

REPORT ON THE WORK AND OPERATIONS OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN 2023



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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

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OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE
AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN 2023**

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the Agency completed with dedication and professionalism many of the tasks set out in the 2023 Action Plan. After a thorough self-evaluation, we are pleased to confirm that we have achieved our objectives. The Agency's central activity, associated with quality assurance and accreditation and evaluation procedures, continues to be the main line of development and activities. We continued the procedures of accreditations and evaluations of higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges.

We strove to improve assessment according to quality standards and accreditation and evaluation procedures. An English version of the guide to external assessments has been produced and is now available in electronic and book editions. We also organised various expert and employee trainings with a view to exchanging practical experience and developing guidelines for the proper assessment of quality standards.

The external assessment of the Agency, including the organisation of a visit by a panel of experts from the European Association of Quality Agencies in Higher Education (ENQA), was one of the key tasks successfully carried out in 2023. We can boast an excellent report by the panel of experts, which demonstrates the conformity of the Agency's work with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). On this basis, our membership of ENQA and the European Quality Assurance Register in Higher Education (EQAR) has been renewed for a further five years, which is a testament to the quality of the Agency's work and an incentive for its continued success.

In 2023, we were actively involved in the overhaul of the Higher Education Act (ZViS). The Agency's representatives in the working group on the overhaul of the Act are working to strengthen the professionalism of decision-making in appeal procedures and to enable the Agency to participate in foreign accreditation procedures. By drafting and amending the internal acts, we wanted to further support the work of the experts, the Council and Appeal Committee members.

We continued to analyse the content of the reports by groups of experts resulting from the evaluations of samples, this time in the area of teacher training and doctoral study programmes. The third systemic analysis of accreditation and evaluation practices covering accreditation and evaluation reports by groups of experts and self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges from 2018 to 2022 was also initiated.

In the spring, we organised a consultation on library activities, where the new Rules on conditions for providing library public service, prepared by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, were presented. The document redefines the conditions for the provision of the public library service, including higher education libraries, which also influences the work of the Agency experts in assessments. In November, we organised a consultation on quality regarding the establishment of a quality assurance system for micro-credentials. The purpose of the consultation was to exchange experiences and transferable practices in this topical area and to discuss the challenges that arise in this context.

We continued international collaboration in the context of international working groups as well as international meetings and conferences. As part of the presidency of the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA), we contributed to a thematic publication presenting human resource management in quality improvement processes.

We believe that the Agency is fulfilling its role as a key player in supporting quality in higher and higher vocational education. We would like to highlight the successful international cooperation and confirmed compliance with the highest standards of European associations such as ENQA and EQAR. The Agency remains committed to strengthening quality in higher and higher vocational education and to continuously improving its work for the benefit of higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and students.

Franci Demšar, Ph.D., Director

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I. ABOUT THE AGENCY

The Government of 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.

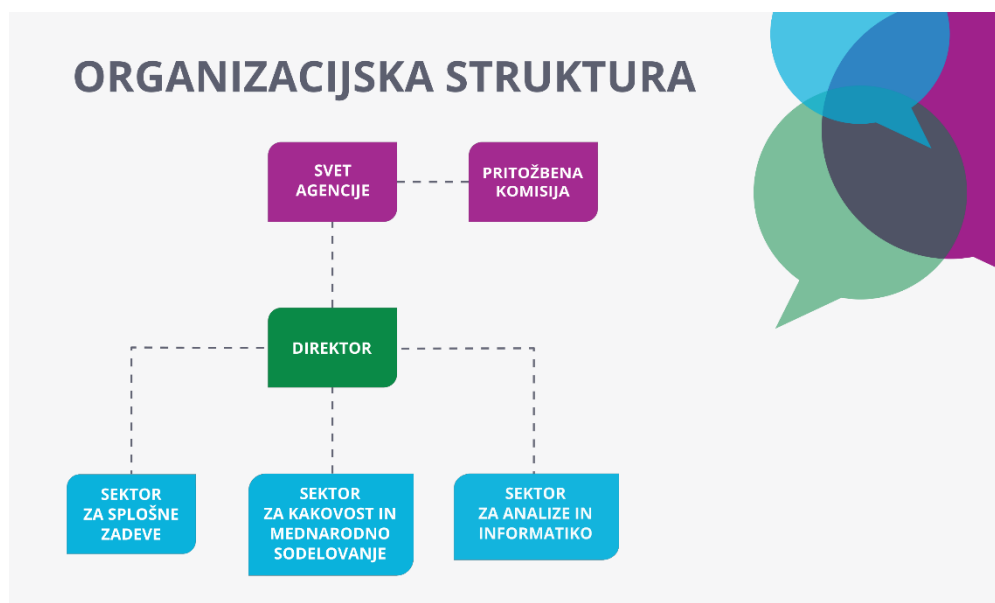
Mission

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** perform tasks in the basic areas of the Agency's operation, which means that 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.

In April 2023, the Director of the Agency was re-elected for a five-year term. The members of the Appeal Committee and the Agency Council remained unchanged, and the trade union representatives still did not nominate a representative on the Council.

Table 1: Overview of tasks related to the external quality assessment of higher and higher vocational education by departments

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: Filip Draženović, Anita Kajtezović, Martina Mravljja, Maruša Trobec and Julija Uršič
Fields of work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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, VTI ...); – project-based collaborations and activities (micro-credentials, European universities, etc.); – intersectoral cooperation (integrity, promotion of health, self-evaluation, etc.); – archiving applications and other documents.
Analytics and Information Technology Department:
Head of the department: Maja Milas, alternates Tatjana Debevec and Andrej Krček

Staff: Matjaž Štuhec, Ph. D., 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-evaluation 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, Prudencija Perat and Zala Sečnik

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-evaluation, etc.);
- keeping and updating human resource and other records within its powers.

The **AGENCY COUNCIL** is the highest decision-making body. The composition of 11 members appointed to the Agency Council by the Agency's key stakeholders ensure politically independent decision-making and 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-evaluation, updating and delivery of study programmes.

Table 2: Council members in 2023

Members	Institution appointing the member
Boris Dular, Ph.D., President of the Council	representative employers' association by agreement
Marjan Mernik, Ph.D., Agency Council Deputy President	Rectors' conference of the Republic of Slovenia
Goran Turk, Ph.D.	Rectors' conference of the Republic of Slovenia
Klemen Širok, Ph.D.	Rectors' conference of the Republic of Slovenia
Sebastjan Kristovič, Ph.D.	representative association of independent higher education institutions
Branko Škafar, Ph.D.	representative association of higher vocational colleges
David Bohar	representative organisation of students in cooperation with student councils
Andrej Pirjevec	representative organisation of students in cooperation with student councils
/	representative trade unions in higher education
Julijana Kristl, Ph.D.	Government of the Republic of Slovenia
Peter Verovšek, Ph.D.	Government of the Republic of Slovenia

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 is appointed by the Agency Council on the basis of a public invitation. The appeals committee consists of 3 members, each of whom has an alternate. The members elect from among themselves a chair and deputy chair. Alternates replace members in decision-making procedures in the event of their absence or exclusion.

Table 3: Appeal Committee members in 2023

Members	Term of office	Alternates
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Uršula Habe Nagode, chair	20 June 2023 to 19 June 2027	Robert Marolt, M.Sc.
Marko Novak, Ph.D., deputy chair	20 June 2023 to 19 June 2027	Tina Tratnik
Andreja Rakuša, member	20 June 2023 to 19 June 2027	Katarina Vatovec, Ph.D.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE AGENCY 'S WORK IN 2023

2023

In 2023, the Agency implemented the goals set in the development strategy for the 2021–2025 period. It followed its key priority areas, which include the efforts to adopt the Act on Quality in Higher and Higher Vocational Education, and to improve assessment against quality standards as well as the accreditation and evaluation procedures themselves. In addition, it strongly focused on in-depth analytical work, the establishment of up-to-date databases on selected activities, the orientations of sustainable development, active international cooperation and on active communication.

Decisions in accreditation and evaluation procedures – on granting accreditation or rejecting an application for it, reaccreditation or possible withdrawal – are decisively influenced by the compliance with quality standards by the areas of quality assessment.

Table 4: Areas of quality assessment according to the types of accreditations or external evaluations

Initial accreditation of a higher education institution	Reaccreditation of a higher education institution and external evaluation of a higher vocational college
1. Operation of the higher education institution	1. Operation of the higher education institution or higher vocational college
2. Human resources	2. Human resources
3. Material conditions	3. Students
	4. Material conditions
	5. Internal quality assurance and improvement, modification, updating and delivery of study programmes
ACCREDITATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME	EVALUATION OF A STUDY PROGRAMME OR A SAMPLE OF STUDY PROGRAMME
1. Structure and content of a study programme	1. Internal quality assurance and improvement of the quality of a study programme
2. Study programme delivery concept	2. Modification and updating of a study programme
	3. Study programme delivery

The Agency constantly strives to ensure and improve professional and objective quality assessment in accreditation and evaluation procedures. This is also the reason for appointing independent groups of experts – each must include two foreign experts 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 expert candidates at specialised meetings and workshops, briefing them about the Agency’s legislative and regulatory developments and international standards for quality assessment. It also stresses the need for impartial and in-depth substantive quality assessments and for information on the characteristics of and satisfaction with external assessments. It familiarises experts with the protocol for visiting higher education institutions and colleges and stresses the importance of meeting other key conditions for participation, such as the ability to work in a team and a respectful attitude towards interlocutors.

The findings made by the group of experts in accreditation and evaluation reports are the basis for decisions on accreditations and external evaluations or important recommendations for quality improvement.

