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Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije  
za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

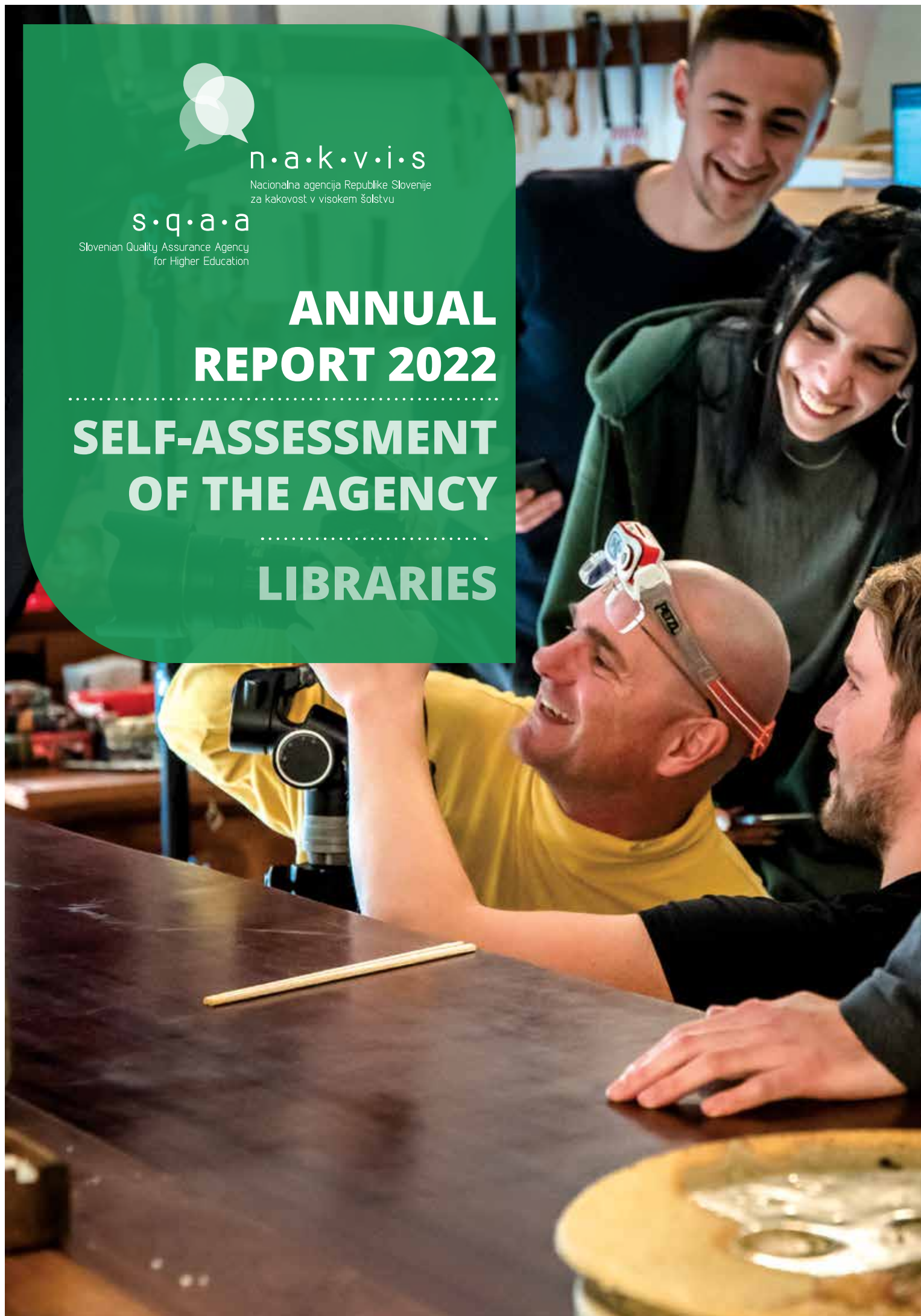
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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022

## SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE AGENCY

### LIBRARIES



# PUBLICATION DATA

**NAKVIS Annual Report 2022.  
Self-assessment of the Agency.  
Libraries.**

**Published by:** Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

**Edited by:** Maja Milas and Julija Uršič

**Authors:**

Mateja Bajuk Malešič, Filip Draženović, Tilen Heco, Primož Južnič Ph.D.,  
Nataša Kramar, Maja Milas, Gregor Rebernik

**Photography:**

Cover page:

VIST - Faculty of Applied Sciences - Photo: Students of the 3rd year of  
Photography 1st cycle, Studio for advertising and fashion photography;  
Mentors: Branko Čeak and Jure Horvat, BA (Hons); Photography: 2019/20

Back page:

VIST - Faculty of Applied Sciences - Students of the 3rd year of Photography  
1st cycle, Studio for Advertising and Fashion Photography; Mentor: Primož  
Lukežič, BA (Hons); Photography: 2018/19

Other photos: Adobe stock

**Design:** Aiko, Maja Cerjak s.p.

**Printed by:** Birografika BORI, d. o. o.

**Print run:** 300 copies

For NAKVIS  
dr. Franci Demšar  
Ljubljana 2023

**This publication is free of charge.**

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji  
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

061.1:378(497.4)«2022»(047)

ANNUAL report 2022 : self-assessment of the agency : libraries / [edited  
by Maja Milas and Julija Uršič ; authors Mateja Bajuk Malešič ... [et al.] ;  
photography VIST - Faculty of Applied Sciences, other photos Adobe stock]. -  
Ljubljana : Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2023

ISBN 978-961-95538-7-9  
COBISS.SI-ID 168656899

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# 01

## ABOUT THE AGENCY

The Republic of Slovenia established the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency) in 2010 as a public body for quality assurance in higher education and for development and advisory work. The Agency is a direct non-governmental budget user. Acting under public authority, it issues general acts for the exercise of public authorities and individual administrative acts. In carrying out its work, the Agency is independent and autonomous and committed to the principles of professionalism, impartiality, legality and political neutrality.

The Agency is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA), the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA), the presidency of which it assumed in 2020, and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Its membership in international associations for quality assurance in higher education proves the compliance of its operation with European standards and guidelines.

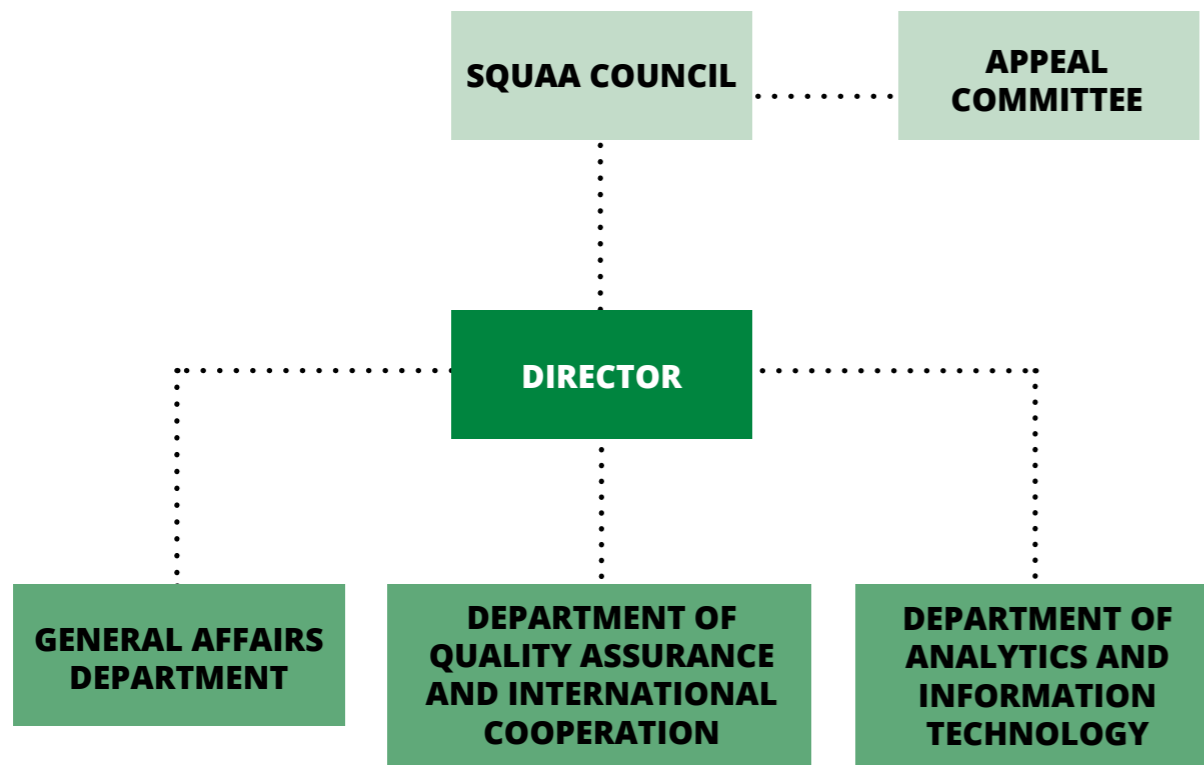
### Mission

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

### Vision

By activities in the implementation of processes in the field of assuring and improving quality in higher education, the Agency will change the national and international higher education area.

## ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION



## THE AGENCY'S DEPARTMENTS

The AGENCY'S DEPARTMENTS perform tasks in the basic areas of the Agency's operation – they draft criteria and other regulations, conduct accreditation and evaluation procedures, update the Agency's information system, prepare analyses and guidelines to support the systems and quality assessment, engage in international networking, oversee the transparency of work and communication with stakeholders, and prepare materials for decision-making of the Agency Council and for the Appeal Committee. One of the basic activities is constant international cooperation with related agencies and associations of agencies, as well as development and consulting work.

