and on the fact that higher vocational education mostly produces applied scientists. How good are graduates in this respect?

Without an open discussion with lecturers, it is difficult to formulate useful and well-founded recommendations for improvement that go beyond organisational actions.

We should avoid the following:

- insufficient number of assessments of end states, i.e. on precision, level of criticism, accuracy, verifiability, depth and balance of content in self-evaluation reporting. Which of the above is considered better and which is considered worse? Is there an expert opinion on professional issues? Or is the self-evaluation predominantly about documenting and listing data without reflection and evaluation;
- a shift to another characteristic, phenomenon or state, when the attention in assessing the self-evaluation is shifted to the efficiency of self-evaluation in itself, to the listing of processes or elements of the system of quality in general, to transparency and stakeholder participation. Although this is also important, especially in institutional issues of operation of quality assurance system, it cannot be the only important feature;
- somewhat stereotypical and superficial recommendations that communication with stakeholders and their participation in self-evaluation of the study programme to be delivered should be improved. It is necessary to identify the problem: is it the lack of reflection on study contents, teaching or professional work? A lack of arguments for the quality of content, modification or implementation?

Standard 19: **SELF-EVALUATION REPORTS SHALL DEMONSTRATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TASKS PLANNED ON THE BASIS OF THE FINDINGS OF THE SELF-EVALUATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider the achievement of tasks related to the self-evaluation of a study programme in the last three years and:

- participation of stakeholders in adopting the actions for improvements, monitoring their implementation and drafting the self-evaluation report, and
- closure of the quality loop.)

Explanatory note:

The basis for a quality assessment against this standard is the knowledge of the accredited study programme. It should be borne in mind in the evaluation of particular content (bracket a) of Standard 18) that students, lecturers and other professional staff, non-educational staff, employers etc. all **play different roles or do not have the same (or even appropriate) capacities.**

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- a general assessment that the quality loop is closed/not closed without a clear justification;
- too much emphasis on the (lack of) participation of stakeholders, mainly students; none or very little on the participation of lecturers and other professional staff, non-educational staff and stakeholders from the environment, especially employers;
- action plans, analyses of reports as a strength.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

It is not enough to look at the closure of the quality loop only from a PDCA process perspective. The important part is a substantively completed self-evaluation or internal quality assessment which:

- unites all important views on the content, structure and implementation of the study programme to be delivered,
- takes into account the characteristics of higher vocational education,
- takes into account the characteristics of the professional field (i.e. the profession graduates are to obtain),
- takes into account different perspectives: those of lecturers and other professional staff, students and representatives of the external environment – economic sphere with consideration of the field of work where graduates mostly find employment,
- also includes or integrates the substantive findings of the relevant college commissions.

Good self-evaluation is the result of a comprehensive assessment that includes documenting, analysing, evaluating and planning actions. These actions should not be only measurable, but supported by content and arguments. For more details, see assessment guidelines for Standard 6 (page 110 to 112).

As under the previous standard, there is often no analysis of how thoroughly and professionally (or if at all) the self-evaluation report addresses the development of study content or the study

programme to be delivered. If it only lists changes, it is usually not discussed what they are based on and why they have been adopted, what are they intended to achieve, to improve etc. Without such considerations, actions cannot be well planned, monitored and, ultimately, evaluated.

Standard 20: **THE COLLEGE SHALL MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY, REVIEW THE STUDY PROGRAMME TO BE DELIVERED AND IMPROVE IT IN LIGHT OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PROFESSION. IT EVALUATES THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SET GOALD, COMPETENCES AND/OR LEARNING OUTCOMES AND THE NEEDS FOR GRADUATES. THE MODIFICATIONS AND UPDATES OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME TO BE DELIVERED SHALL TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME AND MAINTAIN THE COHESION OF ITS CONTENTS OR COURSES.**

Assessment criteria:

(The assessment shall consider whether the study programme is still complete in terms of content and structure upon the development and modification of the study programme to be delivered, whether the cohesion of the syllabi and curriculum with the objectives and competences of the study programme is preserved.)

Explanatory note:

If Standard 18 requires an assessment of all the elements of the self-evaluation of a study programme to be delivered listed in the indents under a), Standard 20 (which is closely linked to Standard 18) delves even deeper into improvements of the study programme to be delivered and/or into keeping the cohesion of its content or courses.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the findings are (partially) contradictory to those under Standard 18;
- the standard is not adequately assessed; no findings in accordance with the provision on the assessment and naming of the standard;
- mainly listing procedures and the role of students in self-evaluation rather than the suitability of content of programme modifications;
- ill-considered or unfounded proposals to modify the programme;
- it is not clear whether and how developments in the professional field influence programme improvement.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

We should follow the guidelines for Standard 18, except that we no longer ask whether this is contained in the self-evaluation, but assess whether it is true for the study programme to be delivered.

We should avoid the following:

- shift to another characteristic, phenomenon or condition, or phase shift when in assessing the quality of professional or artistic work in the study programme field, the attention is diverted

from the quality of activities and achievements to the quality of the collaboration or the organisation and material conditions for such collaboration;

- shift between quality and quantity, when the assessment of the quality of professional work is based only on a count of achievements (services, projects, products etc.). Its intrinsic value needs to be recognised, as well as its relevance to the field of study or changes in the programme to be delivered.

Standard 21: **THE METHOD, FORM AND EXTENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME SHALL CORRESPOND TO ITS CONTENT AND STRUCTURE, WHICH ALLOWS FOR HIGH-QUALITY ADJUSTMENTS AND THE PROVISION OF THE STUDY CONTENT, IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES AND RESOURCES (HUMAN AND MATERIAL RESOURCES)**

Assessment criteria:

a. methods and forms of teaching, their development or adjustment (including resources):
   - to various groups of students,
   - to various study needs and study modes (student-centered study and teaching),
   - to the needs of lecturers and other professional staff

b. number of completed contact hours determined by the study programme, or other types of work with students

c. study materials and their adjustment to the methods and forms of teaching and students' needs

   (The assessment shall consider whether the study materials are adapted to e-study, distance study or other forms of study to and the needs of students, mostly students with various forms of disability.)

d. participation of students in project work

e. practical training of students

   (The plan shall clearly demonstrate the organisation of the practical training, its course holders and the tasks of all participants (lecturers and other professional staff, mentors of practical training, organisers of practical training and students). In relation to that, the implementation of such training in work environment or outside the college shall be assessed. The following shall be determined:

   - implementation of education in work environment,
   - content of practical training,
   - cooperation of the college with companies, and
   - keeping records about it.)

   (At the visit, the evidence regarding the qualifications of mentors of practical training and the documentation on the monitoring of the appropriateness of practical education and the achievement of learning outcomes and competences shall be checked.)

(The assessment shall consider the satisfaction of all participants: students, mentors of practical training, organisers of practical training at colleges and in companies.)

f. suitability of timetables, number of contact hours or accessibility of lecturers and other professional staff to students

g. appropriateness and qualifications of the staff in accordance with Article 7 of the Criteria

h. material conditions related to the implementation of the study programme, in accordance with Article 9 of the Criteria

Explanatory note:

The standard is also assessed in accordance with Article 7 (Human resources) and Article 9 (Material conditions) of the Criteria.

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the assessment under point a) is deficient, nothing is said about the development of teaching methods and forms or the needs of lecturers;
- point e); nothing about the opinion (satisfaction) of the providers of practical training both at the college and in the companies, only the student perspective being assessed;
- it is not clear whether the practical training is systematically organised, whether the college has a proper plan for it, showing how it is organised and the tasks of all the participants to be assessed;
- active participation of lecturers or organisers of practical training, students and company mentors is a prerequisite, not a strength;
- despite the too low number of contact hours (CH), which the college did not replace by other adequate forms of work with students, such as individual work with teachers, the inadequacy of the timetables or the delivery of courses according to the timetable, no major deficiencies or non-compliances were found
- only the students' view or opinion on the decline in the number of CH is presented, while the view of the lecturers and other professional staff of the programme is ignored;
- human resources are not assessed in accordance with all the provisions of Article 7 of the Criteria – most often the provisions on ensuring educational and professional development of lecturers and their achievements in the professional field they teach are ignored;
- the material conditions are not assessed according to all the standards set out in Article 9 of the Criteria – in particular, the provisions concerning the library are ignored: the suitability of the literature, the library stock, the professional support available in the library, the development of the library activity.