Importance of cooperation

In Slovenia, external assessment of the quality of higher and higher vocational education is strongly linked to the active participation of students, teachers and researchers. The Agency and its predecessor, the Council for Higher Education, were among the first in Europe and beyond to actively involve 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.

As well as teachers and researchers, external quality assessment primarily addresses students. The Agency's main task is to contribute to a high standard of education in 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 task in the Agency's Annual Work Plan (AWP 2023) was defined by taking into account the following:

- the Agency's strategic objectives from 2021 to 2025:
 - adoption of the Act on Quality in Higher and Higher Vocational Education;
 - improvement of assessment according to quality standards and of 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.

Over the past year, the Agency organised a number of thematic and coordination meetings and events, which have provided an important meeting point for the exchange of ideas and experiences. It is the collaborations with a wide range of colleagues and other stakeholders in the Slovenian higher and higher vocational education area that have yielded important insights and principles underpinning the Agency's work.

The Agency is building links with different stakeholders, enabling it to design and improve its accreditation and evaluation processes. This collaborative approach is also the basis for high-quality relationships, which are crucial for the development and progress of the Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education system.

Self-evaluation is also an important aspect of the Agency's work. The analysis of its own progress is embedded in its vision. By promoting self-evaluation as an important factor for quality development in Slovenian higher education and higher vocational education area, it is following European standards and guidelines.

Legislation and other provisions from the field of quality

The draft Act on Quality in Higher and Higher Vocational Education (hereinafter: the Quality Act), with its objectives and rationale, international comparisons and explanations of the individual articles, as prepared by the Agency in 2022, is still pending consideration by the competent Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation and other stakeholders in higher and higher vocational education. Activities related to the Act were halted in spring 2022 due to the change of government, and the new government has given priority to the overhaul of the Higher Education Act (ZViS). The Ministry of Higher Education invited all relevant and credible stakeholders to participate in the overhaul process, and appointed a special inter-ministerial working group, which, in addition to representatives of the ministry, includes representatives of the Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Slovenia, independent higher education institutions, the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SAZU), the Coordination of Independent Research Institutes of Slovenia, trade unions, the Student Organisation of Slovenia, the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Agency. In the legislative area, the Agency's main focus in 2023 was therefore on the overhaul of the ZViS. In this context, it also made proposals to improve the provisions on quality assessment, accreditation and evaluation procedures together with appeals, to regulate the possibility for the Agency to participate in foreign accreditation procedures, while it argued for the need for a separate Quality Act, which it continued to actively pursue. The work of the ZViS overhaul group was intensive and continued throughout the year, with the group meeting on a fortnightly basis. Detailed starting points for the overhauled Act have been developed, with the first version expected to be finalised at the end of January 2024, when the working group will continue its work.

Documents relating to the Agency's operations

In the area of the Agency's operations, two new sets of rules were adopted in 2023 and one was amended. The Act amending the Working Time Rules was adopted in July 2023. New sections on "Recording attendance and absences" and "Authorisation of absences" were added, and the authorisation for travel on duty in the event of a travel order not being issued has been amended.

New Contracting Rules were adopted in the summer of 2023, which sets out the rules and procedure for the conclusion of all types of contracts within the Agency and for the conclusion of copyright contracts for experts in the Agency's accreditation and evaluation procedures. In November 2023, the Payment Card Rules were adopted, which regulate the use of payment cards issued to the Agency.

Analyses, documents, publications

In January 2023, the Agency published the English edition of its publication *Guide To External Assessments*, which deals with the assessment of higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges in accreditation and evaluation procedures. The Guide is designed to help make assessments at a deeper level, both in terms of content and expertise, and to guide the work of the Agency's experts and other stakeholders.

In addition to the Agency's systemic and thematic analyses, the text was informed by the Agency's ongoing consideration of the comments of the participants in the procedures, as well as by the findings and recommendations of the participants in the consultations with

experts, higher and higher vocational education teachers, scientists in the field of higher education didactics and science research, and representatives of other stakeholders.

The Guide is intended not only for the Agency experts or expert candidates, but also for institutions and colleges, Agency staff, Agency Council members and other external stakeholders. Its central and most important part intended for the assessment of compliance with quality standards is also useful for institutions and colleges in self-evaluation and preparation for accreditation or external evaluation of the Agency.

Employees continued in 2023 to analyse the content of the reports by groups of experts resulting from the evaluations of samples, this time in the area of teacher training study programmes. The third systemic analysis of accreditation and evaluation practices covering accreditation and evaluation reports by groups of experts and self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges from 2018 to 2022 was initiated. 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.

In 2023, the Agency prepared a thematic analysis on the quality of a sample of teacher training study programmes. Thematic and systemic analyses are characterised by going deeper into the relevance of expert assessments according to the prescribed areas of assessment and quality standards for the evaluation of study programmes. In summarising, interpreting and analysing the content of the formal evaluation reports of the groups of experts, the Agency has drawn on the *Methodology and Procedure for the Preparation and Dissemination of Systemic and Thematic Analyses* (https://www.nakvis.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Methodologija_procesi_metanaliza.pdf) and, in particular, the *Guide to External Assessments* (<https://www.nakvis.si/aktualno/objave/vodnik-poznanjih-presojah-nakvis/>).

The Agency's main guiding principles for analysing the experts' reports were qualitative reports on the quality of studies and their underlying conditions in the selected areas; the experts' conclusions, justifications and assessments of why the studies under assessment are good or not good in terms of study content, changes of study content, self-evaluation and delivery of study programme, such as teaching methods and formats, the facilitation of quality teaching practice, research by students and the quality of higher education teachers. The analysis was based on the guidelines for assessing this topic in the Guide.

In autumn 2023, the Agency's annual publication was published, which – in addition to presenting the Agency and the annual report on its work – presented the Agency's self-evaluation report and the Rules on conditions for providing library public service, prepared by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia. The publication was printed in both the Slovenian and English language, and its content was presented at national and international events.

The Agency has continuously striven to make the key documents and publications accessible to the international public and to make those of other actors in the European higher education area accessible to the Slovenian public, so it ensured the translation of the documents into English and Slovenian respectively. Particular 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. To this end, an online consultation was organised in the spring to present in more detail the Rules on conditions for providing library public service.

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 members and non-members of ENQA. 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.

Manuals, guides

The Agency published an English translation of the *Guide To External Assessments* in a book edition at the beginning of 2023. The guide 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.

The Agency presented the Guide at meetings, presentations and consultations organised or attended by the Agency, both at home and abroad (e.g. CEENQA working meetings).

International cooperation

The Agency actively cooperates with the international associations of quality assurance agencies of which it is a full member (ENQA, ECA, CEENQA, EQAR and INQAHEE). In 2023, it continued its regular participation in the CEENQA network based on the joint organisation of thematic events and the preparation of publications on various topics. Within the network, chaired by the Agency Director, it participated in regular bi-monthly remote working meetings of the agencies.

The Agency also continued with study visits to foreign agencies such as the Finnish Education and Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), the Spanish Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya) and the Serbian Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NAT). The working visits were mainly aimed at strengthening cooperation in the European area, identifying common challenges faced by agencies, finding appropriate solutions and exchanging examples of good practice.

The Agency has been actively involved in the European Consortium for Accreditations in Higher Education – 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.

At the beginning of June 2021, the Agency also joined the ENQA working group for drafting guidelines on academic integrity for both higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies. In an era of digital advances and the introduction of technological models of education into the study process, we see a significant increase in the risks to ensuring academic integrity in Europe and beyond. As an ambassador of academic integrity in Slovenian higher education, the Agency draws attention to the pitfalls and challenges in

the area of respecting the values of academic integrity and ethical behaviour of the entire academic community.

Representatives of the Agency also attended ENQA umbrella events – the ENQA Member Forum, which took place in April, where the Agency's representatives presented the field of computerisation of quality assurance processes, and the EQAF Forum, which took place in November. Participation in the ENQA group provides opportunities to follow the latest good and bad practices in the field of quality in higher education in the European area, and therefore to solve challenges also in the Slovenian higher education area.

In 2023, in addition to its participation in the CEENQA, ECA and ENQA networks, the Agency continued to participate in the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BUFG). It regularly cooperates with EQAR to share and publish up-to-date data on accredited higher education institutions and study programmes (DEQAR information database). Membership of INQAHEE gives the Agency insight into practices and developments in higher education innovation beyond the European Higher Education Area.

Information system of the Agency (eNakvis and iNakvis)

In 2023, the Agency successfully implemented eNakvis 2.0 in the production environment. Since May, it has allowed institutions to communicate changes to their study programmes via a new online portal. To ensure the smooth use of the revamped IT system, the Agency carried out extensive training and education, which ran until the end of the year. Since March 2023, the Agency has been working intensively on the integration of the ministry's and universities' external IT systems with eNakvis. At the end of 2023, it has successfully completed the transfer of data from the University of Ljubljana and University of Maribor to eNakvis and then successfully transferred this data from eNakvis to the eVŠ (Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation).

The Agency continued to develop modules in its internal IT system iNakvis to support work processes of the employees. The analysis module has been upgraded with data on study programmes, procedures and experts. An internal notification system via in-app notifications has been launched and the user interface has been redesigned so that employees now have basic and personalised information available to them from the front page. A module has been added to allow staff to upload pre-populated document templates for accreditation and evaluation procedures. Documents such as accreditation decisions, decisions on the appointment of experts, application reports and letters on taking note of follow-up report can be downloaded by users from the iNakvis application. The downloaded document already contains all the information about the procedure that conducted in the app.