In order to improve its work, the Agency has undergone several organisational transformations since 2018. In 2020 and 2021, its operations were divided into four departments (Quality Assurance, Analytics, International Cooperation and Information Technology, and General Affairs); practice showed, however, that it would be sensible to reorganise the departments in order to ensure better cohesion of content in individual fields of work. Since 2022, the Agency therefore has three departments – the Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department, the Analytics and Information Technology Department, and the General Affairs Department. Each department has its own head. The tasks carried out by individual departments are intertwined or closely linked; as a result, they must often be performed by professional staff from various departments. The Agency's main activities, accreditation and evaluation procedures, are conducted by staff from both the Quality Assurance Department and the International Cooperation and the Analytics and Information Technology Department.

The following table brings a detailed overview of tasks related to the external quality assessment of higher and higher vocational education by departments.

## BASIC FIELDS OF WORK BY DEPARTMENT

**Director: Franci Demšar, Ph.D,** alternate Jožica Kramar

### Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department

**Head of the department:** Klemen Šubic, alternates: Nataša Kramar and Gregor Rebernik

**Staff:** Anita Kajtezovič, Martina Mravlja and Zala Sečnik

#### Fields of work:

- criteria and other provisions from the field of quality;
- accreditations and evaluations;
- modifications of study programmes;
- cooperation with stakeholders (institutions/colleges, experts);
- communications and public relations;
- international activities;
- organisation and cooperation in different national and international events (conferences, consultations, training courses, workshops);
- keeping and updating records (on accreditations, evaluations, modifications, transnational higher education – THE, etc.);
- project collaborations and activities (micro-credentials, European universities, etc.);
- intersectoral cooperation (integrity, promotion of health, self-assessment, etc.);
- archiving applications and other documents.

### Analytics and Information Technology Department:

**Head of the department:** Tatjana Debevec, alternates: Maja Milas and Andrej Krček

**Staff:** Matjaž Štuhec, Ph.D., Jernej Širok, M.Sc, Tatjana Horvat and Tilen Heco

#### Fields of work:

- plans and reports (annual work plan and report on the work and operations of the Agency, strategy);
- analyses, documents, publications;
- self-assessment of the Agency;
- manuals, guides;
- organisation and cooperation in different events (conferences, consultations, training courses, workshops);
- translation;
- eNakvis information system and links with databases (SICRIS, IZUM, etc.);
- internal information system iNakvis;
- intersectoral cooperation (integrity, promotion of health, etc.);
- keeping and updating records (on accreditations, evaluations, modifications, THE, etc.).

### General Affairs Department:

**Head of the department:** Barbara Zupančič Kočar, alternates: Mateja Bajuk Malešič and Snežana Mačar

**Staff:** Slađana Tomić and Prudencija Perat

#### Fields of work:

- legislation, preparation of internal Agency acts;
- assistance in the implementation of activities from the field of quality assurance;
- work for the Appeal Committee;
- financial affairs (budget implementation);
- human resources affairs;
- access to public information;
- business and administrative tasks (contracts, receiving and sending mail, document records, etc.);
- participation in external and internal supervision procedures;
- intersectoral cooperation (integrity, promotion of health, self-assessment, etc.);
- keeping and updating human resource and other records within its powers.

## THE AGENCY COUNCIL

The AGENCY COUNCIL is the highest decision-making body. It is composed of 11 members appointed in such a way as to allow politically independent decision-making and to ensure the participation of all relevant stakeholders:

- 3 members are appointed by the Rectors' Conference,
- 1 member is appointed by the representative association of independent higher education institutions,
- 1 member is appointed by the representative association of higher vocational colleges,
- 2 members are appointed by the representative organisation of students in cooperation with student councils,
- 1 member is appointed by representative employers' associations by agreement,
- 1 member is appointed by representative trade unions in the field of higher education by agreement,
- 2 members are appointed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia based on public invitation (1 is an expert in the field of higher education or its quality assurance + 1 is an expert in the field of higher education or its quality assurance who studies or works abroad).

The Agency Council:

- determines and adopts criteria for accreditation and external evaluation of higher education institutions, study programmes, higher vocational colleges and other regulations related to it; all are published on the Agency's website;
- decides on the following:
  - initial accreditation of higher education institutions and their reaccreditation, which may be granted for a maximum of 5 years,
  - accreditation of study programmes, including international joint study programmes, for an indefinite period of time,
  - accreditation of transformations of higher education institutions,
  - compliance with conditions for the entry of a transnational higher education in the public records,
  - notifications of international study programmes accredited abroad;
- adopts opinions about compliance with quality standards of higher vocational colleges;
- issues recommendations to higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges to improve the quality of all their activities, and especially self-assessment, updating and delivery of study programmes.

*Members of the Council of the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia in 2022*

MEMBERS	Institution appointing the member:
<b>Boris Dular, Ph.D., President of the Council</b>	Representative employer associations
<b>Marjan Mernik, Ph.D., Agency Council Deputy President</b>	Rectors' conference
<b>Ivan Svetlik, Ph.D., later Goran Turk, Ph.D.</b>	Rectors' conference
<b>Peter Purg, Ph.D., later Klemen Širok</b>	Rectors' conference
<b>Sebastjan Kristovič, Ph.D.</b>	Representative association of independent higher education institutions
<b>Branko Škafar, Ph.D.</b>	Representative association of higher vocational colleges
<b>Andrej Pirjevec, later David Bohar</b>	Representative organisation of students in cooperation with student councils
<b>Klemen Peran, later Andrej Pirjevec</b>	Representative organisation of students in cooperation with student councils
<b>Bruno Završnik, Ph.D.</b>	Representative trade unions in higher education
<b>Mirko Pečarič, Ph.D., later Julijana Kristl, Ph.D.</b>	Government of the Republic of Slovenia
<b>Peter Verovšek, Ph.D.</b>	Government of the Republic of Slovenia



## THE APPEAL COMMITTEE

The APPEAL COMMITTEE is a second-instance body deciding on appeals against decisions adopted by the Agency Council in the procedures for accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes.

The Appeal Committee, appointed by the Agency Council on the basis of a public invitation, consists of three members, each of whom has an alternate. The members select and appoint a Deputy Chair from among themselves. Alternates replace members in decision-making procedures in the event of their absence or exclusion.

*Members of the Appeal Committee of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education*

Members	Term of office	Alternate
<b>Uršula Habe Nagode</b>	<b>20 June 2019 to 20 June 2023</b>	
<b>Marko Novak, Ph.D., president</b>	<b>20 June 2019 to 20 June 2023</b>	<b>Andreja Rakuša</b>
<b>Barbara Toplak Perović, Ph.D.</b>	<b>20 June 2019 to 20 June 2023</b>	<b>Tina Tratnik</b>

# 02

*Maja Milas*

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE AGENCY'S WORK IN 2022**

A review of the Agency's work, along with several analyses and reports associated with various events, feedback from stakeholders in higher education, and the Agency's self-evaluation, collectively indicate that the Agency is successfully advancing toward its strategic objectives set for the period up to 2025.

In the past year, the Agency's primary focus was on advancing the development of a standalone law pertaining to quality in higher and tertiary education. This legislation would enable the Agency to participate in foreign accreditation procedures while enhancing the professionalism of its decision-making in appeals procedures. The Agency also dedicated effort to enhancing the quality of its standard for accreditation, and evaluation procedures. It has produced a Guide to External Assessment which has been published in both Slovenian and English. Additionally, the Agency has organized various training courses for experts and staff to share practical experiences and collaboratively develop guidelines for the comprehensive assessment of quality standards across all audit domains as outlined in the Criteria for Accreditation.

Another significant task accomplished by the Agency in the past year was its self-assessment. The primary aim of this self-assessment was to enhance the quality of the Agency's activities and meet the conditions necessary for the renewal of its membership with ENQA and EQAR. The Agency continued to foster international cooperation, participating in international working groups and organizing international meetings and conferences. During its Presidency of the CEENQA network, the Agency produced a thematic publication and co-organized the CEENQA Annual General Meeting in Istanbul. The recovery from the epidemic and the ongoing digital and green transition have accelerated changes in tertiary education, stimulating discussions about the future development of quality systems. The Agency remains committed to deepening its collaboration with various stakeholders and advancing the quality of higher education in Slovenia.

## AREAS OF QUALITY ASSESSMENT ACCORDING TO THE TYPES OF ACCREDITATIONS OR EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS

### INITIAL ACCREDITATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

1. Operation of the higher education institution
2. Human resources
3. Material conditions

### ACCREDITATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME

1. Structure and content of a study programme
2. Study programme delivery concept

### REACCREDITATION OF A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF A HIGHER PROFESSIONAL COLLEGE

1. Operation of the higher education institution or higher vocational college
2. Human resources
3. Students
4. Material conditions
5. Internal quality assurance and improvement, modification, updating and delivery of study programmes

### EVALUATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME OR A SAMPLE OF STUDY PROGRAMME

1. Internal quality assurance and improvement of the quality of a study programme
2. Modification and updating of a study programme
3. Study programme delivery

The Agency constantly strives to ensure and improve qualitative, professional and objective quality assessment in accreditation and evaluation procedures. To this end, it appoints independent groups of experts – which must include a foreign expert and a student – who carry out an in-depth assessment of compliance with quality standards in all areas of assessment.