Guidelines for proper assessment:

We should follow the guidelines for Standard 18, except that we no longer ask whether this is contained in the self-evaluation, but whether it is true for the study programme implementation.

When assessing the quality of teaching in itself, the focus should not shift from the intrinsic value of teaching to the technical process and support for teaching. It is therefore important that lectur-

ers themselves make statements on the merits and value of teaching, as is already the case with students. For more details, see Standard 18 (self)evaluation of teaching).

The number and type of contact hours, the method of implementation (either in technological or organisational terms, or in terms of the approach to teaching) and the allocation of credits should be assessed:

- in view of the characteristics of the field of individual courses/studies;
- in view of the foreseen study content of the course;
- in view of the competences and/or learning outcomes.

The complexity of the study – the complexity and depth of the study content, the cognitive and practical skills, the complexity of the competences envisaged and the capacity to develop them in light of the different forms of teaching guidance, and the prior knowledge of the students is what dictates the circumstances in which the course/study is implemented, or should be the starting point for quality assessment. This must be accompanied by an assessment of the material conditions for the implementation of the study programme (both at the college and outside it – in the economic and non-economic sectors), in particular the library stock, databases and links for the study programme being assessed (see more in the area of assessment of material conditions).

Assessing the practical training of students also requires a thorough knowledge of the study programme. We should check the competences, knowledge and skills that a student needs to acquire and establish:

- whether the practical training is of an appropriate level of complexity and offers the student what is set out in the study programme – i.e. whether the work obligations match the graduate's profile;
- whether the company is suitable for providing such training (from the qualifications of its mentors to the conditions for practical training);
- whether mentoring and students' independent work are adequately demarcated;
- whether the work performed and products made by students are good;
- whether lecturers, mentors in companies and students cooperate well in the implementation of practical training and how they evaluate it (together with employers); what joint actions they take to monitor, assess or evaluate it, update it, improve it.

In assessing the quality of human resources, it is important to assess, in terms of the end state phase, the quality of teaching as well as the quality of the professional or artistic work of lecturers. Is the study implementation of a high quality, is it of an appropriate level of complexity, depth, focus or practicality for its type?

<u>We should avoid the following:</u>

- merely organisational recommendations, which say nothing about the quality of teaching. We should therefore not just recommend the strengthening of links among the teaching staff, for example by organising joint curriculum review meetings – a simple way for a college to respond to such a recommendation is to submit the agenda of the next meeting, and the quality is accomplished. Instead, we could delve deeper into teaching (actions) and the accompanying beliefs and purposes of teaching (approaches to teaching). Similar is true for generic and indirect assessments such as: small size of student groups; lecturers' communicative skills and dutifulness; positive attitudes; video content for studying; setting up technical assistance for lecturers; encouraging the use of the latest methods to attract students to work (pars pro toto shift);

- partial nature of the evaluations (pars pro toto shift), which also stem from the exclusive determination of the quality of teaching from student opinion, which is important, but not the only relevant one;
- shift to another characteristic, phenomenon or condition: when, in view of the reduced number of contact hours, we recommend or find quality in compensatory measures, such as increasing extra-curricular activities and administrative support for students. Can strengthening tutoring compensate for reducing the number of contact hours while keeping study content, competences and learning outcomes unchanged;
- shift between quality and quantity if we require quantitative proportionality between the contact hours and the credits allocated to a course. Such thinking may provide a good basis for roughly identifying problems. It does not, however, rely on an understanding of the specific content of the study. It can vary from course to course how much and what work the student is expected to do on their own, how much explanation or practice is needed etc.;
- shift in assessing the implementation of study (lack of criticism in assessments): whether and when (a) cyclical delivery of courses, (b) reducing the number of contact hours, (c) combining full-time and part-time students, (d) or grouping students into classes on the basis of offering courses from one study programme to students from other study programmes as elective courses, resulting in larger classes with students of widely varying backgrounds, can be an advantage or a sign of quality at all? Is it permissible in such cases to follow the economic concept of quality and to recognise a strength in improved efficiency and optimisation of teaching? Is there not also a conceptual shift here, where the economic concept of quality replaces the compliance with professional standards in higher vocational education?

Standard 22: **PROTECTION OF RIGHTS OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE STUDY PROCESS SHALL BE ENSURED.**

Assessment criteria:

a. all students, when regularly meeting the requirements determined by a study programme, can uninterruptedly advance and complete their studies

   (The following is especially important in the assessment:

   - distribution of exam dates,
   - assessment criteria and methods are published in advance,
   - fairness and transparency of assessment,
   - different methods of assessment and help of the college in the development of knowledge of lecturers in this field,
   - possibility to appeal against grades and transparency of appeal procedures.)

b. all lecturers and other professional staff shall enjoy the respect for their autonomy in teaching and professional work and shall receive help and counselling in their career development

c. provision of information to stakeholders in accordance with Standard 7 of Article 6 of the Criteria

Most frequent examples of inadequacy in assessment:

- the provisions under (a) are assessed through data on the transition from one year to the next and the number of graduates;
- point a) is not assessed under all provisions in brackets;
- identification of assistance and advice in developing the career paths of lecturers and professional staff is deficient (nothing is said about assistance, counselling, training in teaching, professional or artistic fields).

Guidelines for proper assessment:

Quality teaching of lecturers is closely connected to assessment. The latter is extremely important both for students and lecturers, so it should be assessed whether:

- it is appropriate in view of the content and complexity of the study programme or course;
- it gives the lecturer a realistic insight into the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired by a student;
- it enables students to monitor their own progress, encourage them to do quality continuous work;
- it enables students to fulfil all the obligations of their studies to a high standard;
- it enables a clear insight into the acquisition of the competences or learning outcomes set out in the programme;
- it ultimately enables both lecturer and student to identify the student's strengths, talents, aptitudes, specifics; and whether it encourages the student to take a more in-depth approach to studies, to develop their strengths, talents, etc.

II.3 REPORT BY THE GROUP OF EXPERTS AND WORKING WITH A STAFF MEMBER

To ensure consistency, reports by groups of experts are produced according to prescribed templates (https://www.nakvis.si/akreditacije-in-evalvacije-v-visokem-solstvu/register-strokovnjakov/), which guide the experts through each quality standard. The structure and format of the reports must be established and the reports should be comparable. Their content must also be developed in a coherent and comparable way; the fact-finding procedure, findings and assessments must be uniform and comprehensive. The experts must clearly state their positions to the changes that have occurred as a result of the applicant's response to the first report. What the applicant has improved, corrected or edited can have a decisive influence on both the establishment of the actual state of affairs and on the quality. Therefore, for each quality standard, the report must show separately the initial and end actual state of affairs while, for the sake of clarity, the findings and assessments must only be final.

One of the key features of a good report is a reasonable balance in content between (1) documenting the actual state of affairs, identifying and arguing for compliance, major deficiencies or non-compliances etc., assessing and weighing the findings or assessments on the one hand, and (2) against individual quality standards on the other. The label "reasonable" refers to the fact that the scope and depth of reporting depend both on the weight of the findings or assessments and on what they relate to. Reporting should focus more thoroughly on possible partial compliances, non-compliances or major deficiencies or non-compliances. More detailed consideration is more important for quality standards that are more demanding in terms of content, while the admittedly rare compliance-oriented standards can be assessed with less clarifications and evidence, perhaps only by reference to statements in the application and declarations of compliance. For example, there is no need for extensive consideration of the undisputed compliance of enrollment conditions, completion requirements or transitions between study programmes with the Act or the Accreditation Criteria. Readers are unlikely to read the reports to find out about the details of this type of compulsory study content – they will look them up in the call for enrolment or on the institution's/college's website. What will interest them in the report, however, is the issue of legality and, where relevant, quality related to these elements. Conversely, for example, the consideration of the quality of research should be sufficiently in-depth and comprehensive, if not for other reasons, for the complexity of the issue of compliance of the factual situation with the rules or of quality.