The development of support for the Agency's Council sessions has also been important. Agenda creation for Agency Council sessions has been done via iNakvis since this year. Lastly, the record of changes to study programmes has been implemented. Higher education institutions inform the Agency of changes to their study programmes via the external eNakvis system, and the Agency informs the competent Ministry after reviewing the changes. The new electronic records in iNakvis supports the review of changes within the Agency. The progress made in the development of the iNakvis internal IT system was also recognised by the members of the ENQA panel of experts and commended in their report.

Communication

In recent years, the Agency 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 (X 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 2023, this time focusing on higher vocational colleges. The videos are aimed at prospective students, directing them to the Agency website for useful information about the Slovenian higher education area and enrolment itself. The aim was for the website to become a common information portal for all students and prospective students, providing accurate, up-to-date and relevant information on studying in Slovenia, its quality and achievements. The Agency's promotional activities in the field of video content were further strengthened by animated films, where the Agency presents its key activities, procedures and general educational topics in the field of quality assurance in Slovenian and English, aimed at both our stakeholders and the general public.

The Agency was assessed by ENQA experts in 2023 and found to be fully compliant with European quality standards. As part of preparations for the assessment by ENQA experts, the Agency organised meetings with its key stakeholders to disseminate the results of the self-evaluation, where it also briefed those present on the content and purpose of the external assessment. The Agency also organises coordination meetings with all relevant stakeholders – both domestic and foreign – to deepen cooperation, and meets with some stakeholders on a regular monthly basis. The Agency regularly organises consultations for national and international guests, the theme of the international conference in 2023 was "Designing a Quality Assurance System for Micro-Credentials". It also places emphasis on internal communication mainly carried out within the internal information system iNakvis, which is constantly being upgraded and adapted to the communication needs of the employees and the Agency in general.

The Agency is also committed to consistently safeguarding the integrity, independence and professionalism of its procedures, and in 2023 a Communications Protocol was developed to define the channels of communication and the responsibilities of stakeholders in the Agency's procedures, as well as how to deal with undue pressure.

Organisation and participation in events

In 2023, the Agency organised a range of events and meetings, with a focus on strengthening cooperation with different higher education stakeholders both at home and abroad. It organised several thematic meetings, hosted various representatives of other agencies and participated in a number of important events, both at home and internationally. Its efforts were focused on building and consolidating links with diverse stakeholders, which is also a key element of the strategy for further quality work and fruitful cooperation.

It continued the training of candidates for Agency experts, covering the regulations used by experts in their work, how to work as part of a group of experts, lessons learned from assessment experience, and the use of the *Guide to External Assessments*. The training, which is compulsory, is followed by compulsory practical training of candidates – participation in the procedure of accreditation or evaluation of a specific institution, college or study programme.

At the spring consultation on quality assurance, the new Rules on conditions for providing library public service, prepared by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, were presented. The document redefines the conditions for the provision of the public library service, including higher education libraries, and thus also influences the work of the Agency experts in assessments.

In November 2023, the Agency organised an international web consultation on the topic of micro-credentials. The event, which brought together a wide range of international and national experts in the field of micro-credentials, was to exchange experiences and transferable practices in this topical area and to discuss the challenges that arise in this context.

Table 5: Events held and participation in various meetings in 2023

<p>Presentation of the NAKVIS Guide to External Assessments (18 January 2023)</p>	<p>On 18 January 2023, the Agency and the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SAZU) organised an event entitled Presentation of the NAKVIS Guide to External Assessments at SAZU. The event was opened with speeches by Dr Franci Demšar, Director of NAKVIS, and Dr Peter Štih, President of SAZU, and the guide was presented by Tatjana Debevec from NAKVIS. The presentation was attended by a number of distinguished guests from the Slovenian higher education area, including the rectors of all major Slovenian universities, as well as representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Union of Independent Higher Education Institutions, and the Association of Slovene Higher Vocational Colleges.</p>
<p>Visit by a representative from the Moldovan agency ANACEC (24 and 26 January 2023)</p>	<p>From 24 to 26 January, a representative of the Moldovan quality agency ANACEC visited the Agency in the framework of an inter-agency employee exchange (IMINQA project for quality assurance through peer learning). NAKVIS employees presented to their Moldovan counterpart the organisation of their work at the Agency, the process of transition to institutional assessment and the revised procedures, the digitisation process of the Agency, the self-evaluation process and the preparation for the assessment by the European organisation ENQA. Particular emphasis was placed on sharing good practices that will help the Moldovan agency in its ongoing overhaul of its quality assurance system. At the end of the visit, the two agencies also signed an agreement on further cooperation, which will serve as a basis for joint projects in the future.</p>
<p>Visit by a representative of the EUA (2 and 3 February 2023)</p>	<p>At the beginning of February, a representative of the European University Association (EUA) visited the Agency as part of an exchange of agency employees (IMINQA project). The focus of the visit was on the European approach to quality assurance of joint study programmes, the digitisation of the Agency and current trends in the European Higher Education Area (micro-credentials, European networks of universities). Discussions were also held with a view to future cooperation, and an agreement was reached on a new visit by the EUA in the current year.</p>
<p>Visit of the representatives of AZVO regarding the digitisation of quality assurance processes (7 February 2023)</p>	<p>The visit by representatives of the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO) focused on the digitisation of quality assurance processes in higher education. The representatives of NAKVIS gave a detailed presentation on the operation of the two IT systems: eNakvis and iNakvis, and shared their experience in the implementation of the above-mentioned projects, as AZVO is planning the construction of their IT process, which will also seek to digitise the procedures carried out at the agency. Our guests devoted some time to the structure and collection of the data they manage. This information is very useful for the further development of both NAKVIS systems.</p>
<p>ENQA expert panel visit in the context of external assessment of NAKVIS (21–24 March 2023)</p>	<p>A panel of ENQA experts visited the Agency from 21 to 24 March 2023. At the end of the visit, it presented its final findings on the Agency's work over the last five years and summarised them in its report. Following a positive report from ENQA, the Agency's entry in the European register EQAR was renewed in October and its membership of ENQA was renewed in December.</p>

<p>ECA Member Forum in The Hague (27–29 March 2023)</p>	<p>The ECA organised a forum for ECA members, which included presentations on the University of Twente and their participation in the European Universities Initiative, the YUFE Student Journey certificate and the European Degree label initiative. The forum was followed by a two-day training session on communication in an intercultural environment, which was attended by an agency employee.</p>
<p>iNakvis presentation at the ENQA Members' Forum in Georgia (20 and 21 April 2023)</p>	<p>The ENQA Members' Forum took place in Tbilisi, Georgia, on 20 and 21 April, where current policies and practices in the field of quality assurance were presented. The event was also attended by two representatives of NAKVIS, who, at the invitation of the organisers, hosted a meeting entitled Digital transformation and enhancement of QA procedures. A key focus of the lecture was on the development of the Agency's internal IT system iNakvis, which aims to improve the efficiency of the Agency's work, leverage data for analytics and support communication with stakeholders.</p>
<p>ECA Member Seminar and General Assembly Meeting in Mallorca (21–23 June 2023)</p>	<p>To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ECA, a two-day members' seminar was organised in Palma de Mallorca with key speakers who have importantly contributed to the development of the association ever since its establishment. The workshops were organised mainly to mobilise the membership and identify the key strategic orientations of the ECA. The event was attended by an Agency employee.</p>
<p>Thematic meeting of CEENQA members (25 July 2023)</p>	<p>Representatives of CEENQA members, chaired by NAKVIS Director Dr Franci Demšar, gathered in July for the 17th joint online meeting. The meetings are held every other month, with the aim of bringing together members to present good practices, thematic analyses, projects and other topics of interest. The July meeting was dedicated to presenting the work and progress of the Estonian agency SKVC, the work and progress of the Czech agency NAB and the presentation of the <i>Guide to External Assessments</i> prepared and published by NAKVIS.</p>
<p>Visit to Dokuz Eylül University in Izmir, Turkey</p>	<p>The Agency Director, Dr Franci Demšar, visited Dokuz Eylül University in Izmir, Turkey. There he met with the Rector of the University, Professor Dr Nükhet Hotar, and delivered a lecture on International Higher Education and the Role of Quality Assurance: Example of NAKVIS. He also visited some of the university's member faculties, namely the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Postgraduate Studies in the Arts. The discussion between the Director of NAKVIS and the representatives of the local institutions was mainly focused on deepening cooperation with Slovenian universities and the possibility of NAKVIS participating in external accreditation of Dokuz Eylül University in the event of the adoption of Slovenian legislation that would allow this.</p>
<p>Visit by a representative of the Serbian Agency NAT (8–12 May 2023)</p>	<p>The visit of the representative of the Serbian agency provided valuable experience which is important for understanding the core values of each quality assurance agency: independence, professionalism, the ability to self-reflect and analyse their work, and transparency. The visit provided an excellent opportunity for knowledge sharing and cooperation, which has strengthened our long-standing partnership.</p>
<p>NAKVIS Consultation: Presentation of the new Rules on the Conditions for the Provision of the Public Library Service (13 June 2023)</p>	<p>At the June consultation on quality assurance, the new Rules on conditions for providing library public service, prepared by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, were presented. The document redefines the conditions for the provision of the public library service – including higher education libraries – and thus also influences the work of the experts in the NAKVIS assessments.</p>
<p>CEENQA General Assembly (2 and 3 June 2023)</p>	<p>The CEENQA General Assembly took place this year on 2 and 3 June in Astana, Kazakhstan. The event was hosted by the Kazakhstan agency, IAAR. On the margins of the assembly, a workshop on "People and Culture in Quality Assurance Agencies" was held, focusing on issues related to human resources management and staff development. The</p>