The Agency regularly trains experts and candidates at special meetings and workshops, acquaints them with novelties in laws, Agency regulations and international standards for quality assessment, the need for impartial, in-depth substantive quality assessment, information on the characteristics of external assessments and satisfaction with them, the protocol of visits to institutions and colleges and the needs to

meet other, equally important conditions for the Agency expert, such as the ability to work in a group and a respectful attitude towards interlocutors.

The findings of the group of experts are evident from the accreditation and evaluation reports and are the basis for decisions on accreditations and external evaluations or recommendations for quality improvement.



## IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATION

In Slovenia, external assessment of the quality of higher and higher vocational education is inextricably linked to the active participation of students, teachers and researchers. The Agency, as well as its predecessor, the Council for Higher Education, was one of the first in Europe and beyond to start working with students at all levels: students are compulsory members of the Agency Council and all groups of experts, and their organisations participate in drafting legislation, criteria and other regulations. External quality assessment primarily addresses them, as well as teachers and researchers. The task of the Agency is to contribute to high-quality education according to state-approved study programmes. The state-approved status or validity of diplomas is, namely, guaranteed by a granted accreditation, which is within the competence of the Agency.

The tasks in the Agency's Annual Work Plan (AWP 2022) were defined by taking into account the following:

### strategic objectives of the Agency from 2021 to 2025:

- adoption of the Act on Quality in Higher and Higher Vocational Education;
- improvement of assessment according to quality standards and accreditation and evaluation procedures;
- in-depth substantive analytic work in selected areas;
- establishment of up-to-date databases on selected activities at higher education institutions;
- pursuing sustainable development goals;
- in-depth international cooperation;
- proactive communication;

### areas of assessment according to the Quality Manual:

- accreditations and external evaluations,
- internal quality assurance system of the Agency,
- external quality assurance system of the Agency,
- criteria and other provisions of the Agency,
- information system and provision of information;

### values of the Agency:

- professionalism
- transparency
- development.

## LEGISLATION AND OTHER PROVISIONS FROM THE FIELD OF QUALITY

At its meeting in early 2022, the working group appointed by the ministry competent for education (the then Ministry of Education, Science and Sport) to prepare the draft Act on Quality in Higher and Higher Vocational Education endorsed the draft Act for further consideration. The Agency provided explanations of the individual articles of the draft Act, a justification of the objectives and reasons for adopting the Act, and an international comparison. However, with the change of government in spring 2022, activities related to the Act came to a standstill. In autumn 2022, the Ministry assured that activities for the adoption of the Act will continue after the amendment of the Higher Education Act is ready.

The Criteria for Experts of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Criteria for Experts) were amended in the spring; the amendments concern the mandatory conditions to be fulfilled by candidates for entry in the Register, the recording of the annexes to the application for entry and the recording of the content of the assessment of the candidate, the conditions for the extension of entry in the Register or for removal from the Register, and the obligations of the professionals entered in the Register. It has also been redefined when the status of entry of experts in the Register of Experts is suspended.

In autumn, the Agency prepared the draft amendment to the Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education, which regulates in more detail especially the change of an international joint study programme into a study programme delivered only by a Slovenian higher education institution, and actions taken in the event of inappropriate modifications of study programmes (introduction of an extraordinary evaluation procedure). The document was discussed at several meetings and sent to stakeholders for comments. The new Professional and Academic Titles Act (ZSZUN), which entered into force in the summer of 2022, has also been taken into account in the preparation of the document. As an amendment to the ZSZUN, whose content has an impact on the wording of the Criteria, was submitted to the legislative procedure at the end of the year, the adoption of the amended Criteria was postponed until the following year.

The new ZSZUN also prompted the amendment to the Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes. The amendment introduces the naming of artistic titles and the naming of professional, scientific and artistic titles in English. Provisions have been added regarding the conduct of a site visit or tour of the premises, and the identification of major deficiencies in Article 45 has been amended in relation to the modification and updating of the study programme. Article 49a on progress reporting and Article 50 on evaluation of samples of study programmes have also been amended. The forms for accreditation and evaluation procedures have also been revised accordingly. The adoption of the amended Criteria was postponed to the next year as well because the first amendment to the ZSZUN, whose content has an impact on the wording of the Criteria, was submitted to the legislative procedure. Since, according to the ZViS, the components of the Diploma Supplement form are determined by the Minister responsible for higher education on the Agency's proposal, the 182nd meeting of the Agency Council also considered a proposal to amend the Rules on Diploma Supplement in order to bring it in line with the new ZSZUN.

## ANALYSES, DOCUMENTS, PUBLICATIONS

In early 2022, an analysis of evaluations of samples of study programmes with an international dimension was finished and published; the work on it began in the second half of 2021. The programmes are grouped into three thematic sets: international joint study programmes, study programmes in the framework of transnational higher education, and study programmes delivered by Slovenian higher education institutions in their branches abroad.

We started preparing the third systemic analysis of accreditation and evaluation practices covering accreditation and evaluation reports by groups of experts and self-assessment reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges from 2018 to 2022. To this end, more than 200 reports need to be analysed, most of them related to the assessment of study programmes in accreditation and evaluation procedures, for which the first results and data have been collected. The analysis of reports on the reaccreditation of institutions, college evaluations and self-assessments continues.

In autumn 2022, the Agency's annual publication was published, aimed at presenting the Agency and the annual report on its work as well as a guide to external assessments and guidelines for hybrid education. The publication was printed in both the Slovenian and English language, and its content was presented at national and international events.

The Agency continuously strives that the key documents and publications are accessible to the international public and that those of other actors in the European higher education area are accessible to the Slovenian public, so it ensured that the documents have been translated into English and Slovenian respectively. Parti-

cular attention has been paid to the terminological consistency of terms in the field of quality assurance in higher education, which contributes to the standardisation of key concepts in this professional field in both languages.

The analysis of the scientific, research, professional and artistic work of the holders of courses in the study programmes being delivered continued. Useful databases on this have been created, which are compiled on an ongoing basis for each accreditation or evaluation procedure and shared with experts to help them in their professional assessment. A comprehensive database of higher education libraries has also been launched.

In the past year, the Agency continued its international analysis of the independence of agencies for quality assurance in higher education, which was broadened with a substantial sample of agencies, including both ENQA and non-ENQA member agencies. The Agency has established links with CEENQA and individual European agencies to strengthen the analytics field and share good practice in the field of independence. The cooperation framework is based on the joint organisation of thematic events and publications on independence (e.g. CEENQA Annual Assembly and publication).



## MANUALS, GUIDES

The Guide to External Assessments (<https://www.nakvis.si/aktualno/objave/vodnik-po-zunanjih-presojah-nakvis/>) has been published in book form and, since the publication of the first draft on the Agency's website in March 2021 and a second updated draft at the end of the same year, it has been updated and improved in cooperation with representatives of higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, the Agency's experts and other stakeholders. Numerous meetings, presentations and consultations have been organised. In 2022, the Guide was supplemented with the chapter on initial accreditation of a higher education institution and the specifics of assessing (international) joint study programmes or transnational higher education and habilitation. The result is a comprehensive publication of more than 140 pages.

For two years before publishing the final version, the Guide to External Assessments and its guidelines were tested by employees, the Agency Council and experts in accreditation and evaluation procedures,

as well as by a number of institutions and colleges in self-assessment processes. The publication discusses the structural features of external assessments and the discrepancies or shifts that occur in assessments. It details the specifics and important inadequacies of external assessments according to each quality standard and type of procedure, and provides guidance on how to carry out a proper assessment in all the areas covered by the Criteria. Particular attention is paid to assessing the quality of scientific and research, professional or artistic work, teaching, practical training and the content and delivery of studies. In order to make the assessment of quality more in-depth, substantive, multifaceted and rigorous, the specifics of the cycles and types of study, its correspondence to the discipline and some institutional specifics are highlighted.

At the end of 2022, the guide was translated into English, and the English version was published in book form at the beginning of 2023.

## ORGANISATION AND PARTICIPATION IN EVENTS

Last year, the Agency held a number of thematic and coordination meetings for experts and other stakeholders focusing on the consideration of the Guide to External Assessments. In addition to presenting the external and internal properties of assessments and the inconsistencies in determining whether colleges and institutions or universities meet the quality standards for external evaluation, they stressed the importance of in-depth self-assessment of their activities. The Director represented the Agency at various national events; we should highlight the consultation on the future of universities organised by the Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Slovenia and the consultation on the autonomy

of universities organised by the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The Agency's employees also regularly participate in various events in the Slovenian higher education area, where they are actively involved (round tables, staff exchanges, training, etc.).

In autumn 2022, the training of candidates for Agency experts also continued, covering the regulations used by experts in their work, how to work as part of a group of experts, lessons learned from assessments, and the use of the Guide to External Assessments. The training is compulsory, followed by the practical training of candidates – participation in the procedure

of accreditation or evaluation of a specific institution, college or study programme. In December 2022, the Agency held its annual consultation for higher and higher vocational education stakeholders, presenting a report on its work in 2022, the work of the Agency's Council, the Guide to External Assessments and the self-assessment report for the previous period.

## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

In 2022, the Agency continued its regular participation in the CEENQA network based on the joint organisation of thematic events, the preparation of publications on various topics, etc. Within the network, we participated in regular bi-monthly distance agency working meetings, produced a thematic publication and co-organised the annual general meeting, at which an Agency staff member presented the findings of an international analysis of the independence of agencies. At the same time, the Agency Director was re-elected as the network's president.

We continued study visits to foreign agencies such as AKKV, HCERES, QAA, AZVO, ACQAHE, which are primarily aimed at strengthening cooperation in the European area, identifying common problems of agencies, proposing appropriate solutions and exchanging examples of good practice.