Based on the analysis of the reports to date, quality standards could be more evenly addressed, and rather than providing a quantitative balance of strengths and opportunities for improvement, it would be better to be realistically critical of the subject of the assessment, taking into account its specifics. In the reports submitted so far, we have noticed that steps in the assessment process have been omitted. The most common deficiencies were over-documentation and findings or assessments that were taken out of context, unexplained or unreasoned. For example, in one report, compliance with a regulation is explained and stated only as "yes". For instance, the assessment of the study content cannot simply be a description of the structure of the curriculum. Its design needs to be recognised and assessed. Similarly, it is not enough to simply list the companies where the practical training is carried out and add that the institute surveys stakeholders on their satisfaction with the practical training. This is not a sufficient basis for making a comprehensive finding of fact, let alone an assessment of the quality of practical training.

In addition to consistency and balance, the characteristics of a good report are comprehensiveness, depth and breadth, precision, the provision of relevant information, verifiability, irrefutability, clarity, accuracy and logical conclusions that are free from contradictions, assumptions, incomplete, unfinished or ambiguous thoughts, and that are not simplistic. Good reports are also useful, transparent and comparable – they primarily inform on the actual state of affairs, compliance and quality, and are not intended to raise questions, disseminate or interpret policies, ideas and trends.

HIGHLIGHTS:

1. **The experts' reports must follow the prescribed template and instructions; the prescribed template or report form may not be modified.**
2. **Each standard must be assessed against all the assessment provisions and the findings must be clear and unambiguous.**
3. **All findings must be substantiated (let us ask: why, how, why, etc. and answer these questions).**
4. **The compliances, strengths, major deficiencies or non-compliances and recommendations for improvement must be well thought out, coordinated and should not be confused or mutually exclusive.**
5. **The experts are obliged to take into account the comments of the staff members conducting the procedures on:**
   - **whether the assessments are carried out in accordance with the provisions prescribed for them,**
   - **the structure and content of accreditation and evaluation reports (this is not to interfere in professional assessment, but to point out when a report is poorly written or does not contain all the necessary findings and explanations, when it is unclear, etc.),**
   - **the linguistic adequacy of reports.**

II.4 ROLES OF PARTICIPANTS IN ACCREDITATION AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

EXPERTS

The Agency Council shall appoint at least three members to each group of experts, of which at least one shall be a foreign expert and one a student. The composition of the group of experts depends on the size of the institution/college concerned, the type and complexity of the accreditation and/or evaluation procedure, and thus differs both in number and competencies required by experts. The appointed experts have to be scientifically, professionally, artistically or pedagogically active in the field of study of the assessed study programme, institution or college.

TASKS OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS

By agreeing to their appointment, the members of the group of experts undertake to carry out their work in accordance with the Agency's rules and guidelines and in a professional, independent and timely manner.

Chair

The chair of the group of experts provides guidance to the members of the group and is responsible for the content of the accreditation or evaluation report and other actions necessary for a comprehensive assessment. They agree with the members on the division of labour, tasks and the objective of the assessment, and coordinate and review the report. In agreement with the members, the chair determines any additional evidence the applicant may need and decides whether to visit the institution where this is not required by the procedure (e.g. for the accreditation of a study programme).

Members of the group of experts, and foreign experts

Members who are higher education teachers or higher vocational education lecturers, non-academic evaluators or experts from the practical field participate in the substantive preparation of the report and in the work related to the assessment, e.g. organising the site visit, proposing additional evidence, etc. They carry out the tasks assigned to them, as agreed with the chair. A foreign expert in the group brings a broader or international perspective on the subject of assessment. They usually assess the substantive and professional part of the application, such as the relevance of the teaching, research, professional and/or artistic work, the quality assurance system of the institution/college, the content of the study programme with its objectives, competences, curriculum and syllabi. The chair of the group of experts and the staff member present them the specific features of the Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education system or the specific features of the institution/college or study programme being assessed.

Student member

In accordance with national and international regulations and guidelines, the group of experts includes a student representative, who participates in all areas of the assessment in the same way as the other members. They add a student perspective to the assessment, but their work is not limited to this aspect or to areas related to it.

CANDIDATE FOR ENTRY IN THE REGISTER OF EXPERTS

As part of the training for experts, candidates for entry in the Register of Experts attend site visits. A candidate shall, in accordance with the instructions by the chair of the group of experts and staff, perform all tasks of an expert in the group. The tasks and actions performed by a candidate in accreditation and evaluation procedures shall not affect the final assessment and the report submitted by the group of experts. Like the group of experts, the candidate must not have a conflict of interest with the applicant, and the applicant is informed of the candidate's participation when they are appointed to the group of experts.

COMPOSITION OF GROUPS OF EXPERTS IN INDIVIDUAL PROCEDURES

The chair of a group of experts must be a higher education teacher or higher vocational college lecturer and must, in terms of the relevant field, correspond to the dominant or at least one of the fields of the study programme or institution/college, typically according to the first two digits of the Klasius-P-16 classification. If the Slovenian experts in the Register suitable for the chair of the group do not include an expert meeting this condition, the condition must be met by a foreign expert.

Accreditation of a higher education institution and external evaluation of a higher vocational college

The composition of the group of members must be such that at least one of the experts has management experience in an institution/college of at least the same type as the institution/college under the accreditation or evaluation procedure. For the accreditation of a university or an independent higher education institution – a faculty, the majority of the members of the group of experts must hold the title of full or associate professor, while for the accreditation of a higher professional college, at least one member of the group of experts must hold the title of at least assistant professor, and for the evaluation of a college, at least one member of the group of experts must hold the title of lecturer at a higher vocational college. The study, scientific and research fields of experts must comply with the KLASIUS and Frascati classifications.

Accreditation and evaluation of a study programme

All members of a group of experts must be from the field of the study programme and be appropriately appointed to the title; in case of higher professional study programme, in addition to lecturers and senior lecturers, at least one member is an associate professor or assistant professor. For the bachelor's, master's and doctoral programmes, the members are full professors, associate professors and assistant professors.

The chair of the group of experts must be a higher education teacher or higher vocational college lecturer and must, in terms of the relevant field, correspond to the dominant or at least one of the fields of the study programme or institution/college, typically according to the first two digits of the Klasius-P-16 classification.

APPLICANT

Evidence for assessment in accreditation and external evaluation

The Agency expects from the applicant to constructively cooperate with the group of experts and the Agency by allowing access to all the information important for the assessment. In addition to the applica-

tion for accreditation or evaluation with annexes, experts often need information from other evidence to determine the factual situation and make an assessment. Information from publicly available databases will be obtained by the group of experts itself or by the Agency staff member, while evidence that is not publicly available will be submitted by the applicant in the course of the procedure, at the request of the group of experts. In accreditation procedures, the applicant normally provides the additional evidence after receipt of the first report of the group of experts, together with the comments on the report, while in evaluation procedures, the applicant provides the evidence before, during or immediately after the site visit and, if not otherwise possible, together with its comments on the evaluation report. It is important to note that by submitting an application for accreditation or evaluation, the applicant undertakes that it has all the evidence relevant to the assessment at its disposal and must submit it by the deadline.

Site visit

The Agency expects from the applicant to enable the visit of the group of experts according to the agreed schedule, except in case of justified objective reasons. The applicant is notified of the date of the visit within 15 days at the latest. The applicant provides the experts with a suitably equipped room for the smooth conduct of their work, appropriate physical and virtual access to the institution or college, a room for interviews, the required evidence, a tour of the premises and equipment; it shall follow the agreed course of the visit, provide relevant interlocutors and, at the suggestion of the group of experts, additional interviewees, and shall adapt to any changes in the course of the visit resulting from the newly established factual situation. In site visits or visits to an institution at the time of the accreditation of a study programme or the initial accreditation of an institution, the applicant does not receive specific minutes or other record that quotes or summarises the statements of the interviewees. Their statements are taken into account and summarised in the report by the group of experts, on which the applicant has the opportunity to comment.

Remarks to the report of the group of experts, and final report

Once the accreditation or evaluation report is received, the applicant has the opportunity to respond to the report by the expert group, comment on the findings and provide additional evidence. In its final report, the group of experts must define its position on any comments or new evidence. Once the group of experts has produced its final report, the applicant is usually no longer able to submit comments and additional evidence.