	<p>event was marked by a discussion on current issues in the field of quality assurance in higher education, but it was also an opportunity to exchange good practices between the participating agencies.</p>
<p>Visit by a representatives of the Bulgarian agency NEAA (25–26 October)</p>	<p>At the beginning of October, two representatives of the Bulgarian agency NEAA visited the Agency as part of the IMINQA project. The focus of the visit was on the digitisation of the Agency, the involvement of stakeholders in the work of the Agency, the implementation of online visits, self-evaluation and the use of standards.</p>
<p>NAKVIS Consultation: Designing a quality assurance system for micro-credentials (6 November 2023)</p>	<p>The theme of the Quality Assurance Webinar was "Designing a quality assurance system for micro-credentials". The purpose of the consultation, which brought together a wide range of international and national experts in the field of micro-credentials, was to exchange experiences and transferable practices in this topical area and to discuss the challenges that arise in this context.</p>
<p>EQAF 2023: Internationalisation in a Changing World (23–26 November 2023)</p>	<p>A key event for higher education and quality assurance professionals, the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) 2023, took place this year in Aveiro, Portugal, under the title "Internationalisation in a Changing World – New Trends and Challenges for Quality Assurance". The Forum focused on important topics such as transnational cooperation, sustainable mobility and innovative approaches to quality assurance, driven by new trends such as micro-credentials and virtual learning. The events was attended by two NAKVIS representatives.</p>
<p>ECA Winter Members' Forum in Paris (18–19 December 2023)</p>	<p>Two NAKVIS representatives attended the ECA Winter Members' Forum, which focused on discussions and workshops on quality assurance and internationalisation, cooperation between agencies in an international environment, and recruitment of international experts. The event concluded with a workshop and a discussion on the association's strategic objectives for 2030.</p>
<p>Training of experts and candidates for entry in the register of experts</p>	<p>As part of the training of the Agency's experts, a consultation on the Presentation of the new Rules on conditions for providing library public service was organised in June. Every year, the Agency issues a call for NAKVIS experts and then organises comprehensive training for all eligible candidates, following a programme that was thoroughly updated in 2021. In the first part of the training, candidates are familiarised with the Agency's work, procedures, how to work in groups of experts and, after being divided into sub-groups, they work on (assess) a real application for the evaluation of a study programme or a higher vocational college. The first part of the training results in an evaluation report, which is assessed by the Quality Assurance Department and the International Cooperation Department staff, who respond to it with comments on the candidates' participation, organisation of the work, professionalism and the content of the findings. The second part of the training is designed to follow the Agency's current procedures, where candidates, as external observers, follow an actual procedure. Their participation is assessed by the chair of the group of experts and the Agency staff member, and upon successful completion, the candidate is entered by the Agency Council in the NAKVIS register of experts.</p>

III. OVERVIEW OF THE PERFORMANCE OF FIRST- AND SECOND-INSTANCE DECISION-MAKING BODIES OF THE AGENCY

AGENCY COUNCIL

In 2023, the Agency Council met at twelve sessions: eleven were regular and one was extraordinary. In 2023, accreditation of study programmes, external evaluations of higher education institutions, evaluations of samples of study programmes and monitoring of progress based on the recommendations of groups of experts took place. The decisions of the Council on accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions, study programmes and higher vocational colleges are presented in Chapter III – Accreditations and Evaluations in Higher and Higher Vocational Education starting on page 25.

In January, the Agency Council took note of the key topics in the 2022 Work Report and the Agency's 2023 Annual Work Plan, and of the report on the work of the selection panel for the appointment of the Agency Director. At its next, extraordinary, session, it interviewed the candidate for the Agency Director, Dr Franci Demšar, and appointed him as Director for a five-year term.

In February, the Agency Council gave its consent to the 2022 Report on the Work and Operation of the Agency and the 2023 Annual Work and Financial Plan. After submitting the regulation to stakeholders for comments, it adopted the Act Amending the Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes, which harmonises the regulation with the Professional Titles and Academic Science and Art Titles Act, details the conduct of a site visit or tour of the premises, and changes the identification of major deficiencies in relation to the modification and updating of the study programme. The provisions on progress reporting and on evaluation of samples of study programmes have also been amended. The forms for accreditation and evaluation procedures have also been revised accordingly. The Agency Council also adopted the Act Amending the Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education, which regulates in more detail the conditions for accreditation of a joint study programme, 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) and the procedure for withdrawing from participation in a joint study programme. The Council also took note of guidelines in considering follow-up reports in accreditation and evaluation procedures.

In March, the Agency Council took note of the progress of the external evaluation of the Agency by ENQA and the main topics of the evaluation. The Council members were briefed on the Agency's achievements in key thematic areas, cooperation with stakeholders, publications and the establishment of databases, as well as on current challenges for the next evaluation period. The Council also adopted the text of the public call for nominations for new members of the Appeal Committee and their alternates.

In April, it adopted the Act amending the Minimum Standards for Appointment to Titles of Higher Education Teachers, Researchers and Faculty Assistants at Higher Education Institutions after submitting it to stakeholders for comments. The Act sets out in more detail the exceptions to the requirement of three months' continuous activity abroad for appointment to the title.

In May, it took note of the preliminary report of the ENQA evaluation and the Rules on the Conditions for the Provision of the Public Library Service. It appointed members of the Appeal Committee and their alternates for a four-year term. It discussed the Rules on Diploma Supplement and sent comments to the competent ministry.

In June, the Agency Council adopted the guidelines for part-time studies and submitted them to the Rectors' Conference of the Republic of Slovenia. It adopted the draft public call for application to candidates for entry in the Register of Experts and the plan of external evaluations of higher vocational colleges in 2023. After the publication of the Decree on the implementation of scientific research work in accordance with the principles of open science, it organised a discussion on open science and bibliometrics, with Professor Dr Primož Južnič presenting different concepts, their advantages and limitations.

In September, the Agency Council determined a sample of study programmes for external evaluation in 2024. The sample includes first- and second-cycle study programmes, which are broken down internally into fields. It determined the Agency Director's job performance and took note of the referred report or information received from the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption.

At its November session, the Council adopted amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council, which set out in more detail the reporting by the institutions on the follow-up to the recommendations of the reports of groups of experts and the remedying of major deficiencies or non-compliances.

Agency documents

The Agency Council discussed, gave its consent, adopted or took note of the following documents on the work and operations of the Agency:

- Report on Work and Operations of the Agency in 2022 (16 February 2023, 187th Council session);
- 2023 Work and Financial Plan (16 February 2023, 187th Council session);
- Confirmation of the sample of study programmes for evaluation in 2024 (21 September 2023, 193rd session);
- Confirmation of the plan of external evaluations of higher vocational colleges in 2024 (15 June 2023, 191st session);
- Act amending the Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council (16 November 2023, 195th session).

Adoption and amendments to criteria and other regulations, consideration of proposals

Adoption of regulations:

- Act Amending the Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes (16 February 2023, 187th session)
- Act Amending the Criteria for International Cooperation in Higher Education (16 February 2023, 187th session)
- Act amending the Minimum Standards for Appointment to Titles of Higher Education Teachers, Researchers and Faculty Assistants at Higher Education Institutions (20 April 2023, 189th session)

Interpretation of the Minimum standards for appointment to titles of higher education teachers, scientific staff and higher education staff at higher education institutions:

indent one of Article 35 on taking into account the grade of the thesis and the thesis defence in the calculation of the average grade, and the interpretation of Article 12 on the interpretation of the notion of active knowledge of a foreign language. (16 November 2023, 195th session)

All interpretations of the Council are published on the Agency's website.

Thematic discussions

Before adopting documents, the Agency Council took note of the key topics in the 2022 Work Report and the Agency's 2023 Annual Work Plan, which cover, among other things, the organisation of the Agency's work and the composition of its bodies, a review of the Council's decisions, guidelines for the assessment of joint study programmes, a thematic review of the work of the departments, a guide to external assessments, and the Agency's self-evaluation.

In February, the Council took note of orientations in considering follow-up reports in accreditation and evaluation procedures. The Agency Council is required to take into account the provision of the Criteria to only take note of the follow-up report, which does not envisage the involvement of a group of experts, while preserving the role of the Agency Council as an important advisory body. In case of initial accreditation of a higher education institution, reaccreditation of a higher education institution for five years, and accreditation and sample evaluation of a study programme where non-compliances or major deficiencies have not been detected, the higher education institution thus submits a follow-up report within two years. If the Council, when addressing a follow-up report, considers that it is unclear or that no progress is evident, it expresses its findings in minutes and the group of experts receives them at the time of the first subsequent reaccreditation of the higher education institution or evaluation of the study programme. If the Council, when addressing a follow-up report following an evaluation of a sample of a study programme in which non-compliances or major deficiencies have been identified, considers that there are ambiguities or a lack of progress where non-compliances or major deficiencies have been identified, it asks the higher education institution for further clarifications. After receiving further clarifications, the Council may initiate an extraordinary evaluation or express its findings in the minutes of the Council session. Follow-up report is not requested on the reaccreditation of a higher education institution for a period of less than five years, as the application has to be submitted within a short period of time. The higher education institution must prepare a plan for remedying non-compliances or major deficiencies listed in the decision within two months and, in the period pending re-evaluation, promptly notify the Agency about the completion of the tasks from the plan. The implementation is checked in the next procedure of reaccreditation of the higher education institution.

At its May session, the Agency Council considered the preliminary report of the ENQA evaluation. The report concludes that the Agency complies with all the standards and that there are no more partial compliances. In the report, the experts recommend that the thematic analyses heading on the Agency website should only include the analyses belonging under this heading. The guide to assessments and the IT system were particularly commended. The Agency has improved by 50 per cent compared to the previous evaluation.