The Agency has been actively involved in the ECA since 2009, when it was accepted as a member. Two employees currently cooperate with the ECA, one as a member of the ECA Council. Priority activities of the ECA focus on continuing education and training events on internationalisation and the European approach, organising webinars and debates, and providing support for the projects of the ECA's members. This year, two staff members took part in the training on quality assurance of joint study programmes.

In June 2022, the Agency organised an international conference on hybrid studies and, in cooperation with external experts and the Agency's working group, prepared *Guidelines on Hybrid Approach in Tertiary Education* ([https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/smernice\\_hibridno\\_2022\\_z\\_naslovnico.pdf](https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/smernice_hibridno_2022_z_naslovnico.pdf)).

At the beginning of June, the Agency also joined the ENQA working group for drafting guidelines on academic integrity for both higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies. In particular, with the shift to hybrid education and the availability of various technological solutions, it sees an increase in the risks to ensuring academic integrity in Europe and beyond. Participation in the ENQA group provides opportunities to follow the latest good and bad practices and to solve challenges also in the Slovenian higher education area.

In 2022, in addition to its participation in the CEENQA, ECA and ENQA networks, the Agency continued to participate in the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BUFG).

The Agency continued to strengthen international contacts and organise both distance and live thematic meetings. 2022 ended with a visit by representatives of the Serbian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Nacionalno telo za akreditaciju i obezbeđenje kvaliteta u visokom obrazovanju), as part of the EU REDiS project (EU support for education reform in Serbia).



## INFORMATION SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY (eNAKVIS AND iNAKVIS)

In 2022, eNakvis 2.0 was finalised. It has been tested in a test environment and installed in a school environment. Since the summer, external stakeholders (mainly institutions) have been able to access it via the school environment and have provided feedback on the performance of the redesigned application. In the autumn, the Ministry responsible for public administration started security checks of the application. By the end of the year, the first stage of checking had been completed, and the second stage (penetration tests) was launched at the end of the year.

In 2022, the Agency continued the development of its internal IT system iNakvis, which was first piloted in 2020. Within the system, it has developed new records of working time. Recording is now done exclusively via iNakvis. The records contain information on attendance, homeworking reports, holidays, training, business trips and other absences. iNakvis also allows data to be automatically transferred to MFERAC, saving the time needed for manual data entry and reducing the possibility of errors.

The Agency's fixed asset register has been set up to facilitate the work of the Inventory Committee in its annual inventory of assets, and is also useful for investment planning.

Finally, the Expert Report Register has been added to iNakvis, allowing the automatic upload of published expert reports to DEQAR (Database of External Quality Assurance Results) via a web service.

## COMMUNICATION

Since the Agency's last external evaluation (in 2018), it has devoted a lot of time and attention to active, clear, accurate and timely communication, both with internal and external stakeholders. To this end, the Agency uses its website as a key communication tool to inform the public. Accompanying tools are social networks (Twitter and YouTube) and electronic communication (e-newsletter). The Agency keeps up-to-date and communicates all events, news and important announcements on its website and social media. As part of its promotional activities, the Agency has continued its project of making presentation films in 2022, this time focusing on higher vocational colleges. The project will close in 2023.

The Agency's main activity, associated with quality assurance and accreditation and evaluation procedures, continues to be the main line of development and operation of the entire Agency. More than half of the employees conduct accreditation and evaluation procedures. In September and October, the Agency held several focus group meetings with representatives of higher education institutions evaluated in the last two years to obtain feedback on the implementation of the procedures. The focus was on distance site visits, with a generally very positive response from institutions to both the work of the Agency staff and the work of the experts. The Agency generally holds regular meetings with all relevant stakeholders, while in 2022, the Agency Director completed the project of visiting all higher education institutions in Slovenia. These visits were also aimed at gathering feedback on the Agency's activities. Every year since 2019, it organises the International Conference on Quality in Higher Education, which focuses on a variety of topical issues in higher education.

# 03

*Mateja Bajuk Malešič, Tilen Heco, Nataša Kramar, Maja Milas, Gregor Rebernik*

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE AGENCY**

Preparing for the visit of a group of experts from the European Association of Quality Agencies in Higher Education (ENQA) was one of the major tasks planned for 2022. The central objective of the Agency's self-assessment is to improve the quality of the Agency's activities and to fulfil the conditions for extending membership in ENQA and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Through self-assessment, the Agency analyses the quality of its work and strengths and opportunities for improvement. The self-assessment is based on opinions, procedures and documents developed in cooperation with a wide range of colleagues and stakeholders in the Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education area.

The self-assessment report was prepared and drafted in December 2022 by the Agency's self-assessment team, which consisted of five employees and the Agency Council President. Representatives of external stakeholders appointed at the Agency's invitation by the Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Slovenia, the Union of Independent Institutions of Higher Education, the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges and Student Organisation of Slovenia also participated in the preparation of the report.

Due to the different type of ENQA expert group review – the third external review under the so-called targeted review – the structure of the report is slightly different compared to previous years. The purpose of such review of the Agency is to review the Agency's target areas of activity, in particular the partial compliances identified, the significant changes in the Agency's operation in comparison with the previous review, and the current challenges in achieving ESG compliance. The focus of ENQA's targeted review is also to help the Agency strive for continuous improvement in the quality of its work.

In preparing the self-assessment report, the Agency also considered the past reports on the Agency's work and operation and information on the Agency's operation obtained at meetings with various stakeholders, monthly Agency Council sessions, consultations or training sessions, management college meetings etc.

The self-assessment report is used by the Agency as a key collaborative and self-critical tool for analysing progress, assessing the actual compliance of standards with ESG and gaining an insight into its own performance, both internally and externally.

Summaries of the report are presented below.

## OVERVIEW OF CHANGES SINCE THE LAST EXTERNAL EVALUATION

There have been no significant changes in the Agency's operations since 2018, when the last external review was carried out. The last major systemic change affecting its operations was the transition from programme to institutional evaluation carried out in 2016. Instead of the previous reaccreditation of study programmes, the law stipulated that the Agency carry out the evaluation of study programmes through the procedures of reaccreditation of higher education institutions and extraordinary evaluation of study programmes and a new type of procedure – evaluation of samples of study programmes.

The law, namely, stipulates that the Agency annually evaluate at least two per cent of the accredited study programmes implemented in that academic year by higher education institutions in the Republic of Slovenia. The nature of the procedure of evaluation of a sample of study programmes is different than in other Agency procedures, as the purpose it is to advise higher education institutions in the devel-

opment of self-assessment and improvement of the quality of study programmes. The procedure does not end with a decision with legal implications, but with recommendations to the higher education institution on how to improve the self-assessment, implementation, updating or quality of the assessed study programme.

The study programmes for the sample are determined by the Agency in cooperation with higher education institutions. The Agency first introduced the procedures of evaluation of a sample of study programmes in the Annual Plan in 2019 (12 study programmes). As these activities have not yet been reviewed by ENQA and EQAR, an assessment of the procedures of evaluation of a sample of study programmes against ESG standards 2.1 to 2.7 is provided in the ESG Compliance section (Part 2).

## PRESENTATION OF THE AGENCY'S ACTIVITIES IN THE AREA OF ACCREDITATIONS AND EVALUATIONS

### Slovenian Higher Education Area

A detailed presentation of the Slovenian higher education area can be found in the *Self-assessment Report of the Agency for 2018 and 2019* (SEP 2018 and 2019 – [https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/SEP18-19/SEP\\_2018\\_in\\_2019.pdf](https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/SEP18-19/SEP_2018_in_2019.pdf)). There have been no major changes in the Slovenian higher education area since the last ENQA external review in 2018. While the number of higher education institutions has remained almost the same, and the number of study programmes has been growing with an increase of around 20 programmes each year, in 2021 for the first time we saw a process of several mergers of study programmes in each field, which will lead to at least a temporary stabilisation of the number of programmes after the transition period of the generational change.

Also in the 2020-2022 period, the Agency spent a lot of time drafting a stand-alone Agency Act. At the end of 2021, a working group was appointed to consider the draft Act, prepare explanations of the articles and the rationale for the adoption of the new Act. Due to the political situation (change of government), the further process of adopting the Act was halted. A stand-alone Act would enable the Agency to participate in foreign accreditation procedures, which is increasingly important for the Agency's development, and would strengthen the professionalism of decision-making in accreditation procedures.

### Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic

Like other actors in the European higher education system, the Agency faced the challenge of implementing accreditation and evaluation procedures in 2020 and 2021 in the face of the constraints created by the COVID-19 epidemic. In April 2020, in cooperation with stakeholders, it made recommendations for higher education institutions to work in emergency situations.

In May 2020, in accordance with ENQA recommendations and with the aim of improving distance visits, the Agency prepared the *Guidelines for Distance Site Visits* (<https://www.nakvis.si/aktualno/objave/smernice-za-izvedbo-evalvacijskega-obiska-na-daljavo/>), which were included in the work and programme of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA). In June 2020, the Agency changed the site visits, and in July it carried out a survey on stakeholder satisfaction with the new format of the visits, inviting them to make suggestions for improvement. The stakeholders were generally very satisfied with the new way of working; major difficulties were perceived in assessing material conditions. The Agency updated the guidelines in September 2020 on the basis of the survey, and focused on standardising the work of the staff through the preparation of technical guidance.

## Organisational Structure

There have been no changes to the Agency's organisational structure since the last external review. The Agency's bodies remain the Agency Council, the Appeal Committee and the Director. The bodies, how they are appointed and their powers are laid down in the law, which has not been amended in this part. The Agency Director was appointed just before the visit of the group of experts carrying out the external review in 2018. During his term of office, the work of the Agency's professional services has been re-organised so that the departments are structured around more related areas of work: the Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department, the Analytics and Information Technology Department and the General Affairs Department. Department heads and deputy heads have also been appointed. The Agency has 20 employees: 7 in the Analytics and Information Technology Department, 7 in the Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department, 5 in the General Affairs Department, and the Director.