AGENCY COUNCIL

For the Agency Council, which decides on applications for accreditation and external evaluation on the basis of the final report of the group of experts and the applicant's response, application and other documents, the assessment by the expert group is a fundamental basis for its decisions. It therefore expects the report's findings to be adequately explained and substantiated, both from a regulatory and a professional review perspective. If the Council finds the report incomplete or unclear, it may request the group of experts to supplement it.

The Agency Council is independent in its decision-making and may deviate from the findings of the group of experts, but must provide adequate reasons for such deviations. Thus, on the basis of public records, the application and other evidence, it can assess that a particular deficiency is of such nature and extent that it has a significant effect on the quality of the institution, college or study programme, and find, for example, that a particular standard is not met.

STAFF MEMBER CONDUCTING THE PROCEDURE

Agency staff members conduct accreditation and evaluation procedures and provide the group of experts professional, legal and organisational assistance. The experts are obliged to take into account the comments of the staff members on the structure and content of accreditation and evaluation reports. They can obtain relevant information from staff members, such as accreditation and evaluation reports on the institution, college or programme to date, decisions of the Agency Council, comparative data on the research activities of the institution and of individual teachers, etc.

The staff members also perform other organisational and procedural tasks: after the group of experts is appointed, they connect the members and provide them with appropriate documentation for the assessment; they submit the requests of the group of experts to the applicant and the Agency Council; they call upon the applicant to supplement its application; they assist the group of experts in organising a meeting or a visit; as administrators of agreements and claims for payment, they take care that contractual liabilities are complied with; in the procedures of internal quality assurance at the Agency, they assess the work of experts and participate in expert surveys, report analysing, collecting data in assessments etc.

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR OBJECTIVE AND IMPARTIAL ASSESSMENT

According to the law, staff members and experts are autonomous in the performance of their work. The latter must not allow their assessment to be unduly influenced by the applicant, the Agency Council, the Agency management or other Agency employees.

Potential conflict of interest

Experts have the duty to carry out their work impartially and to avoid any conflict of interest. This exists if circumstances in which the private interest of an official influences or appears to influence the impartial and objective performance of their public duties. The expert is obliged to refuse to participate in the procedure if they consider that they have a conflict of interest in relation to the institution/college or programme to which the procedure relates. If an expert is in doubt about whether they may have a conflict of interest, they shall consult a staff member.

An expert shall be excluded from accreditation and evaluation procedures if they are in an employment or other contractual relationship with the applicant or directly related to it, or if less than two years have passed since the termination of such relationship. An expert should first assess for themselves whether they have a conflict of interest with the applicant, but the applicant may also request their exclusion. The decision on the latter shall be made by the Agency Council.

How applicants can influence experts and what to do about it

In a specific procedure, experts communicate with the applicant and the members of the Council through a staff member to avoid attempts to influence the assessment. They must also be alert and sensitive to any attempts at undue influence or pressure by applicants, Council members, other Agency employees or other interested parties in relation to the assessment, and must inform the chair of the group of experts and the staff member thereof.

III REFLECTION ON ASSESSMENT IN SELECTED AREAS

SPECIFICS OF TEACHING

This guide will not be able to cover all the specifics of studies in a satisfactory way. We will try to select the ones we may not have paid enough attention to so far. We will begin by selected views on teaching. The approach to its quality can be generic or discipline-specific. While in the first approach the elements of education are universal and in practice aim at the training of the individual, in the second they are decisively shaped by disciplinary cultures and their standards of knowledge. The less sensitive teaching approaches are to disciplinary rules, the more they are guided by rules, expectations and needs that are external to higher education, and the more importance is assigned to practically oriented competences.

To assess the quality of teaching, conceptual approaches to teaching are elementary. Although the Accreditation Criteria focus on student-centred learning, which we will touch on below, the transmission of knowledge, and the choice of the approach to teaching that goes with it, is a matter of freedom of teaching. We will therefore outline an initial overview of approaches and try to relate it, at least superficially, to the different concepts of quality. These approaches have different attitudes towards qualification (training), socialisation (finding one's place in the society) and subjectification (development of personality and personal autonomy) as the three elements of education. They may emphasise either cultivation or competence; they may be more concerned with the development of an academic, professional or business habitus; finally, they may be oriented towards placing the individual into the existing social order or towards emancipation. Different disciplines, types of study and institutions/colleges adopt them to a different extent.

Teaching approaches

1. The approach that originates in the Enlightenment and humanist traditions emphasises the enrichment of disciplinary knowledge, and sees the essence of teaching as personal formation or cultivation. Such education seeks to deepen knowledge and broaden the intellect, and by overcoming mythological and incomplete interpretations of the world, the student should become increasingly independent and capable of autonomous action in society.
2. The critical approach criticises the traditional one for lacking in enlightenment. It complements this with a critical interpretation of social inequality and the role of institutions in maintaining it. Unlike the previous approach, the teacher should reveal what is hidden, and the knowledge imparted should be even more dependent on critical reflection, i.e. reflection on the disciplinary and social levers shaping this knowledge.
3. The progressive approach builds on the preceding one by trying to turn the interpretation of emancipation into its realisation. It emphasises the pragmatic discovery of truth and the expansion of reason through personal experience. While these three outlined approaches are based on the socialisation and subjectification elements of education, the following approaches can be derived from the qualification level.
4. The vocational approach places studies in the role of an introduction to a specific field in order to practise a profession. The traditional and critical approaches give way to forms of training and skilling, and the teacher is ideally a master or specialist of a narrow specialisation, who is not only a researcher but also connected to the external working environment. They impart closed and applied knowledge and skills to students.
5. The constructivist approach, which also embraces student-centred learning, is similar to the vocational approach, but with a vague relation to a form of progressive approach, in which the social-critical note of education is replaced by a psychological and individualistic one. In this way, job training is tailored to the individual learning experience, in which the teacher plays the role of an instructor or learning assistant.

6. The last approach that should be mentioned is the scientific approach to teaching, in which the various approaches already mentioned can be intertwined and are linked by agonistic dialogue, the pursuit of truth and curiosity, as well as by the scientific and disciplinary principles of open, critical and reflexive knowledge. Such studies first initiate students in scientific research and then rely on it as closely as possible.

On quality of teaching

This makeshift attempt to delineate a treasury of teaching ideals is certainly insufficient either to explain approaches to teaching in a useful way or to show what happens in practice, where these approaches intertwine, build on each other and push each other out. It might, however, suffice to illustrate the great diversity of teaching ideals and ideas about what makes a good teacher. In light of the freedom of teaching, a view of the quality of teaching through awareness of these approaches is necessary to sensitise judgements to the diversity of teaching. But this is not enough, it also needs to be linked to different concepts of quality. We will try to illustrate more specifically the mutually exclusive views of a quality teacher.

1. Through one lens, a quality teacher is a cultured educator with broad horizons and an active and respected scientist. They teach almost with artistic inspiration: they illuminate the specificity and totality of knowledge, systematise it, complement it and place it in a discipline, a system of ideas, a profession, a society, a culture, the world (e.g. the environment), a historical context, the present and the outlines of the future. They contextualise, concretise and generalise it, or bring it to the abstract level. They deepen it and soundly evaluate it. They are in a collegial relationship with the student.
2. Through another lens, the teacher is a highly skilled trainer, an instructor versed in optimal teaching techniques and in the use of information and communication technology. They are idealised as a flexible educational service provider that assists or guides the student in an increasingly individualised yet mass training. They are guided by pre-defined objectives and outcomes, prescribed competences and skills, and a concern for effective teaching and student's employability.

All this preliminary discussion of different conceptual approaches is important, however, because evaluation practices in Slovenia and abroad show that assessing the quality of teaching is relatively formal, technical and superficial. Too often, teaching is limited to indicators such as counting pedagogical and andragogical trainings, teacher exchanges or guest lectures, and quoting or promoting the latest teaching techniques and methodological trends, which do not say enough about the quality of teaching and are not particularly sensitive to its specifics.

In Europe, the assessment of teaching quality often relies on indicators such as: graduation rates per generation, drop-out rates, average grades, even graduate employability and employment rates. These are indicators that depend not only on the quality of teaching, but on a number of other factors, such as choice in enrolment or the development of the region, and which may even be problematic for the actual quality of teaching, since they may be linked to a reduction in the complexity of a study that should otherwise be conducted at a high level, or to an optimisation of the study that is not primarily guided by didactic or academic criteria. The over-reliance on student survey results is also problematic, especially in the parts related to satisfaction. The latter may reflect the attractiveness, interest or usefulness of the study or the teachers, or even the ease of study. Good teaching is characterised not only by the provision of information to students, their activities, the teacher's commitment and support, or the use of the latest techniques and methods, but also by the teacher's general knowledge and sophistication and, above all, by the good generalising, concretising, deepening, articulating, linking, contextualising, theorising, applying and reasoning of knowledge.