At the same session, the Council took note of the Rules on the Conditions for the Provision of the Public Library Service prepared by the National and University Library with the participation of the Agency and Dr Primož Južnič from the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and of the planned consultation on the subject with various interlocutors. The Rules will also help experts to focus more on substantive issues related to library services rather than formal ones. The Rules have 9 points – organisation, status, purpose, tasks, management, access to materials, etc., but it is still the task of experts to determine the adequacy of the library in relation to the discipline and the cycle of study programmes of the institutions, the availability of compulsory study literature; access via dljb is no longer sufficient, and theses must normally be freely accessible. Institutions will have a transitional period of 18 months to remedy the deficiencies. The most difficulties are to be expected with regard to Article 47 (employment of library staff), which is likely to remain a matter for the Agency experts to assess.

The Council also discussed the proposed amendment to the Rules on Diploma Supplement. Paragraph two of Article 32a of the Higher Education Act provides that elements of the Diploma Supplement form shall be determined by the minister responsible for higher education on the proposal of the Agency. In addition to various nomographic corrections, the Council also added that the designation of professional titles in English may also be different from that indicated if the higher education institution demonstrates that this is necessary to ensure international comparability within the European Higher Education Area.

In September, the Agency Council adopted the Guidelines for part-time studies with the following key highlights:

- the content of the accredited study programme does not differ according to the way the study is delivered;
- the organisation of the study implies an adaptation in terms of timing and delivery (the way the study programme is conducted as a part-time study), but it does not interfere with the reduction of the content of the programme's objectives and the achievement of the general and subject-specific competences and learning outcomes envisaged by the programme;
- adjustments to the way of delivery of study, where lectures, tutorials or seminars are replaced by other forms of organised study work (tutorials, simulations, group work, etc.), must be clearly presented and reflected in the curricula and the schedule of delivery of the study programme;
- the senate of the higher education institution decides on the way of delivery of part-time study, taking into account the accredited programme and any updates or changes to the programme, both in terms of scope and content, as well as in terms of objectives and learning outcomes;
- all adjustments are aimed at providing quality services and improving them, not at rationalising and reducing the cost of study for the higher education institution and at the expense of increased individual student workload;
- the student's workload in terms of ECTS must be the same as for full-time study.

Upon the adoption of the Decree on the implementation of scientific research work in accordance with the principles of open science, the Agency Council held a discussion on open science and bibliometrics. Article 10 of the Decree stipulates, among other things, that funders must, when evaluating research activities and making decisions on co-funding, evaluate the substantive merits of the scientific research work, not the place of publication or its impact factor (or other journal metrics) or the publisher, and take into account other types of research results and other open science practices in addition to scientific publications. Other types of research results include, for example, research data and research software developed. Other open science practices include, for example, early and open sharing of research results, participation in open peer review procedures, and involvement of knowledge actors such as citizens, civil society and end-users in research. Publications, in particular scientific articles, should be made openly accessible and research data should conform to the FAIR principle and be as open as possible and as closed as necessary. Article 11 of the Decree provides, inter alia, that research organisations align the evaluation of higher education teachers and faculty assistants and of researchers with the policies of the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area, and that the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education take into account Article 10 when setting minimum standards for appointment to the titles of higher education teachers, researchers and faculty associates, and the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency when setting minimum standards for research titles at public research institutions, in so far as they relate to the evaluation of scientific research work.

The Open Science Principles initiative was considered excellent in the debate; electronic publication has made access to almost the entire set of international journals widely available, but at a cost. The trend internationally is to make as many journals freely

available as possible. The Agency must adapt the Minimum Standards to the Decree, prioritising the relevance of publications over the impact factor. Dr Primož Južnič then elaborated on the Decree in comparison to the Leiden Manifesto, which emphasises the detailed assessment of research rather than the excessive use of quantitative data. The Manifesto aims to promote academic excellence and integrity and to prevent the misuse of bibliometrics. The Leiden Manifesto thus takes into account the visibility and citation rate of publications, but these criteria take time to assess correctly. Council members noted that the Leiden Manifesto does not prohibit the impact factor. Other countries do not have this type of regulation; perhaps this is an influence from the UK, but other countries are quite reticent about it. Those present agreed that the place of publication was not an entirely appropriate criterion for assessing scientific work, but that the impact factor is also important for ranking universities and hence for the employment of graduates, in addition to funding projects, so removing the impact factor does not seem entirely appropriate.

Conflict of interest

In 2023, the Agency Council discussed one case related to the conflict of interest in assessments. The applicant requested the exclusion of the chairperson of the group of experts on the grounds of bias in the assessment on the basis of their position at another higher education institution. After rejecting the request and the appeal, the Appeal Committee upheld the appeal, pointing out that the Council had failed to clarify the allegation of the appearance of bias. The Agency Council subsequently granted the request and appointed a new group of experts to reassess.

Entry of experts in the Register

The Agency Council entered 29 candidates who have successfully completed the training in the register of experts and extended the entry of 4 experts. It also entered 22 foreign experts. It confirmed a public call for applications to candidates for entry in the register of experts on its 191st session on 15 June 2023. There were 40 candidates from shortage fields, candidates for the assessment of vocational colleges and student candidates that the Council admitted to training. The training of the candidates for experts took place on 22 and 29 September (theoretical) and on 13 and 20 October 2023 (practical).

Actions and complaints

In 2023, the Council addressed complaints related to the following:

- annulment of Council decision – 187th session, 16 February 2023,
- rejection of a request for exclusion of experts – 193rd session, 21 September 2023,
- rejection of an application for transformation of a higher education institution to a faculty, 196th session, 21 December 2023.

In all cases, the Council submitted the complaints to the Appeal Committee for decision-making.

At its 191st session, on 15 June 2023, it considered the Administrative Court's decision on the action against the decision on reaccreditation of a study programme. A court decision overturned the decision, and the Agency Council reconsidered the case.

Self-evaluation of the Agency

Through self-evaluation, the Agency aims to analyse the quality of its work and review strengths and opportunities for improvement. As part of the self-evaluation, it checked stakeholder opinions on external quality assessments and accreditation and evaluation procedures and their impact on quality in tertiary education.

The preparation of the Agency's Self-Evaluation Report was a priority, as the Agency was externally reviewed by a panel of ENQA experts in early 2023. The Report was the basis for a third external review as part of the so-called targeted review. The main objective of the Agency's self-evaluation is to improve the quality of the Agency's work and to fulfil the conditions for extending membership in ENQA and EQAR.

The composition of the self-evaluation group appointed in 2022 for preparing the self-evaluation report was slightly different than in previous years, especially because of a different type of review by the ENQA panel of experts. The purpose of the targeted external review of the Agency is to review the Agency's target areas of activity, in particular the partial compliances identified, the significant changes in the Agency's operation since the previous review, and the current challenges in achieving ESG compliance. The focus of ENQA's targeted review is also to help the Agency strive for continuous improvement in the quality of its work.

The external assessment of the Agency, including the organisation of a visit by a panel of experts from ENQA, was one of the key tasks successfully carried out in 2023. This is a mandatory external review, which is a condition for renewal of ENQA membership and for renewal of entry in EQAR. The visit of a panel of experts from ENQA took place as part of the expert panel's targeted review. The self-evaluation report will be slightly different from previous ones, focusing on the changed ENQA expert assessment. This is a so-called targeted review, taking into account the panel's findings in the last external evaluation in 2018. In addition, our self-evaluation report outlines the challenges we see in the area of agency independence. This is the so-called "enhancement standard" chosen by the Agency itself. We can boast an excellent report by the panel of experts, which demonstrates the conformity of the Agency's work with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

APPEAL COMMITTEE

In 2023, the Appeal Committee held four sessions (in May, June, August and November). A total of three appeals were lodged, each by a different appellant. At its session in May, the Appeal Committee was composed of one member and two alternates, as two members had been excluded on the grounds of a conflict of interest. The appellant lodged an appeal in the course of a sample evaluation of a study programme, in which the Agency Council identified significant irregularities and recommended that the appellant inform the Agency of the measures and activities planned to remedy them within a specified period of time. If the appellant fails to submit an action plan within the specified time limit, or if the Agency Council considers that the action plan or the measures taken are inadequate, the Council will decide whether to initiate the procedure for an extraordinary evaluation of the study programme. The appellant made a motion for annulment of the decision of the Agency Council and, in the alternative, brought an appeal against the same decision. By the contested decision, which was for the Appeal Committee to decide, the Agency Council decided to reject the appellant's request for annulment of the letter and also rejected the appeal against the letter. The Appeal Committee upheld the Council's decision.

At its session in June, the Appeal Committee met in a new composition, as the previous four-year term had expired. The session was attended in the opening part by the Agency Director, who gave a brief presentation of the internal organisation of the Agency, the statistics of applications submitted and processed in the accreditation and evaluation procedures, and the results of the third external assessment by the ENQA panel of experts. He said that the Agency had been working on changes to legislation on the Agency's work and quality in higher education for several years and suggested that the text of the proposed changes to the legislation on the Agency's work should be forwarded to the

Appeal Committee, and the members of the Appeal Committee and their alternates agreed to discuss the proposed changes to higher education legislation and to provide the Agency with a written position on them. At the session, the members of the Appeal Committee also appointed their Chair and alternate Chair.

At the next session of the Appeal Committee convened in August, the members of the Appeal Committee and their alternates adopted a position on the proposed legislative changes, and the final written position was forwarded to the Agency Director.

At its last session in November, the Appeal Committee considered two cases. In the first, it ruled on the contested decision by which the Agency Council decided to reject the appellant's request for the exclusion of two members of the group of experts. The Appeal Committee found the appeal to be well-founded, upheld it and referred the case back to the Agency Council for reconsideration. The Appeal Committee also considered the other case, but postponed its decision until its next session.