### Agency Council

The Agency Council has taken into account the recommendations of the previous self-assessment report (SEP 2018 in 2019). Besides carrying out the tasks set out in the law and the Criteria, it was involved in all the Agency's activities. At its sessions, it discussed a wide range of topics, including presentations of the results of analyses, surveys, guidelines, the draft Quality Act, the proposal on how to deal with undue pressure, the baselines for the assessment of interdisciplinary study programmes, etc. It placed particular emphasis on how to deal with cases of undue pressure on experts, Council members or the Agency staff.

The latest SEP survey shows that stakeholders give better scores to the soundness of the Agency Council's decisions than in the previous period. This is probably linked to the provision in the Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council (<https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/CISTOPIS-poslovnika-o-delu-sveta-za-podpis.doc>) that a proposal for a decision opposing the rapporteur's proposal must be substantiated in writing. Members of the Agency Council must therefore thoroughly consider and justify their decision, and it helps that a matter that requires written and substantiated material is adjourned to the next session.

### External Stakeholders

Cooperation with external stakeholders has strengthened. The Agency organises regular annual meetings and conferences to which it invites stakeholders, the Director continues weekly meetings with higher education institutions and regular meetings with university rectors. In addition, stakeholders are involved in the drafting of new and amended regulations of the Agency Council, they receive the Agency's monthly newsletters, etc. The Agency also organises regular meetings with representatives of higher vocational colleges and participates in consultations organised by the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges. The improvement in stakeholder engagement is also reflected in the SEP survey, where all areas received higher scores than in the previous period.

## Economic and Financial Resources

### Financial resources

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

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

### Human and other resources

The number of employees has not changed. However, also as a result of the action taken in the context of the Family Friendly Enterprise certification process, the Agency, a year before the expected departure of the two heads, started to plan for their gradual unburdening and to ensure the transfer of knowledge to the remaining employees.

Much attention has been paid to human resources training and development. Each year, the Agency draws up a training plan based on employee proposals. To encourage employees to pursue higher education and improve their work, the Agency finances the education of employees: three employees are enrolled in doctoral studies, two have completed a master's degree and one is completing a first-cycle degree. The Agency pays particular attention to reconciling work and family life. In March 2020, it was certified as a Family Friendly Enterprise by Ekvilib Institute and has adopted and implemented 16 measures (work from home, disconnection from work communication, pre-retirement career plan, quiet hours, possibility to bring children and pets to work, etc.), the implementation of which is verified annually by the certifier. The group for the promotion of health also plays an important role in the well-being of employees. The main concern of the group is to encourage employees to adopt a healthy lifestyle both inside and outside the Agency's premises, in various areas (exercise, entertainment, nutrition, etc.).

## Internal Quality Assurance

The amendment to the Quality Manual (<https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Poslovnik-kakovosti-spremenjen-junij-2021-KONCNI-brez-podpisa.pdf>) adopted in June 2021 has slightly changed the self-assessment procedures. It now stipulates that the self-assessment report is prepared only before the external review, and the Agency prepares an annual progress report which assesses compliance with the recommendations of the external review on compliance with ESG standards. In accordance with the above, the Agency prepared the NAKVIS Progress Report in 2020 and 2021 and published it on its website ([https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Porocilo-o-napredku-2021\\_slo-KONCNO.pdf](https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Porocilo-o-napredku-2021_slo-KONCNO.pdf)). When the Agency was changing the way it carries out self-assessment, ENQA adopted guidelines for targeted review. The Agency has opted for this type of review and has adapted its self-assessment report accordingly; in accordance with the Quality Manual, it contains an additional chapter on the Agency's internal quality.



## INFORMATION ON ACCREDITATIONS AND EVALUATIONS

### Decisions in Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures

The overview of the data covers the whole period since the last external review by ENQA in 2018 until the end of 2022, and the details are only considered for the current self-assessment period. The substantive explanation for 2018 and 2019 can be found in SEP 2018 and 2019. The number of negative decisions covers only those where the decision remained negative after any appeal procedure.

Table 1: Decisions in accreditation and evaluation procedures since 2018

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

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

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

<sup>c</sup> The procedure determines whether new higher education institutions comply with the conditions and quality standards determined for initial accreditation. The main areas of assessment cover the operation of higher education institution, human resources and material conditions. Initial accreditation of a higher education institution is granted for a period of five years or the application is denied.

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

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

## Appeal Procedures

The overview of the data covers the whole period since the last external review by ENQA in 2018 until the end of 2022, and the details are only considered for the current self-assessment period. The substantive explanation for 2018 and 2019 can be found in SEP 2018 and 2019.

Table 2: Overview of appeal procedures since 2018

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

## Self-assessment Survey

The self-assessment survey was carried out in March 2022. The survey was sent to internal and external Agency stakeholders. The former include members and former members of the Agency Council, its employees and experts. The external stakeholders group consists of representatives of higher education institutions' or higher vocational colleges' administrations, teachers and researchers, practitioners, students and other external stakeholders, including graduates, representatives of line ministries, representatives or members of representative organisations in the field of higher education and higher vocational education, and employers. 131 internal and external Agency stakeholders responded to the survey. The self-assessment survey covered the Agency's area of operation, its procedures and criteria, the work of the staff, experts' assessments, the decisions of the Agency Council, the Agency's management, appeal procedures, relations with stakeholders and the Agency's impact on the higher education environment. The self-assessment survey also includes a section on self-assessment, the development of the Agency and the quality of its services.

The results of the survey are included in the Self-Assessment Report 2022 - ENQA Targeted Review, which is published on the Agency's website at the following link [https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Samoevalvacijsko-porocilo\\_2022-SLO.pdf](https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Samoevalvacijsko-porocilo_2022-SLO.pdf).



## TARGET AREAS

### COMPLIANCE WITH ESG (part 2)

In the following sections, we present an overview of the improvements and progress made by the Agency since the last external evaluation. We focused on the three assessment standards – thematic analysis, internal quality assurance and professionalism and reporting – and on the fulfilment of standards 2.1 to 2.7 in the context of evaluations of samples. In the following section, we present the model evaluation of a study programme, a new process in quality assurance launched after the last external review by ENQA. Other procedures have remained unchanged.

### ESG 2.1: Consideration of Internal Quality Assurance

In accreditation and evaluation procedures, the Agency consistently considers the Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes (hereinafter: the Accreditation Criteria) harmonised with stakeholders and placing a particular emphasis on internal assurance of quality of institutions and/or colleges, which is evident from the regulation as a whole, specifically from the application forms. The Accreditation Criteria, which are aligned with national higher education legislation (ZViS) and ESG, include standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance (part 1 of ESG). This includes all Agency procedures – accreditation or external evaluation of higher educational institutions and study programmes and external evaluation of higher vocational colleges. Study programmes selected for evaluations of samples are assessed according to the same quality standards as those in the procedure of reaccreditation of a higher education institution also set out in the Accreditation Criteria.

## ESG 2.2: Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose

Procedure of evaluation of a sample of study programmes also plays an important role in promoting improvement of quality of study programmes. As the purpose is advisory and the findings are not binding, higher education institutions have the opportunity to reflect on and improve their self-assessments and study programmes on the basis of the expert advice of the group of experts and the Agency Council. At the end of the evaluation of the study programmes covered in the sample, the Agency Council makes recommendations to the higher education institution to improve the implementation, self-assessment, updating and modification of the study programmes, and asks it to report on its progress and compliance with the recommendations within a given time-frame (usually two years). After reviewing the progress reports, the Agency Council concluded that the recommendations had been appropriately observed for the most part.

## ESG 2.3: Implementing Processes

In line with the recommendations of the previous ENQA external review, the Accreditation Criteria were updated in January 2020. A new Article 49a (Progress Report) has been added, which stipulates that progress reporting is mandatory even in the case of positive decisions in the procedure. Where a higher education institution has been found fit to implement a study programme, or where a higher education institution or study programme has been accredited or reaccredited for a full period, the higher education institution shall, within two years, report on the progress and compliance with the recommendations expressed in the Agency Council decision or final report of the group of experts. With the 2017 Accreditation Criteria, the Agency has put even more emphasis on the internal quality assurance of higher education institutions, requiring them to self-assess their study programmes in more detail, in addition to self-evaluating all their activities. The progress report may therefore refer to the parts of the self-assessment report that show the progress made and/or compliance with the recommendations of the Council. The Agency took into account comments of the higher education institutions expressing concern that the introduced reporting would impose an additional burden on them. By referring to the part of the self-assessment report containing the progress description, the higher education institution is relieved of additional work, while at the same time being directed to assess in the self-assessment whether the recommendations made have been adequately implemented.

## ESG 2.4: Experts

Experts participating in the Agency's procedures must meet the conditions set out in the Criteria for Experts (<http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=MERI47>) adopted in March 2018 and amended in May 2022. These differentiate the conditions for experts assessing higher education institutions from those for experts assessing study programmes. The Agency organised specific training sessions (March 2019) for the chairs of the groups of experts in the procedures of evaluation of samples to explain the nature and process of these evaluations. A protocol has been developed for the visits in the context of evaluation of samples, as the visit process is slightly different from other evaluation procedures. The fact that the specific training for chairs of groups of experts was a step in the right direction is confirmed by the results of the SEP survey. In May 2022, the Agency Council adopted amendments to the Criteria for Experts, which stipulate, among other things, that experts must have been active in scientific and research, professional or artistic fields for the last ten years. This change means that

the assessments are carried out by experts who are active in research their field, and will help the Agency to avoid the criticism – which the institutions, however, expressed only exceptionally – that this rule does not apply to some experts.