In evaluation interviews with teachers, experts have so far paid less attention to professional and academic views on the quality of teaching, and to views from student surveys that are not marked by satisfaction. Where they have done so, however, the debate has been insufficiently contextualised in individual conceptual approaches that teachers are free to pursue in their work. It is worth considering

whether future evaluation interviews should focus more thoroughly on the qualitative features that position the teacher between cultivation, professional training, learning experience, and introduction to science and the discipline. The assessments have not been able to show how the higher education and higher vocational education teacher are actually different from a secondary- or primary-school teacher. How do they exercise their great responsibility in dealing with knowledge, with its implications? How do their virtues and consciousness influence the formation of individuals? How do they activate their professional talent or awaken their scientific or artistic flair? Answers to such questions can be provided by didactically informed collegial discussions, which would be useful to balance an indicator-based, formal and technical or interest-based (satisfaction) view of the merits of teaching.

SPECIFICS OF CYCLES AND TYPES OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAMMES

The cycles and types of higher education study programmes are prescribed by the ZViS and are also covered by the Accreditation Criteria and the Slovenian Qualifications Framework (SQF).

Most of the provisions of the ZViS on the different cycles and types of study focus on qualification, less to socialisation and even less to subjectification. The transfer of professional knowledge, the application of scientific methods, professional problem-solving and practical training, which is not compulsory for university degree programmes, are common to professional higher education and first-cycle university study programmes. The legislation distinguishes university study programmes from professional higher education programmes mainly by further specifying the study of theoretical and methodological concepts. In fact, it allows professional higher education and first-cycle university studies to be intertwined and to build on similar competences. The master's study is deeper and broader – but, interestingly, not more specialised – compared to the first-cycle study at the level of transfer of expertise. Nevertheless, study remains primarily professional, and it is only in the third cycle that it moves to the level of explicitly scientific education, research, developing new knowledge, solving the most complex problems and finding solutions.

In the legislation, the socialisation element in the first and second cycles is closely linked to training for professional work. While the first-cycle study, regardless of its type, assumes responsibility, autonomy and initiative in the profession, the master's study is mostly about responsibility. This element disappears in the doctoral study and is not defined by anything. Subjectification has even fewer points of reference in the legislation. Critical attitude is prescribed for all cycles and types of study, moving from professional critical attitude in the first cycle to critical reflection in the second- and third-cycle studies.

The Slovenian Qualifications Framework, as the name implies, distinguishes primarily between the level of qualification in cycles and types of study. The Accreditation Criteria take into account the specifics of the cycles and types of study programmes, in particular by setting quality standards or differences in assessment. Although national regulations require the sensitivity of quality assessments to cycles and types of study, they place the latter within a narrow qualification framework. They increase the complexity of the study, but they also make it uniform by repeating generic competences and making them homogenous. We will try to expand on these starting points, in spite of the current reality and the regulations in force, by contrasting them as much as possible in order to make the specifics of the study clearer.

In the first cycle, higher professional study is mainly applied. Its purpose is to help one get a job as soon as possible. It trains students for professions. It imparts knowledge that is scientifically based but professional, closed and stable, because it is essential that it can be transferred to the work environment and applied rather than to raise questions and be tested in order to find new or different paths of knowledge. The competences that students develop in such studies are also oriented towards the work environment, whether this environment is explicitly professional or relatively indeterminate in terms of profession,

unpredictable and variable. By putting more emphasis on practical training and involving teachers who are also good professionals without an academic habitus, it equips students to enter the world of work as well prepared as possible. Its important element is therefore cooperation with organisations that provide initiation in practical work.

The first cycle university study is fundamental and provides well-rounded education. It is oriented towards a certain level of general knowledge and sophistication. It introduces the student to the discipline, its key knowledge and theoretical bases. At the same time, it cultivates them and gives them their first experience of scientific research – of the principles of science, of the problems in the discipline, of peripheral knowledge (i.e. knowledge on the periphery of mainstream thought) and of knowledge creation. Important for teaching are cultivation, emancipation, scientific introduction to the discipline and the development of an academic habitus. While the teacher educates their students with a greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge, they also impart open and pluralist knowledge. They develop students' general mental skills, such as problem-solving, with the skills for the application of specific knowledge being slightly less important. Such study programmes are usually designed for further study. They therefore require teachers-researchers and a link with research institutions in particular.

The first-cycle curriculum is therefore general. Regardless of the type of study, it maintains core knowledge and competences, primarily structured according to disciplinary rules. Too much diversity in courses imparting dispersed knowledge can lead to multidisciplinary illiteracy. Rather than providing a multitude of superficial and fragmented content, it is more appropriate to deliver in-depth study in a smaller number of courses that are not too short or overly condensed. Otherwise, the development of analytical skills and critical attitudes may be hindered. Developing high-level expression and literacy can also be placed in this context. Especially for university study programmes, the thesis is of great importance as the only real opportunity to produce a complete piece of research that already extends into the scientific field. Replacing it with other study commitments is therefore challenging, as the student is expected to maintain all the competences developed through such work.

Unlike the first cycle, the master's study is suitable for professional specialisations, but it must combine the specific features of both types of first-cycle studies – it must deepen and focus both their applied and basic foundations – due to the possibility of enrolling in both higher professional and university studies, and the possibility of continuing studies in the third cycle. At the same time, it should further open up disciplinary knowledge for doctoral students and promote the development of an academic habitus, while offering future professionals specialised expertise that was lacking or was addressed in insufficient depth in their first-cycle studies. This is a significant challenge for the curriculum, which generally covers two years and includes a compulsory master's thesis. The curricular risks from the first-cycle studies are therefore intensified, and the concern for the comprehensiveness and roundedness of the specialisation on offer is all the greater.

At both levels, an important question arises: how far does the threshold of acceptable electiveness, modularity, fragmentation and interdisciplinarity of a study extend to ensure that it still provides a complete qualification, socialisation and subjectification within the primary discipline? This question is reasonable for approaching the issue of doctoral studies, which are purely scientific, now also artistic, and always theoretical. The focus is on skills and competences relevant to scientific and research work. Unlike first- and second-cycle studies, they aim to be completely elective, tailored to a specific research problem. Study obligations are concentrated around this problem and related peripheral knowledge, where the horizon of truth and understanding is expanded. It is therefore not ideal for a doctoral study to be saturated with generic professional content and generic competences for a job, nor for it to consist of superficial and excessively fragmented content or obligations. This is why it avoids basic knowledge, practices and skills – for example, learning about disciplinary basics, sectoral legislation, elementary professional practices, or transferable skills, such as skilling to apply for, organise and manage scientific projects. A doctoral student has either become familiar with such contents during their lower-cycle

studies or will acquire them in the workplace. Doctoral studies are not suitable for disseminating closed knowledge, fashionable methods or knowledge, or leading ideas and trends in practice, unless they are critically or originally tackled.

Evaluation practices have revealed that there are occasional lapses in assessments related to a lack of understanding of the specifics of the cycles and types of study. An example is a group of experts who proposed the introduction of role-playing as an innovative method in one of the courses of a doctoral study, although from an applied soft discipline. Let us just clarify that scientific work is likely not developed through role-playing, which can be more important for first-cycle studies. One of the most common lapses is to force first-cycle university studies into the field of specialised vocational training. On the other hand, few reports on such study programmes have encouraged the strengthening of theoretical and fundamental knowledge. The most widespread shortcoming of the assessments so far is that they are too superficial and brief in their consideration of the specifics of the study. In carrying out assessments, we need to develop sensitivity to the study's specifics, especially in the parts that go beyond the provisions in the regulations and the related emphases on the qualification frame of mind. The regulations do not only make concessions to the socialisation and subjectification elements, but also to distinguishing between basic and applied studies, and between general and specialised studies.