IV. ACCREDITATIONS AND EVALUATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND HIGHER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Accreditation decisions in higher education

In 2023, the Agency Council:

- granted accreditation to 10 study programmes,
- reaccruited 11 higher education institutions,
- adopted 4 transformations of higher education institutions,
- completed 20 procedures of evaluation of samples of study programmes,
- completed one procedure of extraordinary evaluation of a study programme,
- stayed the procedure on the grounds of withdrawal of three applications for accreditation of a study programme.

External evaluations of higher vocational colleges

The Agency Council adopted seven opinions on the fact that colleges meet the quality standards prescribed by law and criteria, and no opinion in which it found non-compliances or major deficiencies in the operation of the college.

Detailed data is provided in tables and explanatory notes.

Table 6: Consideration of applications submitted before 2023

CONSIDERATION OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED BEFORE 2023				
Type of procedure	Type of accreditation	Number of Council decisions	of	Decision
Higher education institution	Reaccreditation	11		5 reaccreditations for a full period and 6 for a shorter period
Higher education institution	Transformation of institution	1		Negative decision (under appeal procedure)
Higher education institution	Accreditation of location	1		/
Higher vocational college	External evaluation	3		3 positive opinions
Study programme	Accreditation	8		8 positive decisions
Study programme	Extraordinary evaluation	1		Partial compliance of delivery
Study programme	Evaluation of a sample	5		Only recommendations made to the institution.

EXPLANATORY NOTE:

The table shows the number of accreditation and evaluation decisions in 2023 concerning applications submitted before that year.

Table 7: Consideration of applications submitted in 2023

CONSIDERATION OF APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED IN 2023 (from 1 January to 31 December 2023)

Type of procedure	Type of accreditation	Anticipated number of applications	Number of applications received	Number of Council decisions	Decision
Higher education institution	Reaccreditation	9	9	0	
Higher education institution	Initial accreditation	1	1	0	
Higher education institution	Accreditation of location	2	4	2	2 positive decisions
Higher education institution	Transformation of institution	1	2	1	1 merger by acquisition
Higher vocational college	External evaluation	12	12	4	4 positive opinions
Study programme	Accreditation	20	21	5	2 positive decisions and 3 withdrawals of applications.
Study programme	Extraordinary evaluation	0	1	0	
Study programme	Evaluation of a sample	20	20	15	10 recommendations made + 5 non-compliances identified

EXPLANATORY NOTE:

In 2023, the Agency anticipated 65 applications for accreditations and evaluations and received 70 applications.

The purpose of evaluations of a sample of study programmes is to advise higher education institutions in improving the quality of delivery, updating or modification and self-evaluation of study programmes. An evaluation procedure does not conclude with a decision but with recommendations to a higher education institution for improving the quality.

In 2023, third-cycle study programmes were assessed again through the evaluation of a sample, with the emphasis on the assessment of scientific and research work.

Major deficiencies or non-compliances were established in five third-cycle programmes for the following reasons (summarised):

- inadequate and deficient study programme self-evaluation procedures;
- internal and external stakeholders were not properly involved in the preparation of the self-evaluation report and communication on findings;
- the quality loop for the evaluated study programme was not closed;
- unavailability of compulsory literature and obsolescence of compulsory literature;
- inadequacy of research equipment;
- unclear concepts for mentors and course holders in the doctoral study.

In these cases, the Council imposed a deadline on the applicant to eliminate and report on the identified non-compliances or deficiencies.

For programmes where only opportunities for improvement were identified, the Agency Council decided that the applicant should consider the written opportunities for improvement in the self-evaluation of the study programme, which should also be evident from the self-evaluation reports, and notify the Council in writing within one or two years.

The Council took note of the follow-up report in procedures of programme accreditation, evaluation of a sample and institution reaccreditation 53 times. In the case of study programmes from higher education institutions that are in the reaccreditation procedure, the Council decided that follow-up reports should be forwarded to groups of experts in institutional assessments.

The Agency Council reaccredited six higher education institutions for a shorter period. The following reasons have been pointed out (summarised):

- inadequate habilitation of higher education teachers;
- insufficient professional and research activity, and failure to meet the conditions for student and teacher involvement;
- study programmes have not been updated in terms of content throughout the entire assessment period;
- the internal quality assurance system did not enable the closure of the quality loop in several areas of operation of a higher education institution;
- the publicly available information about the study programme does not correspond to the accredited status;
- the move to a hybrid mode of delivery of study is not in line with quality standards;
- no development of strategy and verifiable strategic objectives;
- inappropriate recognition of practical work;
- inadequate library services.

In 2023, the Council discussed three initiatives for the extraordinary evaluation of a study programme and a higher education institution. In all cases, before making a decision on the initiation of the procedure of extraordinary evaluation, initiatives or the reported suspicion of major violations were forwarded to the management of the relevant higher education institutions for response.

In two cases, the Council did not initiate the procedure because the higher education institution adequately explained the arguments in the initiative. In one case, the Agency's reply was received by the Agency Council at the end of 2023 and will be considered in 2024.

There were 12 external evaluation procedures for colleges in the external evaluation plan for higher vocational colleges, seven in the first half and five in the second. Four procedures have been completed and three will be completed in early 2024.

The Agency Council adopted 7 decisions or positive opinions on meeting quality standards set by the Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges.

Table 8: Negative Council decisions in 2023

NEGATIVE DECISIONS OF THE COUNCIL IN 2023 (from 1 January to 31 December 2023)			
Type of procedure	Type of accreditation	Number of decisions	Notes
Higher education institution	Transformation of institution	1	Under appeal procedure

EXPLANATORY NOTE:

The Agency Council adopted one negative decision on the transformation of a higher education institution because it did not comply with the conditions laid down by the ZViS and the quality standards according to the Accreditation Criteria. The weak scientific research activity was highlighted (insufficient number of researchers, failure to obtain research projects, publications mainly in journals without impact factor); the acquisition of research projects should be strengthened and a sufficient number of appropriate course holders should be ensured.

Table 9: Number of unresolved applications

NUMBER OF UNRESOLVED APPLICATIONS AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2023			
Type of procedure	Type of accreditation	Number of unresolved applications	Notes
Higher education institution	Reaccreditation	10	9 applications were submitted in autumn, 1 application is for reaccreditation of a university and was brought under an appeal procedure.
Higher education institution	Initial accreditation	1	The application was submitted in August.
Higher education institution	Transformation of institution	2	One application is under an appeal procedure, another was submitted in the second half of the year and concerns a complex process of transformation into a university.
Higher education institution	Accreditation of location	2	The applications were submitted in autumn.
Study programme	Accreditation	16	5 applications were submitted in the summer, 2 in December, one application will be subject to a repeated procedure, in case of one application there was a change of an expert, 7 applications are expected to be decided on by February 2024.
Study programme	Extraordinary evaluation of programme	1	Expected to be decided on by February 2024.

NUMBER OF UNRESOLVED APPLICATIONS AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2023

Type of procedure	Type of accreditation	Number of unresolved applications	Notes
Study programme	Reaccreditation	1	Following an administrative dispute before the Administrative Court, the application is under an appeal procedure.
Study programme	Evaluation of a sample	5	The applications were scheduled for assessment in autumn.
Higher vocational college	External evaluation	8	5 applications were submitted in autumn and 3 applications were submitted just before summer.

EXPLANATORY NOTE:

The reasons for unresolved applications in the procedures for accreditation of study programmes are the following:

- a) 5 applications were submitted in the summer and 2 in December 2023, so the procedures in accordance with the law and the Accreditation Criteria could not be completed yet and will continue in 2024;
- b) in case of one application, there was a change of an expert, which extended the deadline for submitting the report;
- c) in case of one application, the Council reappointed a group of experts.

The reasons for unresolved applications in the procedures for reaccreditation of a higher education institution are the following:

- a) 9 applications were submitted in September 2023, which means that the procedures have only just begun;
- b) one application is for the reaccreditation of a university, which is one of the most complex procedures (two site visits are foreseen, as well as a wider group of (international) experts); in addition, it was under an appeal procedure.

The reasons for unresolved applications in the procedures for external evaluation of higher vocational colleges are the following:

- a) 5 applications were submitted in autumn, in line with the annual plan;
- b) 3 applications were submitted just before summer. Due to the absence of various stakeholder groups (students, graduates, teachers, etc.), it is generally not possible to carry out site visits during study holidays, which slightly extends the duration of the procedures.

Comparison with 2022

In 2023, the number of positive decisions adopted by the Agency Council in accreditation and evaluation procedures was almost the same as in 2022, namely:

Higher education

- accreditations of study programmes: 9 in 2022, 10 in 2023;
- initial accreditations of higher education institutions: 0 in 2022 and 2023;
- reaccreditations of higher education institutions: 13 in 2022 and 11 in 2023;
- transformations of higher education institutions: 4 in 2022 and 3 in 2023;

- evaluations of samples of study programmes: 17 in 2022 and 20 in 2023.

Total: 43 positive decisions in 2022, 44 positive decisions in 2023.

In 2023, 37 visits took place in procedures of reaccreditation and initial accreditation of higher education institutions, extraordinary evaluation of study programmes, accreditation of study programmes and evaluation of samples of study programmes (in 2022, there were 37 as well).

The Agency examined and recorded 520 modifications of study programmes (478 in 2022).

Higher vocational education

- site visits: 10 in 2022 and 12 in 2023;
- opinions on the compliance with standards prescribed by the law: 9 in 2022 and 7 in 2023;
- qualified opinions: 0 in 2022 and 2023;
- opinions identifying major deficiencies or inconsistencies in compliance with the standards prescribed by law: 1 in 2022 and 0 in 2023.