## ESG 2.5: Criteria

The standards and criteria for the assessment of study programmes are clearly described in the Accreditation Criteria and are the same regardless of whether the study programme is being evaluated as part of the process of reaccreditation of a higher education institution, evaluation of a sample of a study programme or an extraordinary evaluation of a study programme. More detailed instructions and clarifications are provided in the application forms that form part of the Accreditation Criteria. In October 2019, the Agency published on its website an interpretation of some of the provisions of the Criteria, which were approved by the Agency Council. In 2021, the Agency prepared a special Guide to External Assessments (<https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Vodnik-po-zunanjih-presojah-NAKVIS.pdf>) intended for the Agency staff and experts, as well as for applicants and students, to improve their work in accreditation and evaluation procedures. The Guide provides a clear insight into understanding the rules. It details substantive assessments according to the quality standards set out in the Criteria, taking into account the type of higher education institutions and/or higher vocational colleges, the type, cycle and content of the study programmes, or the specifics of the assessed institution.

In order to improve transparency of its procedures, the Agency Council updated the Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council (<https://www.nakvis.si/o-agenciji/svet-agencije/>), which clearly shows the manner of addressing applications, the way of decision-making, the cooperation with expert services of the Agency and the adoption of decisions. In 2020 and 2022, the Rules of Procedure were amended to further specify the Council's conduct in the event of disagreement with the findings of the group of experts.

## ESG 2.6: Reporting

ENQA experts found in a previous external review that the Agency only partially complies with the standard on reporting. Recommendation from the previous external review:

**NAKVIS should publish reports on all procedures, including the initial accreditations with negative results, for better transparency and further development.**

In 2018, the Agency completely overhauled its website ([www.nakvis.si](http://www.nakvis.si)) – improving both the accessibility of the content and the clarity of the structure, and thus the overall user experience.

On the Agency website, documents are organised by higher education institution and, from 2018, by year of decision. When the decision on the assessment of a study programme or institution becomes final, the expert report and the decision of the Agency Council are published on the subject under assessment. Expert reports on sample evaluations of study programmes are also published regularly and systematically. All final negative decisions of the Agency Council were made public on the Agency's website in 2019 and the section has been updated regularly since then (<https://www.nakvis.si/analize-in-publikacije/negativne-odlocitve-v-akreditacijskih-postopkih/>). In appeals, the content of the Appeal Committee's decisions is always, without exception, summarised



in the Agency Council decision because the summary of the course of procedure and findings are its constituent part. In addition to the regularly updated website, the Agency's monthly e-newsletter is also a means of communication, informing stakeholders, inter alia, of the Agency Council's decisions in proceedings. Stakeholders only receive information on the adoption of the decision, while the substantive details are available in the documents published online. The iNakvis internal IT system has enabled significant progress in reporting. The system helps in publishing and updating the online timetable, where external stakeholders can check the status of the procedure and the planned deadlines for the next steps in the procedure.

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

## ESG 2.7: Complaints and Appeals

The appeal procedure, in which appeals against decisions of the Agency Council are decided by the Appeal Committee, is laid down in the Higher Education Act (ZViS) and the General Administrative Procedure Act (ZUP), which the Agency applies in the absence of corresponding procedural provisions in the ZViS (paragraph six of Article 51e of the ZViS). The procedure for excluding an expert or official from procedures conducted by the Agency follows the provisions of the ZUP. Under these provisions, the parties to procedures have the possibility to appeal against substantive decisions on the main issue and lodge certain procedural objections before the Agency Council decides on the merits of the applicant's application. In accreditation or evaluation procedures, applicants may therefore, before a decision on accreditation is taken, lodge a so-called procedural objection on the grounds of the alleged impartiality of the persons taking the decision or participating in the procedure and request their exclusion. Such a request is decided on by the Agency Council, or, in the case of a request for the exclusion of a member of the Agency Council, the President of the Council. If the application is granted and the person is excluded from the proceedings, another person is appointed in their place. If the request is not granted, the applicant may lodge a separate appeal against such a decision and therefore not challenge the decision until the appeal against the decision on the main, accreditation issue.

The Agency has published on its website, in the Frequently Asked Questions and Answers section under Other options for applicants in the procedure (Chapter II, point 3 <https://www.nakvis.si/akreditacije-in-evalvacije-v-visokem-solstvu/pogosta-vprasanja-in-odgovori/>), an open communication channel for applicants for communications other than formal objections and appeals.

## Compliance with ESG (part 3)

### ESG 3.4: Thematic Analyses

ENQA experts found in a previous external review that the Agency only partially complies with the standard on thematic analyses. Recommendation from the previous external review:

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

The Agency produces analyses summarising trends, strengths and areas for improvement at system level, with the aim of improving the quality of the Agency's operations. Thematic analysis belong to the area of development for the Agency, and in the years since the Agency's last evaluation, tasks have focused on in-depth analytics work at the Agency. In 2019, the Agency created a dedicated Analytics Department, initially working in the area of international cooperation and the Agency's IT activities, and later as a department in its own right.

Based on the recommendations of the ENQA group of experts, in August 2018, the Agency prepared a document Methodology and Procedure for the Production and Dissemination of Thematic Analyses (<https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Methodologija-tematske-analize.pdf>), setting out the detailed procedure for systemic analyses, as well as the influence of external stakeholders on the production of subsequent more detailed (thematic) analyses. The Agency carries out periodic thematic and systemic analyses to further develop its external quality system. In its development strategy for the period 2021-2025 (<https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Strategija-NAKVIS-2021-2025-1.pdf>), it has set as one of its key strategic objectives the improvement of reviews or, in particular, the pursuit of professional external reviews. These take into account the specifics of higher education and are related to various cycles and types of study, disciplines in which study programmes are embedded and status and organisational differences between higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. In addition, the Agency can boast the creation of an online Guide to External Assessments in Accreditation and Evaluation Procedures (<https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Vodnik-po-zunanjih-presojah-NAKVIS.pdf>), which provides experts and staff precise guidelines for the assessment of individual standards of quality. The Agency regularly presents thematic analyses to its Council members, to the Agency's experts at expert consultations and to interested parties at its annual events. It also continuously disseminates them through training sessions for professionals and employees and consultations for other interested higher education stakeholders, thus deepening thematic cooperation with different stakeholders.

The Agency ensures that the documents are presented at various other events abroad (e.g. ENQA Members forum – <https://www.nakvis.si/aktualno/dogodki/enqa-members-forum-cardiff-22-24-junij/> –, CEENQA annual assembly – <https://www.nakvis.si/aktualno/dogodki/dr-franci-demsar-ponovno-izvoljen-za-predsednika-reenqa/> –, ECA and BFUG Working Group, presentations to foreign agencies during study visits and mobility of staff), and are translated into English or Slovenian.

## ESG 3.6: Internal Quality Assurance and Professional Conduct

ENQA experts found in a previous external review that the Agency only partially complies with Standard 3.6 as well. Recommendation from the previous external review:

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

The Agency ensures continuous development and improvement of its own quality system in transparent self-assessment procedures with a particular stress on the development of the culture of quality. The basis for internal quality assurance is the self-assessment report, which the Agency, following the amendment of the Quality Manual in June 2021, prepares prior to the external review by ENQA, and a progress report prepared on an annual basis.

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

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

All self-assessment reports are considered and harmonised at employee meetings and at the Agency Council meetings. The Agency Council discusses both the self-assessment report and all stakeholder comments at several sessions and agrees on the final version at a session.

The Agency is aware that ensuring an adequate flow of internal and external feedback is crucial and has therefore taken a number of measures since the last ENQA review to maximise the involvement of all stakeholders in the Agency's activities, the adoption of its key instruments and its development orientations.

The Agency keeps the public regularly and diligently informed of changes to any important regulation, report, strategy or other document. Each document to be considered or adopted by the Agency Council is made public twice – first as a draft, then as a consolidated version, and external stakeholders always have an opportunity to comment. The Agency's website, which was completely overhauled in December 2018, the eNakvis IT system an important role in communicating with stakeholders, while communication with stakeholders also takes place through social media (Twitter – <https://twitter.com/nakvis> – and Youtube – <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB1f7OXBeO1QN8p4MlfINSw>). Since January 2019, the Agency has published a monthly e-newsletter, whose main purpose is to proactively inform all stakeholders on the most important issues related to the Agency's activities and operations.

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

The surveys prepared by the Agency involve all relevant internal and external stakeholders, and their analysis is accessible to all stakeholders. Questions related to internal quality assurance, the self-assessment process and stakeholder relations were also part of the self-assessment survey.



## QUALITY IMPROVEMENT STANDARDS

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

### ESG 3.3: Independence

The Agency's independence is guaranteed by the acts and regulations governing its work. Article 51e of the ZViS stipulates that the Agency is autonomous and independent in its operation. It is bound by the principles of professionalism, impartiality, legality and political neutrality. Article 51h of the ZViS further stipulates that the Agency Council – as the highest decision-making body – acts in a professional, independent and autonomous manner. Members of the Agency Council shall not be bound by the decisions, positions and instructions of the institutions that appointed them or of other institutions. The Agency continuously ensures that its work is free from dominant influence of third parties such as government or higher education institutions, in particular in the appointment of the Director, the drafting of quality standards, the appointment

of experts, the decision-making on evaluation and accreditation procedures and appeal procedures. The formal independence of the Agency is demonstrated in the composition of the individual bodies of the Agency (the Agency Council, the Appeal Committee), as they are formed in a way that does not allow for a dominant influence of a single stakeholder.