SPECIFICS OF CORRESPONDENCE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION TO DISCIPLINES

When looking at the quality of studies in a discipline-specific way, notions of good education are shaped by disciplinary cultures and their standards of knowledge. We also divert from a generic approach, which emphasises the qualification element of education, and from the general expectations of the external environment for applied knowledge. By accepting disciplinary specifics, we understand that generic knowledge and competences need to be grounded in disciplinary content for a study to lead to high-level education. To be an expert in a particular field, it is not enough for a graduate to be flexible, to be able to communicate, process information and continue learning; to be good at teamwork, putting any knowledge into practice, and to be skilled in new technologies. A graduate also had to develop a comprehensive and in-depth professional and scientific background and sophisticated mental skills sharpened within the discipline.

The regulations in force do not distinguish between the specifics of the disciplines. Neither the ZViS or the Scientific Research and Innovation Activities Act, nor the Accreditation Criteria have provisions to separate the disciplinary specifics of education and research. Nevertheless, the Accreditation Criteria entrust the consideration of disciplinary specifics to experts by requiring an assessment of the appropriateness of the study programme's correspondence to the intended field or discipline, as well as of the appropriateness of the scientific and research work and research credentials of the study holders or providers to the field, either at the programme or at the institutional level.

Disciplines differ in their criteria for scientific knowledge and reasoning. Although their specifics are complex, for ease of understanding we divide them into groups that are more distinctly different from each other. Disciplines therefore have different procedures for creating, organising and testing knowledge. While some are characterised by the pursuit of discoveries or applied solutions, practical discoveries and technologies are rare in the others, which, however, seek to broaden and deepen understanding. The attitude towards truth is therefore different in terms of strictness, and varies from understanding reality through interpretation to directly proving and verifying reality. Some disciplines approach research in a more systematic, objective and exact way, with more controlled and isolated variables within limited frames of reference. Others are more general, comprehensive, metanarrative and approximate, as their frame of reference in which to study interrelated and dependent variables is broader. They allow for dif-

ferent views of truth and foster critical attitude. This does not make them less worthy, this is precisely why they tackle their problem field better. Answers to research questions are therefore, depending on the discipline, definitive or more open-ended; differently distinguishable, partial or more comprehensive; more theoretical or more practical; and can be planned and predicted with varying degrees of certainty. In the former disciplines, knowledge develops in a more linear, coherent and cumulative way, while the latter are characterised by patterns of repetition (returning to the same problems) and lesser coherence of the knowledge produced. Disciplines also have different attitudes towards the functionality of knowledge. In some, knowledge creation is predominantly interest-based, while in others it is not interest-based. Finally, they differ in their view of when science moves from the creation to the application of knowledge to become a profession, and when science is committed to the study of reality and when it is committed to its creation.

Disciplines can also be understood as cultures of specific scientific communities, linked by common values and ideas such as academic freedom and autonomy, but demarcated by specific and distinct traditions, ethics, rules of behaviour, forms of communication and modes of knowledge transfer. Depending on the discipline, the interconnectedness and unity of their members, the permeability of disciplinary boundaries, the relationship between disciplines, as well as the unity or dispersion of research interests and research, intellectual styles and discourses change.

1. The hard pure disciplines are characterised by the accumulation of findings, fragmentation, the tree structure of knowledge, the interest in universal truths, the focus on quantities, simplifications, impersonality and the absence of values, the clarity of the rules for the testing of knowledge and its relevance, the consensus to address important issues, the orientation towards discovery, and good organisation.
2. The soft pure disciplines are repetitive. They address research problems in a broader and more comprehensive way. They are fluid, personal and individualistic. They are value-laden, qualitative- and complication-oriented. They lack consensus on important issues and their results are interpretations. Their structure is loose as well.
3. Hard applied disciplines are purpose-driven, pragmatic and focused on mastering the physical environment. Their approaches are heuristic, qualitative and quantitative, with purpose and function behind the criteria for judgement. They create products, technologies and patents.
4. The soft applied disciplines are not only purposeful, pragmatic and outward-looking, but also oriented towards improving professional practices. They place importance on case studies and create protocols and procedures. They follow fashion and trends and are prone to insecure status.

Disciplines also vary in their development level – they differ in terms of their establishment and stability, and consequently in terms of their social power or susceptibility to external influences, either from other disciplines or from non-academic environment. The hard-pure and hard-applied disciplines demonstrate greater unity, coherence and focus of research. They are better delineated from other disciplines. Soft pure and soft applied disciplines, on the other hand, are more permeable and open. Their communities are more fragmented and there are less bonds between their members, who tend to explore a broader field.

Due to space constraints, we cannot go into the impact that the disciplines have on teaching. Signature pedagogy, for example, addresses this issue. Roughly speaking, we can outline that teaching in studies within hard disciplines relies, among other things, on models, theories and symbolic manipulation, while within soft disciplines it relies on emotionality, intuition and the metaphorical representation of knowledge. Moreover, disciplinary cultures each influence educational ideals in their own ways. While some focus on creating applied scientists, pragmatists and technicians, others focus on creating critics, people skilled in oral and written expression, and still others on theorists and analysts or on creators and artists. Graduates' ways of thinking and behaving – i.e. the nuances of the quality of education – vary so much due to disciplinary influences that it is questionable whether they can be captured by generic indicators such as employability, average grade, transition or completion rates and competences for the workplace.

Quality in disciplinarity

Returning to the Accreditation Criteria, assessments should take into account the disciplinary specifics of education and research. However, this is where the problem becomes acute, as these specifics need to be linked to different concepts of quality, which, depending on how they have been established, have different implications for the different groups of disciplines and for the disciplinarity itself. Below is a tabular overview of the ways in which study programmes are assessed on two issues that are key to the disciplinarity of a study programme – the programme's correspondence within the discipline and its interdisciplinarity.

Assessment of disciplinarity by different concepts of quality:

	Assessment of the correspondence of the study programme with the intended field or discipline	Assessment of the interdisciplinarity of the study programme
1. Quality as consistency with set objectives or regulations	Disciplinary specifics are not laid down in the regulations. Therefore, experts can make statements on compliance based on the quality concepts (2) to (6) below. They may also refer to any internal regulations of the institution or its organisational objectives that envisage the disciplinary structure of the studies and related changes. The absence of defined disciplinary rules and the social or spiritual nature of knowledge make it very difficult to assess compliance objectively.	
2. Quality as fitness for purpose (satisfaction, expectations and needs of stakeholders)	A decisive criterion for the appropriate disciplinarity of studies is that the curriculum is based on the expectations and needs of key stakeholder groups, in particular students, employers' representatives and teachers as custodians of the discipline. Disciplinary rules thus make necessary compromises with interests that are not always related to criteria of knowledge, but also to satisfaction, benefit and the exercise of power. A positive, but not necessarily expert opinion from different stakeholder groups on the correspondence of a study to a discipline or its interdisciplinarity is already a sign of quality.	
3. Quality in economic terms (meeting the needs of the economy)	According to this concept, a good curriculum is a cross-section of strategies, needs and expectations from the economic sphere. The need for graduates is key to the design of the study content, and the curriculum offers knowledge and competences relevant to the profession and the workplace that respond to, react to and have the potential to add value to economic and technological progress, rather than to disciplinary rules. At the core of this concept of quality, the disciplinarity of study is externally regulated. The correspondence of the study to the discipline is therefore assessed in terms of the requirements of the graduate's professional qualification. Quality is in the curriculum with a focus on applied skills and competences. The rules and study programmes in the applied disciplines are an example and could be followed by study programmes in the pure disciplines. The issue of interdisciplinarity is also shaped by the need for new job profiles, new job opportunities and the effects of technological progress. Its quality is not assessed on the basis of the composition of the field of knowledge and the problems of merging disciplines, but on anticipating and responding to economic trends. At the same time, the curriculum can be marketable and therefore of high quality if the institution is able to make the most of the investment in the study programme. From this perspective, the quality of interdisciplinarity derives from the uniqueness of the content of the study programme, which represents a niche market in higher education.	