Table 10: Number of accredited study programmes according to Klasius-P-16 – comparison between 2022 and 2023

Klasius-P-16	Year	Number of accredited programmes	Number of all accredited programmes in the year	Percentage of accredited programmes
(01) Education	2022	0	9	0
(01) Education	2023	4	10	40
(02) Arts and humanities	2022	1	9	11.1
(02) Arts and humanities	2023	5	10	50
(03) Social sciences, journalism and information	2022	1	9	11.1
(03) Social sciences, journalism and information	2023	0	10	0
(04) Business, administration and law	2022	3	9	33.3
(04) Business, administration and law	2023	3	10	30
(05) Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	2022	1	9	11.1
(05) Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	2023	0	10	0
(06) Information and communication technologies (ICTs)	2022	2	9	22.2
(06) Information and communication technologies (ICTs)	2023	0	10	0
(07) Engineering, manufacturing and construction	2022	2	9	22.2

Klasius-P-16	Year	Number of accredited programmes	Number of all accredited programmes in the year	Percentage of accredited programmes
(07) Engineering, manufacturing and construction	2023	1	10	10
(09) Health and welfare	2022	2	9	22.2
(09) Health and welfare	2023	2	10	20

NOTE:

KLASIUS-P-16 is the implementation of classification ISCED-F 2013 that replaced ISCED 1997 and entered into force by the amended Decree on the introduction and use of the education and training classification system (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia [Uradni list RS], No 8/17). Klasius-P-16 is intended for national and international statistical data collection and reporting.

V. THE AGENCY'S PRIORITIES (IMPORTANT TASKS) IN 2023

The chapter outlines the Agency's work it carries out in addition to managing accreditation and evaluation procedures and other tasks necessary for its operation, such as human resources and finance. These are the priorities the Agency has planned and set for 2023.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2023 ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan tasks are set out or determined by taking into consideration:

- A) The **Agency's strategic objectives** from 2021 to 2025:
 - a) Adoption of the Act on Quality in Higher and Higher Vocational Education (R)
 - b) Improving assessment according to quality standards and accreditation and evaluation procedures (S)
 - c) In-depth substantive analytical work in selected areas (S)
 - d) Establishing up-to-date databases on selected activities in higher education institutions (T)
 - e) Pursuing sustainable development goals (R)
 - f) Enhanced international cooperation (S)
 - g) Proactive communication (T)

- B) **Areas of assessment** according to the Quality Manual:
 - a) accreditations and external evaluations
 - b) internal quality assurance system of the Agency
 - c) external quality assurance system of the Agency
 - d) criteria and other provisions of the Agency
 - e) information system and provision of information

- C) The **Agency's values**:
 - a) professionalism
 - b) transparency
 - c) development

VI. OVERVIEW OF WORK BY DEPARTMENTS IN 2023

Activity/task	Contents	Category
GENERAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT		
Legislation (higher and higher vocational education)	Participation in the working group responsible for the overhaul of the Higher Education Act, reviewing and examining remarks, harmonising the text of the draft Act and explaining the articles of the Act.	Regulations
Participation in the working group and preparation of bases for the Act	Most of the Agency's legislative work in 2023 was devoted to the overhaul of the ZViS, in the context of which it also made proposals to improve the provisions on quality assessment, accreditation and evaluation procedures together with appeals, to regulate the possibility for the Agency to participate in foreign accreditation procedures, etc.; at the same time, it argued for the need for a separate Quality Act.	
Internal legal acts	Preparation of new rules and updates; acts on changes to job classification; clean copies of internal legal acts.	Regulations
Preparation of internal rules from receipt to archiving of the document	Preparation was not made. There is a legal basis for adopting the rules, but in practice we do not know of any institution having such rules. If necessary, the task will be added to the 2025 Action Plan.	
Organisation of working time for 2024	Preparation of the calendar of work (sessions, days off, public holidays, etc.).	
Act on Changes to Job Classification of the Agency	Change due to a statutory salary increase by one pay band.	
Updating the Quality Manual	The Quality Manual defines the Agency's functioning, responsibilities, quality areas, indicators, measures and quality standards. It also governs the organisation of the Agency self-evaluation procedures and drafting of annual work plan, self-evaluation report and work report. The Agency regularly evaluates and, where necessary, updates the Manual on the basis of the results of the self-evaluation.	
Rules on working time	Change: new sections on "Recording attendance and absences" and "Authorisation of absences" were added. The authorisation for travel on	

	duty in the event of a travel order not being issued has been amended as well.	
Agency rules on contracting	The new Agency rules on contracting were adopted.	
Rules on the measures to be taken to obtain the Family Friendly Enterprise certificate	Supplementing the rules with additional measures, the right to request adjustments to working conditions, socialising among employees, participation of employees' relatives in occasional agency work.	
Rules on the prevention of alcoholism and the administration of alcohol and drug tests	A change was not adopted.	
Payment Card Rules of the Agency	The new Payment Card Rules of the Agency were adopted.	
Act amending the Job Classification (March, May, August 2023)	Appropriate amendments to the Agency job classification were adopted.	
GDPR	Counselling and raising awareness among employees about personal data processing; cooperating with the data protection officer; adapting personal data management according to the provisions of the ZVOP-2.	Regulations
Adapting personal data management in the light of the provisions of the ZVOP-2	Adapting the Agency operation on the entry into force of the ZVOP-2.	
Legal support to the Agency Council	Participating in Agency Council sessions; reviewing the minutes, help with drafting decisions; monitoring of members' term of office.	Quality assurance support
Calls for the appointment of new members at the end of terms	Calls for the appointment of new members and the arrangements for the new members to take up their duties.	
Legal support to Agency Council activities	Participation in Agency Council sessions, overseeing the legality of decisions of the Agency Council.	
Formulation of decisions of the Agency Council	Reviewing the session minutes, help with drafting decisions.	
Legal assistance to staff in conducting procedures	Legal assistance to staff in conducting procedures.	Quality assurance support
Preparation of legal opinions	Studying the issue and preparing legal opinions on specific dilemmas on the application of legislation.	Quality assurance support
Structure of the Appeal Committee	Overseeing the composition/membership of the Appeal Committee (monitoring the terms of office, drafting and publishing public calls for nominations for members of the Appeal Committee and their alternates, serving on the Appeal Committee selection panel, preparing documents for the Council's session materials).	Appeal Committee

Appointment of the last alternate member of the Appeal Committee	Drafting and publishing public calls for appointing the last alternate member of the Appeal Committee.	
Activities at the end of the term of the current Appeal Committee	Public call(s) for new members of the Appeal Committee and their alternates, work on the selection board (checking the eligibility of candidates, communication with candidates and Committee members, sessions of the Committee, interviews, preparation of materials for the Committee, etc.).	
Appointment of the reconstituted Appeal Committee	Tasks related to the appointment of the reconstituted Appeal Committee, constitutive session.	
Support to the activities	Preparation and distribution of materials and documents relating to the Appeal Committee session, participation in the Appeal Committee session and taking of minutes, correspondence with Appeal Committee members, coordination of decisions between members.	Appeal Committee
Employment	Recruitment procedure (publishing the job posting, candidate selection procedure), implementation of public call for the Agency Director (publishing the job postings, examination of applications, panel work, interviews, candidate selection procedure, etc.), preparation of employment contracts, annexes to employment contracts, registration with the National Health Insurance Fund, entry of data in the records (Mferac) of new recruits, preparation of authorisations.	Human resource affairs
Implementation of the public call for the Agency Director	Implementation of the public call for the Agency Director (job posting); examination of applications, work of the panel, Agency Council, interviews, employment contract.	
Recruitment procedure for the post of "Sectoral Adviser II" in the Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department	Two procedures were carried out, from the publication of job posting to the conclusion of the contract.	
Recruitment procedure for the post of "Senior Sectoral Adviser II" in the Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department	The procedure was carried out, from the publication of job posting to the conclusion of the contract.	
Another recruitment procedure for the post of "Senior Sectoral Adviser II" in the Quality Assurance and	The procedure was carried out, from the job posting to the conclusion of the employment contract – the selected candidate declined the employment at the Agency.	

International Cooperation Department		
Wages and salaries	Preparation of data for wage calculation.	Human resource affairs
Proposed personnel plan 2024/25	Proposed personnel plan 24/25 with additional substantive explanation for micro-credentials.	
Education and healthy working environment	Monitoring education needs, proposals, preparation of annual education plan, safety at work, promotion of health, Family-Friendly Enterprise	Human resource affairs
Copyright contracts for experts	Preparation of copyright contracts and financial documents for the payment of taxable disbursements to individuals.	Financial affairs
Payments	Preparation of financial documents for payment of the Agency's financial liabilities.	Financial affairs
Contracts/orders	Entering contracts/order forms into the Mferac system; entering data on new business partners or changed data on business partners into the Mferac system.	
Implementation of the budget	Activities related to budget implementation.	Financial affairs
Managing procedures related to requests for access to public information	Managing procedures related to public information.	Public information
Catalogue of public information	Preparation and regular updating of the catalogue.	Public information
Provision of general information from the Agency field of activities	Provision of general information and data from the Agency field of activities.	Public information
Contracts	Participation in below-threshold public contracts.	Business and administrative tasks
Receiving and sending mail and recording documents	Receiving and sending mail in physical and electronic form.	Business and administrative tasks
Business contacts	Participation on the organisation and coordination of business contacts.	Business and administrative tasks
External supervision	Preparation of required documentation and cooperation with supervisory authorities.	Supervisions