In addition to working towards a stand-alone Act, the Agency is continuously working on the necessary amendments to secondary legislation, such as the Accreditation Criteria and the Criteria for International Cooperation. However, the Agency often faces challenges in reconciling in a meaningful way the specifics of higher education institutions, study programmes, higher vocational colleges, assessment procedures, differences in disciplines or scientific fields, bearing in mind that the same legal rules apply to everyone.

The final decisions of the Agency or the decision-making in accreditation and evaluation procedures are the responsibility of the Agency. To prevent potential conflicts of interest both within the Agency (experts, staff, the Agency Council, the Appeal Committee) and with applicants and other stakeholders, the Agency has put in place mechanisms for this purpose.

The Agency ensures that anyone associated with the work of the Agency (e.g. a member of the Council, an Agency expert, an Appeal Committee member) is acting on their own behalf and does not represent the interests of the organisation in which or with which they (co-)operate. In implementing their tasks and adopting decisions, the members of the Agency Council shall observe the principles of preventing conflicts of interest and of impartiality.

Taking into account the finding of the past review by the ENQA group of experts that the inclusion of more international experts in the Agency work would strengthen the public awareness of the independent op-

eration of the Agency, the Agency made visible progress in this field. In March 2019, it added to the Accreditation Criteria the provision that part of the application shall be translated into English, which enables foreign experts to perform their tasks more effectively. In the procedures of accreditation of doctoral programmes and reaccreditation of universities, it has stipulated that the group of experts must include at least two foreign experts from different countries.

The Agency also strengthens the inclusion of foreign experts through international events, where presentations and discussions are held in English. This it has included in its accreditation and evaluation processes foreign experts hosted through the CEENQA mobility project. In 2021, it included a foreign student from the European Students' Union (ESU) register in the external evaluation process, which was a very good experience, so it concluded a cooperation agreement with the ESU in December 2021.

The Agency, however, also sees challenges in the inclusion of international experts in the procedures, in particular in the provision of extensive documents in English as part of the compulsory documentation in the procedure. This condition, namely, imposes a significant financial and time burden on higher education institutions.

The Agency also strengthens its independence principles and procedures through analytic and project-based work. In 2020, it launched a study exploring the independence of quality assurance agencies in higher education from different European countries. The study, carried out in cooperation with CEENQA, developed a methodology for assessing the independence of agencies.

## ESG 2.2: Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose

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

The Criteria are developed and amended in cooperation with numerous stakeholders – representatives of universities, autonomous higher education institutions, the Rectors' Conference, students, Agency experts, etc. In the autumn of 2022, as part of the process of preparing the self-assessment report, the Agency organised meetings with various stakeholders in higher education, in particular to obtain their views on the conduct of the site visits and/or evaluation procedures in the recent

period and on the good and bad practices of the Agency.

We note that a well-functioning internal and external IT system has reduced the number of bureaucratic procedures. Nevertheless, there are different opinions on the scope of the mandatory documentation in the accreditation and evaluation procedures, both at the stage of submission of the Slovenian and English documentation and later at the stage of the visits. Since it supports the inclusion of international experts in its procedures or work, the Agency will seek to reduce the financial and administrative burdens on higher education institutions, such as high interpretation costs, translation of comprehensive documentation into English and so on.

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

## SWOT ANALYSIS

### STRENGTHS

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

### WEAKNESSES

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

### OPPORTUNITIES

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

### RISKS

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

## LOOKING AHEAD – Current Challenges for the Next Self-assessment Period

On the basis of the above findings, we propose that the Agency focuses on the following tasks in its Action Plan for the coming years:

1. drafting the stand-alone Quality Act to simplify procedures of accreditation and evaluation, international evaluations and introduction of sectoral boards in appeal procedures;
2. improving assessment against quality standards and procedures for accreditation and evaluation, including training for staff members to understand specific areas of assessments (e.g. interdisciplinarity, joint study programmes, micro-credentials, European universities);
3. taking into account the specificities and diversity of scientific fields, higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, and evaluation and accreditation procedures, including a debate on the advisability of introducing targeted evaluations of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges;
4. continued systematic engagement and proactive two-way communication with both external and internal stakeholders in all internal quality assurance processes (preparation of the SEP, adoption of new regulations/documents, implementation of procedures, strategic planning, analytical work);
5. organising consultations and training sessions, taking into account specific recommendations from the stakeholder survey (e.g. preparation of applications in accreditation and evaluation procedures, preparation of self-assessment reports at institutions/colleges, knowledge of the Agency's procedures);
6. additional thematic and coordination meetings for experts, training in report writing and external assessments, exchanges of experience and practices between experts, and discussion of good and bad evaluation examples in accreditation and evaluation processes;
7. discussing with experts the quality of their work and suggesting possible improvements;
8. strengthening the personal integrity area, including active awareness-raising among experts, Council members and employees on the importance of personal integrity;
9. strengthening cooperation between departments and tasks of common interest to the Agency;
10. updating the internal and external IT systems (eNakvis and iNakvis);
11. taking sustainable development principles into account in quality improvement in higher and higher vocational education, including through hybrid site visits;
12. continuing international cooperation, which includes active participation in international associations, visits to foreign agencies and participation in projects.

# 04

*Filip Draženović, Primož Južnič Ph.D.*

## **LIBRARIES**

### **Presentation of the new Rules on the Conditions for the Provision of the Public Library Service**

A higher education library is a fundamental part of any higher education institution and an institution that ensures the networking of different stakeholders and the exchange of knowledge. Higher education librarianship faces a number of challenges related to services and space, as well as to the organisation of the activity as a whole. If higher education libraries are to maintain their status within higher education institutions and spaces, they need to continuously rethink the perceptions of end-users and shape their services accordingly. A large majority of users expects libraries to have one of the following four characteristics:

- 1. Motivation: a library can motivate or stimulate intellectual discovery and knowledge creation.**
- 2. Credibility: a library can guarantee the credibility or quality of the process of intellectual discovery and knowledge creation.**
- 3. Convenience: a library can make intellectual discovery and knowledge creation easier and more convenient.**
- 4. Efficiency: a library can make intellectual discovery and knowledge creation more efficient and cheaper.**

Quite a few of the above points are addressed by the Rules on the Conditions for the Provision of the Public Library Service (<http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=PRAV12750>, hereinafter: the Rules). They were published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia No 28/23 of 3 March 2023 and entered into force on the fifteenth day following their publication. In accordance with the provisions of the Act Amending the Librarianship Act – ZKnj-1A (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 92/15), the Rules redefine the (minimum) conditions for the provision of public library services for general, higher education and special libraries, as well as the National Library. The Rules contain provisions governing the minimum professionally sustainable (quantitative and qualitative) values or minimum conditions for the provision of the public library service, which relate to the volume and selection of professionally arranged library materials, as well as to the professional staff of the libraries and to the space and equipment.

Verification of compliance with the standards of the Rules and entry of libraries in the register will be the responsibility of the National and University Library (hereinafter: the NUK), with which the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency) cooperates closely in the exchange of data. The Rules provide for an 18-month transition period until September 2024, when libraries will be entered in the register. The NUK is currently working on a more detailed strategy for its approach to the assessment. As can be seen from the annex to the Rules used to determine the compliance of higher education libraries with conditions (Annex 4: Determination of Compliance with Conditions – Higher Education Libraries; hereafter: Annex 4), the NUK will focus on some of the indicators first, rather than immediately checking all of the conditions set out in the Rules. For each condition, it specifies the type of condition, the indicator (with a definition of the data and the criterion for determining compliance), the

required value of the condition and the required level of compliance with the condition. The Agency will follow the provisions of both the Rules and the NUK, but will also encourage libraries to fulfil those areas not covered by Annex 4. The set of indicators in the Annex may be gradually expanded to cover all those listed in the Rules.

The Rules themselves will help the Agency's professionals by relieving them of the need to check formal conditions and allowing them to focus on the quality of the library's work and the material it offers. Most of the provisions in the Rules are already being assessed by experts, as can be seen from the guidelines for a proper assessment of a higher education library in the Guide to External Assessments (e.g. pp. 90 and 91), so this is not a completely new issue. On the other hand, it is worth pointing out that there are new features (such as the norms referred to in Article 49) which are not included in the assessment guidelines in the Guide.

Article 15 of the Accreditation Criteria already specify the material conditions to be assessed for the reaccreditation of an institution (Standard 17). Experts are expected to check the relevance of study, technical and scientific literature, the accessibility of materials, information and bibliographic support and access to databases. In doing so, they must pay attention to the study cycle, as well as the scientific, professional, research or artistic fields of the higher education institution, and the number of students, teachers and researchers. Experts are already checking, among other things, what professional assistance is provided by library staff to users and how library activities are developing.

In addition to determining whether and how library materials are substantively related to the institution's academic, scientific, professional, research or artistic areas, 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. In doing so, the group of experts should ask itself the following questions: How does the institution 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, acquired by purchase or created at the higher education institution, and resources for which it provides remote access, at

least for a limited period of time. Both on the premises of the library and remotely, it must be possible to access compulsory study materials, collections of international scientific literature, databases – independently or in cooperation (consortium) with other libraries –, the final theses of graduates and publications of higher education teachers, faculty assistants and researchers of the institution. Materials obtained through interlibrary loan and materials freely available on the internet are not part of the library's collection.