4. Quality as transformation – a constructivist approach and student-centred learning	Instead of disciplinary delineation, it is important to have flexibility and adaptability in the content of the curriculum. Ideally, it is open in a way that aims at the improvement of the learning experience and personal development. Taking into account the student's preferences, it emphasises the freedom to choose content that promises the best outcome for the most optimal investment. The focus shifts from introducing the student to the discipline to motivating them and finding techniques to make the study as profound as possible while being effective and efficient. In this concept, the focus is shifting from a discipline-specific approach to a generic one – transferable skills, adaptability and the ability to handle information are gaining importance for quality. Disciplinary issues are also giving way to the ideal of transdisciplinary integration of problem-oriented knowledge from broad fields. This is also the context in which the assessments of interdisciplinarity are based.
5. Quality from a procedural and administrative perspective	More important than the correspondence of the study to the discipline or disciplinarity in itself, in assessing the quality of a curriculum, are the adherence to rules, the planning of the curriculum or changes to it according to an established procedure, the organisation and management of its development, as well as the rights, duties and obligations of the stakeholders involved in the process. The curricular proposals that emerge from a disciplinary department at an institution are technically and professionally compared by the management of the institution with proposals from other stakeholder groups, sifted through the organisational objectives, subjected to statistically supported analyses according to performance and efficiency indicators, and finally an optimal decision is taken. The process must be transparent and properly documented, and stakeholders must be informed of the process and its outcomes.
6. Quality in relation to academic standards and values	The curriculum is characterised by a discipline with all its specifics. In view of curricular constraints, it structures all relevant disciplinary knowledge and skills in a meaningful way according to disciplinary rules, not according to expectations and initiatives outside the disciplinary field or according to the rules of another discipline. Good correspondence of a study programme to a discipline is in fact an important starting point for assessing the overall quality of the study, its depth, breadth and complexity. The view of the quality of education also focuses on the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, at least at the level of competence. The assessment of interdisciplinarity stems from the question of whether the individual branches of knowledge that are interwoven in the study programme are comprehensively grounded and developed, whether they are consistently integrated by the curriculum, so that together they form a sufficiently profound whole that has solved the epistemological and methodological challenges of merging different disciplines. To assess the quality of interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary initiatives, disciplinary rules and the success of the combined knowledge in generating new knowledge and developing its peripheral areas are key. Unlike other concepts of quality, this is the subject of expert opinion from the community of teachers and researchers as custodians of the disciplines.

The factual situation of disciplinarity can be assessed in different ways, to different extents, on the basis of different sources of information and with different emphases or omissions. Moreover, disciplinarity cannot be judged by the same criteria, because the disciplines are very different from each other. It is therefore important for experts to take into account disciplinary specifics and to base their assessment on the quality concept(s) with the right degree of honesty and caution.

The assessments so far invite reflection on the following:

- which demarcation experts might be more sensitive to – studying within exact/non-exact disciplines or studying within applied/not interest-based disciplines;
- whether the rules of a particular group of disciplines can also be applied when considering the quality of studies within other groups of disciplines;
- whether non-disciplinary rules can take precedence over disciplinary rules when it comes to the quality of the disciplinarity of studies, and whether the non-disciplinary rules can be ignored;
- how to apply the concepts of quality and how the different cycles and types of study affect the assessment of its disciplinary structure;
- whether a discipline can be established through the introduction of a study programme, or whether a new study programme should be placed within a discipline that is already developed at the institution;
- whether the interdisciplinarity of studies can be merely the result of the intersections of disciplines developed at the institution, or also the patching of disciplinary gaps;
- whether interdisciplinary habilitations are acceptable, even desirable;
- whether different disciplines are (still) equal and equally important today.

INSTITUTIONAL SPECIFICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education institutions are fundamentally distinguished by fields of activity, types, legal status and organisation. The ZViS stipulates that universities ensure the development of science, professions and the arts and the transfer of knowledge in several fields or disciplines in all cycles of study. Its size and disciplinary diversity link it to Humboldtian model of a great university. While faculties are mainly active in scientific research and education, academies of art are mainly active in the arts and education, and professional colleges are mainly active in education. Each of them is active in one or more disciplines or, in the case of the colleges, professional fields.

External evaluations initially shift the focus from the broader institutional diversity characterised by fields or disciplines to administrative and organisational specifics. They are interested in the mission, vision and strategy of the institution, which, rather than its educational-research essence, are concerned with its management or business and the role of stakeholders in this. The initial focus of the assessment is on all the key teaching and research contexts of the institution, ranging from the material and human resources conditions to the quality of study programmes, teaching and research, as well as internal quality assurance. Institutional assessment in all these areas is usually based on organisational plans and objectives and their achievement. The assessment of the various institutional issues therefore often focuses on the organisation and management of institutions as organisations, rather than as guilds of researchers, teachers and students.

Although the organisational view of institutions has already been well sharpened by experts, the current regulations do not preclude a more comprehensive view that also focuses on other institutional features, such as an understanding of the origins and tradition of the institution, the importance of its autonomy, its social position, its field orientation and disciplinary development, sorting out the relations at individual departments, its political or ideological orientation, its relationship to knowledge, and the institutional mark on the socialisation and subjectification growth of students. An assessment that relies primarily on organisational objectives may ignore such institutional specifics or may transfer them into contexts and language that are not native to them.

In our review of the experts' reports, we found that institutional aspects are often linked to the planning, updating or implementation of organisational objectives. For example, the latter should be more up-to-date, measurable and actionable, as well as better defined and adapted to global trends. It was also important to see how stakeholders are involved in the organisation and management, how these processes

are linked to internal quality assurance and how their effects ultimately feed through into the content and implementation of the study. The assessments so far, however, have often not gone beyond formalities, have not said enough about how the institution was established, what role it plays and and how it sees its future. It was also not uncommon for the institutional discussion in the experts' reports to be placed in the context of the institution as an organisation offering market services and meeting the wishes of clients, or in the context of an institution where administrative and legal transactions are carried out and where the management of the rights, duties and obligations of stakeholders is key. This is not to suggest that such views are not permissible, but only that they are partial.

Autonomy

Autonomy is a central institutional feature, given the long tradition of universities. The ZViS stipulates it as a characteristic guaranteeing a special institutional status. It associates it with freedom of research and teaching, self-government in management, habilitation, recruitment, study programme introduction, asset management, awarding of titles and degrees, and cooperation with other organisations. The Accreditation Criteria mention autonomy in only one clause, i.e. in relation to freedom of teaching and research. The Accreditation Criteria do not explicitly address the specificity of institutional autonomy, so it is assessed in the context of the mission, vision, strategy, organisational and financial plans, stakeholder engagement and internal rules. These legal-administrative bases for assessment are set over what is in fact also a feature of a specific field of social action with specific rules and a task of creating and transmitting knowledge. They are set over a community of teachers, researchers and students that is not predominantly of business or legal nature. This is only to reiterate that it is sensible to adapt the sensitivity of the assessment of institutional specifics to the circumstance that the community in question is academic in its ideal and that it operates not only efficiently and according to the legal order, but also in a spirit of solidarity, criticism, agonism, professional ethics and reputation. Although there is not much information on this in accreditation and/or evaluation applications and self-evaluation reports, this does not mean that it is not equally important for the assessment.

When the specifics are further linked to different concepts of quality, in addition to the concerns raised above, we also ask the following questions:

- to whom autonomy belongs – to the management bodies of the institutions, to the disciplinary communities (chairs and departments) or to both, and to what extent?
- can autonomy be consistent with, or even subordinate to, economic, administrative and legal objectives or provisions?
- what is the impact of the still ongoing push to centralise the management and administration of institutions?
- can an institution be considered a company or a corporation, and knowledge a commodity?
- what should be an assessor's view on the demarcation between academic and business activities in the field of research and teaching?
- how to assess the division of the governance of the institution between the ownership stakeholders (the management board) and the academic stakeholders (the Senate)?
- how to steer the assessment between legal, business and academic influences on the governance of an institution?
- how to assess the various organisational factors, ranging from the knowledge by which departments and faculties are formed across disciplines, and the relationships between their members, to the central administrations that govern through organisational objectives and rules?
- how to balance the meritocratic ideal of academic prestige and the power of argument with the ideal of technical management by efficiency, effectiveness and pre-set organisational goals? How to link both to the real power relations and administrative obstacles at the institution, as well as to the diffuse interests of different stakeholder groups?