**Below is a brief overview of the Rules with some comments:**

#### Article 42

Article 42 defines the organisation, status, purpose and tasks of the higher education library, as well as the responsibility for its operation, supervision and evaluation, both at the level of the higher education institution and at the level of the library. It also stipulates that the library must have a library development plan available to the public, rules and a library manager. The Rules define a higher education library as follows: "A higher education library is organised as a library – university member, as a library of a higher education institution of a university member, as a library of an autonomous higher education institution or as an autonomous public institution." The organisational structure of the higher education institution must clearly define the status, purpose and function of the higher education library, as well as the responsibility for its operation, supervision and evaluation, and the accountability for its operation, supervision and evaluation, which must be defined both at the level of the higher education institution and at the level of the library.

#### Article 43

Under Article 43, a higher education library must provide users with at least the following services and materials:

- textbooks and other basic and recommended study literature – the Rules here stipulate that a statement of the content and volume of the material is sufficient, but this does not indicate the minimum number of library units, so experts will have to check this directly with the institution; at the consultation, this topic was addressed by Janez Jug, M. Sc., from the Central Social Sciences Library at the Faculty of Social Sciences, which has an established system of marking textbooks in the COBISS system;
- accessibility of international scientific literature;
- dissemination of library materials and information about them;
- space for work for the users;
- education, help and advice on how to use the library and information resources;
- support for users with special needs in the use of the library and its services;
- entry of bibliographic information.

A library provides training, support and advice, which will also need to be verified by a group of experts, as the type of training provided is important. Another task of a group of experts will be to check the relevance of the training to the target stakeholder group and the extent to which the library provides advice to students, professors and researchers.

#### Article 44

Article 44 of the Rules addresses the management of the library collection. It must be coordinated and updated in accordance with the library's policy of management, building and development of the library collection, and must provide access to electronic information resources. The management policy is a public document and must be published on its own or as part of a broader higher education institution development document. The experts will continue to have the task to scrutinise the library's policy: whether it is being updated, how it is integrated into the functioning of the institution itself, and the importance of the different stakeholder groups in its creation. This Article is meaningfully related to Article 46.

#### Article 45

Article 45 addresses library materials and electronic information resources for which it provides remote access, at least for a limited period of time. Library materials obtained through interlibrary loan and materials listed in the library catalogue while freely available on the internet are not part of the library's collection. Similarly, learning materials available in electronic classrooms are not part of the library's collection. The library must have access to the databases on its own or as part of a consortium; it is not sufficient to refer to publicly accessible databases, such as the Digital Library of Slovenia (dLib) in Slovenia. Resources should be appropriate to the field and cycle of study. Hybrid or online study requires a particularly well-equipped library and highly qualified staff, as we have already described in the Guidelines for a Hybrid Approach in Tertiary Education. The Agency will continue to argue that cooperation with general libraries is inadequate.

The higher education library will normally provide a freely accessible basic reference library collection and at least one copy each of textbooks and other basic study literature in physical media, and the Agency will have the task of encouraging institutions to provide a larger number of copies, or a number sufficient to meet the needs of the study process.

The library generally provides open access to the final theses of higher education studies and to publications by staff of the higher education institution in electronic form. Here, it is likely that the final theses will not be immediately openly accessible due to the nature of the data they may contain. In view of transparency, research integrity and the concept of open science, institutions and all stakeholders should be encouraged to collaborate and publish their work in order to help build a better academic environment where works are more accessible to the professional public and the possibility of plagiarism is reduced.

#### Article 46

Article 46 obliges higher education libraries to acquire library materials whose contents are related to the fields of scientific and research, professional or artistic activity of the higher education institution and its study programmes, which will have to be verified by a group of experts. A higher education library should build its collection in accordance with its mission, whereby, as defined in the Rules, the library collection primarily includes materials that support the study programmes, scientific and research and professional work of the higher education institution, as well as reference materials and the final theses of higher education studies at the higher education institution.

#### Article 47

Article 47 refers to professional library staff. Although the number of professional library staff in a higher education library depends on the scope of the activity, a higher education library must have at least one professional librarian. Higher education libraries supporting doctoral studies in higher education must have at least one professional librarian with a scientific title (Master of Science or PhD) to ensure the quality of their work with students in this cycle. This provision is new and should therefore be taken into account in the assessments.

#### Article 48

Article 48 deals with the qualifications of professional librarians and the level of education they need for their work, which determines the position in which they can be employed. The provision of compulsory professional training for higher education librarians is important, as this is the only way for them to keep abreast of new developments in the profession and thus provide adequate library and information services.

#### Article 49

Article 49 provides for space and equipment, and it will be verified that the premises are appropriate to the study programme and accessible and adapted to all students. The Rules stipulate a minimum of one user place for every 30 students enrolled in full-time first-, second- and third-cycle studies at a higher education institution, or one user place for every 100 students enrolled in full-time studies in the case of a university library. It should be remembered that libraries must also offer appropriate e-support in the context of hybrid or online study, as outlined in the Guidelines for a Hybrid Approach. The NUK will check whether the library is at least halfway to meeting this condition. Here again, the Agency will encourage groups of experts to check whether the library has equipment adapted to special groups of users (e.g. blind and partially sighted, physically handicapped), as provided for in Article 50 of the Rules, which stipulates that, in addition to the equipment defined in paragraph two of Article 4, the library shall also have additional equipment, including a wireless internet connection. Despite the general digitisation, library spaces are becoming increasingly important. The library also provides premises in other locations or dislocated premises, which it must manage itself.

In verifying compliance with the standards for higher education libraries, most of the required data will be obtained by the NUK on the basis of a statistical questionnaire, which will be supplemented as necessary. Nevertheless, some factors – in particular those relating to the quality of the library's functioning and the appropriateness of its development in relation to the orientation and complexity of the studies – will need to remain under the scrutiny of the groups of experts. The Agency therefore organised a quality assurance consultation on 13 June 2023, at which the new Rules were presented. The participants were welcomed by Franci Demšar, Ph.D., Director of the Agency, and Miro Pušnik, Director of the Central Technical Library of the University of Ljubljana and President of the National Council for Library Services of the Republic of Slovenia.

The event was attended by Marjan Gujtman from the Ministry of Culture, who briefly outlined the meaning and development of the Rules, Primož Južnič, Ph.D., Head of the Working Group on Higher Education Libraries, who presented the content of the Rules and pointed out some of the important new features, and Damjana Vovk from the NUK, who explained how the NUK will verify the criteria for inclusion in the register of libraries. Filip Draženović from the Agency presented the importance of the Rules for the Agency's experts, also in terms of the impact on the NAKVIS Guide to External Assessments, and the consultation was concluded with a presentation by Janez Jug, M.Sc., from the Central Social Sciences Library (ODK JG) at the Faculty of Social Sciences, of how mandatory literature is marked within the COBISS system. The consultation was followed by questions from the audience. Most of them focused on issues related to the recruitment of library staff. Annex 4 to the Rules provides that the library shall have at least one professional librarian, but does not define the scope of the employment contract relationship. A university librarian is therefore not necessarily employed for a full FTE, as this would

be pointless and unnecessary for smaller higher education institutions and those with smaller volumes of doctoral studies.

In conclusion, the Rules are an excellent starting point from which to rethink the importance of libraries of higher education institutions. Books, library materials and information resources are not an end in themselves, but determine the way a library should design and tailor its services to its users. Higher education libraries have the most demanding users whose information needs and behaviours are clearly shaped and largely determine the objectives of the institutions where they work and study. They show the interconnectedness of higher education teachers-students-researchers-professional services, each contributing to development. As pointed out, the higher education library needs to be integrated into the functioning of the institution and involved in the self-assessment of the institution and the study programmes, as reflected for example in the relevance of the material.

An appropriate status in the institution is crucial for all higher education libraries and has an impact on their visibility, resources and opportunities. Higher education institutions are, namely, also undergoing profound changes. This has implications for library strategy, space, structures, partnerships and identity. Strategic responses to these challenges include a new library organisation with a focus on students' academic achievement and the quality of research. Changing book collections, library space and the competences of librarians is a challenging process, in which the Agency will work actively with both the NUK and higher education institutions.

## ABBREVIATIONS

**ACQAHE** – Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education of Montenegro

**AZVO** – Agency for Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Croatia

**BFUG** – Bologna Follow-up Group

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

**Criteria for Experts** – Criteria for Experts of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

**Criteria for the accreditation** – Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes

**Criteria for International Cooperation** – Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education

**DEQAR** – Database of External Quality Assurance Results

**ECA** – European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education

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

**ENQA** – European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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

**ESU** – European Student Union

**EQAR** – European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

**Guidelines for a Hybrid Approach** – Guidelines for a Hybrid Approach in Tertiary Education

**HCERES** – High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education of the French Republic

**iNakvis** – Internal information system of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

**INQAAHE** – International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

**MIZŠ** – Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport

**QAA** – Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the United Kingdom

**SAR** – Self-assessment Report of the Agency

**ŠOS** – Student Organisation of Slovenia

**VTI** – Higher Transnational Education

**ZViS** – Higher Education Act

**ZVSI** – Higher Vocational Education Act

**ZUP** – General Administrative Procedure Act





n.a.k.v.i.s

Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije  
za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

s.q.a.a

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (NAKVIS) was established in 2010 for accreditations and external evaluations in higher education and higher vocational education, as well as for development in this field. It operates responsibly, professionally, impartially and independently in line with European and global trends. Through membership in international associations, it strengthens its reputation and ensures comparability and international visibility of the Slovenian higher education area. It is committed to continuously improving quality, including cooperation with and counselling to all stakeholders in tertiary education.

**Slovenian Quality Assurance  
Agency for  
Higher Education**

Miklošičeva 7  
SI-1000 Ljubljana  
[www.nakvis.si](http://www.nakvis.si)



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