OUTLINE OF CONCEPTS OF QUALITY

Quite a lot has been said about the concepts of quality. We have shown how they characterise assessments, either against individual quality standards or in the specifics of the subject of assessment. What interests us more than the operationalisation and functionality of quality is, namely, the diversity of ideas that emerges from its essence and its associated effects. The concepts chosen are therefore meaningfully differentiated by the ideals, perceptions and values of quality higher and higher vocational education that define them. Their choice is also based on the fact that concepts of quality are not developed on the basis of coherent value systems, but either on seemingly divergent values that are predominantly economic, psychological and procedural in nature, or on negative values that associate certain notions of quality not with ideals, but with accusations of elitism, snobbery and traditionalism. The choice was also influenced by the analysis of evaluation practices – what we observed when reviewing the experts' reports, and whose common denominator could be found in the semantic relativity of quality. In Slovenia, neither the White Papers nor the national programmes of higher education, nor the primary or secondary legislation have provided an explanation of quality in higher education. Nor has it been placed in relation to previous concepts of quality in science and education.

1. Quality as consitency with set objectives or regulations is based on an understanding of good based on excellence, consistency, reliability, elimination of errors and stakeholder accountability. It means measurable compliance with objective requirements and is intrinsically linked to forms of control that originate in industry. In practice, this concept is key to assessing quality as a form of compliance with minimum standards and criteria. All those who have shown quality according to it are of the same quality. This view challenges quality in whether it should rather be called coherence, relevance or uniformity in higher education instead.
2. Quality as fitness for purpose relies on satisfaction, expectations and needs of stakeholders, although it originates from the purpose of a product or service. This purpose is not characterised by exclusivity, but by inclusiveness – the inclusion of stakeholders, and can be achieved without external recognition. The management of the institution weaves the various interests, which are not clearly demarcated into academic, economic and other interests, into organisational objectives and steers them with managerial techniques. This functional approach to quality is also strongly present in external assessments and regulations. Experts make their assessments in relation to the previous approach, as both stakeholder inclusion and the achievement of organisational objectives are prescribed. It is mainly focused on aligning higher education for work and with the business endeavours of institutions.
3. Quality in economic terms puts higher education in the role of the economy. Good is what contributes to economic growth, progress and the creation of a skilled and productive labour force, as well as to the successful operation of an institution. Quality is linked to profitable, useful and specialised knowledge that helps to manage the world. The educational ideal is therefore professional training, focusing on job competences, soft and transferable skills, and on strengthening technical, information, communication and functional competences. Important values are: efficiency, innovation, optimality, productivity, entrepreneurship, effectiveness, performance, profitability, applicability, competitiveness and flexibility.
4. Quality as transformation is a concept based on a constructivist approach to teaching. It is linked to student-centred learning, which is required by the 2017 amendment to the Accreditation Criteria, in line with European standards. By focusing on teaching, it combines the ideals of training and skilling based on applied knowledge with a form of progressive approach to teaching, in which the social-critical tone of education is replaced by a psychological and individualistic one. Thus, within this concept, traditional critical reflection as a way of thinking about the implications of disciplinary knowledge for truth, reason, human beings, society and the environment is oriented towards the value of individual reflection on the learning experience. Quality is related to a study where job training

is tailored to the individual learning experience. The teacher plays the role of an instructor or coach who activates, supports and facilitates learning, while the student acts as an individualistic learner for whom the institution provides the conditions to enhance the learning experience. Teaching and assessment methods and techniques are particularly important for quality. In this respect, transformation is linked to a qualitative change in knowledge, skills, values and personal development, and ultimately to the added value created. In addition to the efficiency, flexibility and applicability of education, the following values are key: (pro)activity, empowerment and improvement, experiential learning and learning how to learn, (self-)management and control of learning.

5. The concept of quality from a procedural and administrative perspective is based on organisational culture. According to this concept, the relationships between stakeholders are ideally legal, and the relations between them and their activities are formal and regular. They are governed by the greatest extent possible by agreements and regulations. The focus is on the rights, obligations and duties of stakeholders. It is important that their interests and activities are managed professionally, technically and according to established and predictable procedures. Therefore, quality mechanisms for monitoring and controlling higher education and higher vocational education activities are needed, and the important values are: accountability, transparency, legal and procedural order, professional and rational management, planning, recording, documenting, reporting, compliance with implementation deadlines, (self-)monitoring, (self-)evaluation, traceability and accessibility.
6. The academic concept is based on the ideal of the academic culture. A good study is complex and in-depth, implemented at a high level. It is based on cultivation and introduces an individual to discipline. It offers one professional knowledge and skills for a profession. It opens the door to the social and cultural world and its order, but at the same time enlightens and develops one into an autonomous, critical individual who is able to sensibly engage with academia, the profession, society, culture and the world. It sets high expectations and requires high stakes, effort and intellectual capacity. A graduate becomes a scholar. Higher education teaching is reflexive Socratic education. Research is scientific and has great intrinsic value – it enriches the discipline. It is characterised by an autonomous pursuit of truth and reason, which, depending on the discipline, is either interest-based or not, and either exact or inexact. Important values are: academic freedom, institutional autonomy, responsibility for high-level knowledge and disciplinary orientation, collegiality, academic ethos, academic habitus, academic prestige and influence, self-governing meritocracy, internal regulation of knowledge, its pluralism and openness, and its substantive and rational orientation. Although the academic concept is specific to higher education and not to higher vocational education, it can be reasonably transferred to the latter, taking into account the criteria of the profession and vocational training.

Although the (certain) concepts presented may seem questionably defined, distortedly distinguished or irrelevant, their traces are imprinted in the reports of experts to date, and they are also embedded in national regulations. They remind us of the contradictions in our understanding of quality and the possibility of different perspectives on the same conditions, characteristics or phenomena. It is possible to have both a positive and a negative opinion about a high transition rate or about the correspondence of a study to a discipline, and solid evidence and a real argument for each of these opinions can be found easily. Therefore, where the rules allow, the use of concepts of quality should perhaps not be arbitrary and non-transparent. Two fundamental conclusions follow from this.

1. Is the purpose of quality assessment to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the subject of assessment across the different concepts of quality and for each of them separately?
2. Or would it be appropriate to choose the right concept of quality for a given quality standard, to justify the choice, and to approach it with the right critical distance that aims at the consequences of such a choice? But who should be entrusted with the choice in this case – an institution, a college, a group of experts or the Agency?

CREATION OF THE GUIDE

The text is based on the results of the Agency's system-wide and thematic analyses of accreditation, evaluation and self-evaluation of higher education institutions; on the results of the ongoing examination of the comments of the participants in the procedures, and in particular on the reports of the groups of experts in accordance with the ZViS 2016 and the Agency's criteria adopted thereunder; as well as the findings and recommendations of the participants in the consultations with experts, higher and higher vocational education teachers, scientists in higher education didactics and science research, and representatives of other stakeholders.

The Agency published a first draft of the Guide on its website at the beginning of 2021. Until autumn of the same year, it collected comments from various stakeholders through specific meetings and in writing. It supplemented the Guide:

1. with new chapters on:
    - External evaluation of higher vocational colleges – a topic presented at the June, October and November 2021 and spring 2022 courses for higher vocational education stakeholders;
    - the role of participants in accreditation and evaluation procedures;
2. with the guidelines for assessment of second-cycle interdisciplinary study programmes; they were adopted by the Agency Council at its 163rd meeting on 15 April 2021;
3. with proposals from experts and representatives of higher education institutions for the assessment of:
    - the equipment for the implementation of higher education activities;
    - the structure and content of a study programme and its implementation plan in the accreditation of a study programme;
    - implementation of study in the evaluation of a study programme;
    - practical training and human resources in reaccreditation of a higher education institution.

The Agency published the supplemented second draft of the Guide at the end of 2021. In 2022, in cooperation with various stakeholders, it was supplemented by the following:

4. s poglavjem o prvi akreditaciji visokošolskega zavoda;
5. s posebnostmi pri presojanju (mednarodnih) skupnih študijskih programov oziroma visokošolskega transnacionalnega izobraževanja ter habilitacij.

The assessment guide and its guidelines have been tested over a period of two years by employees, the Agency Council and experts in accreditation and evaluation procedures, as well as by a number of institutions/colleges in self-evaluation processes.

SOURCES

When considering the specifics of higher education and concepts of quality, we have drawn on various sources, among which we would like to highlight the following domestic sources:

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