Internal audit	Implementation of (corrective) measures to improve internal controls, etc.	Supervisions
Human resource affairs	Keeping of human resource records.	Records and documentation
Financial affairs	Keeping of financial records.	Records and documentation
Records of personal data processing	Records of personal data processing.	Records and documentation
ANALYTICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT		
Report on evaluations of samples of study programmes and thematic analysis	Analysing reports on evaluation of samples of study programmes by delineated topics.	Plans and reports
Systemic analysis	The systemic analysis is carried out over a longer period – from three to five years according to a pre-agreed methodology. It is a comprehensive analysis of accreditations and evaluations in higher and higher vocational education, as well as self-evaluations of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges over the period. The results of the analysis help the Agency and experts, as well as institutions and colleges, to improve the assessment of higher and higher vocational education activity or quality in accreditation, evaluation and self-evaluation procedures.	Analyses, documents, publications
Annual publication of the Agency	Each year, the Agency produces a publication presenting its organisation, tasks, mission and values, its work during the previous calendar year, topical issues and, as a rule, publishes the proceedings of the annual international conference.	Analyses, documents, publications
Upgrade of internal information system iNakvis	The Agency's internal information system, designed to improve the Agency's performance and planned activities, enables both monitoring and updating of tasks from the action plan, creation of events and online meetings by automatically generating web links for them, keeping records of higher	iNakvis

	education institutions and study programmes, records of experts, preparation of materials for Council sessions, records of working time, as well as fast communication between co-workers. The system is constantly being developed and updated.	
Maintenance of the eNakvis information system	Part of the maintenance of the external IT system is related to routine maintenance (software updates and troubleshooting), while the other part is related to major maintenance. This includes optimising the performance of the application, improving the user experience, increasing transparency, etc.	eNakvis
Preparation for external evaluation by ENQA	The visit of the ENQA panel of experts is one of the main tasks in 2023. The site visit is a part of compulsory external review, which is a condition for renewal of ENQA membership and for renewal of entry in the European Register of Agencies – EQAR.	Self-evaluation of the Agency
External evaluation of the Agency	The visit of a panel of experts is a part of the procedure for renewal of ENQA membership and for renewal of entry in the European Register of Agencies – EQAR. The visit of a panel of experts from ENQA took place as part of the expert panel’s targeted review.	Self-evaluation of the Agency
Research	The Agency provides information on the research achievements of study programme holders to the group of experts, who needs them to assess their scientific, professional, research or artistic work in accordance with the Accreditation and Evaluation Criteria.	External databases
Libraries	The Agency also maintains data on the library activities of higher education institutions, mainly in the context of assessment procedures.	External databases
Employability database	Establishment of a database on the employability of students by higher education institutions and study programmes, taking into account the cycle, type or nature of the latter.	External databases
Translation	The Agency ensures up-to-date translations of all relevant documents, from regulations (criteria, standards), analysis, guidelines, etc. to the Agency's annual publication. In addition to the above, in 2024, the Agency will arrange for the translation of the Agency's self-evaluation report and the Guide to Assessments.	Translation
Interpreting	Interpretation is provided mainly during visits to institutions and colleges where the participants are unwilling or unable to communicate in English, which is the working language in accreditation and evaluation procedures due to the presence of foreign experts in the groups of experts (an obligation under the ZViS). Interpreting is done from Slovenian into English and vice versa. This can also be provided in other events, such as the	Translation

	external evaluation of the Agency during a visit by ENQA representatives, etc.	
Report on Work and Operations of the Agency in 2023	Overview of the completed tasks from the 2023 Action Plan, the work of the Agency Council, Appeal Committee and resources.	Plans and reports
Annual Work Plan of the Agency 2024	Preparation of the Annual Work Plan with principal work tasks in 2024.	Plans and reports
Independence of agencies	An international analysis of the independence of quality assurance agencies produced in cooperation with the various agencies associated in CEENQA.	Analyses, documents, publications
QUALITY ASSURANCE AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION DEPARTMENT		
Proposing amendments, criteria, forms, templates for writing reports	Updating criteria according to the legislative changes and stakeholders' proposals.	Criteria and other provisions
Consideration of comments on the proposed amendments to the Accreditation Criteria	Harmonisation of remarks with the amendments to the Professional Titles and Academic Science and Art Titles Act.	
Meeting with the UL about the proposed amendments to the Accreditation Criteria and Criteria for International Cooperation	Meeting on adaptations of text of Article 49a of the Accreditation Criteria, follow-up reports, and on the amendments to the Professional Titles and Academic Science and Art Titles Act.	
Publication of amendments to the Criteria for International Cooperation	Harmonisation of remarks with the amendments to the Professional Titles and Academic Science and Art Titles Act.	
Publication of amendments to the Accreditation Criteria	Harmonisation of remarks with the amendments to the Professional Titles and Academic Science and Art Titles Act.	
Preparation of the international study programme notification form and the THE form	Preparation and publication of the international study programme notification form and the THE form (eNakvis production environment).	
Drafting of letters to inform institutions in follow-up report procedures	Drafting proposals for decisions to inform institutions in the follow-up procedures – reviewing and responding to follow-up reports.	

Accreditation and evaluation procedures (assigning, conducting and deciding)	Assigning procedures, conducting procedures, reviewing and preparing materials for Council sessions, reviewing and considering at Agency Council meetings, letters and decisions.	Accreditations and evaluations
Managing iNakvis (rules of procedure)	Prepared proposal to optimise the rules of procedure in iNakvis.	Accreditations and evaluations
Inter-ministerial and inter-department cooperation	Inter-department cooperation on changes of legislation in higher education, the resolution of the National Programme for Higher Education and other topics related to the development and upgrading of the quality assurance system of Slovenian higher education.	Cooperation with stakeholders
ENQA working group on academic integrity in Ljubljana	A full-day international workshop to prepare a report and recommendations for ENQA members.	
Rules on the Measures to Preserve the Dignity of Employees and Protect the Persons Reporting Instances of Unethical Behaviour	The Rules on the Measures to Preserve the Dignity of Employees published on 2 November 2023.	
Visits to institutions and cooperation with stakeholders	Online or in-person meetings with representatives of different higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges to inform stakeholders about the work of the Agency and to build trusting relationships.	Cooperation with stakeholders
Consultation within the Rectors' conference of the Republic of Slovenia	Discussion of open questions on various topical issues: 1. part-time study, 2. accreditation mechanisms in the light of European guidelines on international university networks, 3. e-Nakvis records and the proposal for a link with eVŠ, 4. Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes, 5. draft Act on Quality in Higher and Education, 6. incorrect and unconstitutional interpretation and application of the provisions of the Act and the Criteria.	
Participation in the UM Consultation "Inclusive University Educational Environment as a Generator of Successful Stories"	Participation of an Agency employee as a speaker and panellist at the University of Maribor consultation.	
National consultation of higher vocational colleges	Participation in the annual meeting of higher vocational colleges (on quality), organised by the Association of Higher Vocational Colleges.	
Emuni – training session within the MORHEL project	Presentation of the <i>Guide to External Assessments</i> .	
UM E-Learning and e-Education Group	Presentation of the <i>Guidelines for Hybrid Education</i> .	

Visit to UM – UM Quality Assessment Committee	Presentation and discussion of current issues related to the Agency's procedures.	
Monitoring relevant practices and new developments and preparing proposals	Through participation in working groups of international associations and in various international and national events, the Agency monitors examples of current practices and innovations in the field of quality improvement and integrates them into its procedures and practices as appropriate.	Cooperation with stakeholders
ENQA WG academic integrity group – interviews for micro-credentials	Active participation in the ENQA working group with representatives of various foreign agencies (QII, NVAO and SAAHE – Slovakia).	
Preparation of the questionnaire for micro-credentials	Preparation of a questionnaire and interviews with representatives of the different quality agencies in the EHEA. Preparation of summaries and findings of the interviews and draft text for the ENQA publication.	
Guidelines for part-time study	Develop baselines and submit them to stakeholders for review and response, collect responses by 7 August 2023.	
Reviewing responses and planning follow-up activities for the development of guidelines	Review and discuss the responses received from stakeholders on the draft baselines and prepare a proposal for the development of guidelines for part-time study.	
Planning and carrying out expert training	Preparation of a training programme for experts and holding of workshops and events for the Agency's experts.	Training courses
Public records	Activities related to the establishment, maintenance and updating of public records kept by the Agency under the ZViS.	Records
Archiving	In accordance with the Protection of Documents and Archives and Archival Institutions Act (ZVDAGA), resolved cases are regularly archived.	Records
Register of experts	Reviewing and monitoring entries in the Register of Experts, keeping records and preparing the call for candidates for the Agency's experts.	Records
Training of Agency experts on 17 and 20 January	Organisation and implementation of training for candidates for entry in the register of experts (teachers and students).	
Call to candidates for entry in the Register of Experts	Publication of the call for training of candidates for entry in the Agency Register of Experts.	
Training courses for candidates for entry in the Register of Experts	Organisation and implementation of training courses for candidates for entry in the Register of Experts in two groups, dates of training: 22 and 29 September and 13 and 29 October.	
Participation in associations and organisations (ENQA, ECA, CEENQA, etc.)	Active participation in associations of quality assurance agencies of which NAKVIS is a member.	International

ENQA WG academic integrity	Organising a full-day meeting of the members of the ENQA Working Group on Academic Integrity (at the Agency) and developing baselines for the report.	
ECA members Forum (the Hague)	Participation at the ECA winter seminar.	
Training course CULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE PROFESSIONALS	ECA training on communication in an intercultural environment, participation of a department employee in the training.	
ECA GA Palma de Mallorca	Participation and cooperation in the ECA annual seminar.	
EQAF 2023	Participation in the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) 2023 entitled "Internationalisation in a Changing World – New Trends and Challenges for Quality Assurance", held from 23 to 26 November 2023 in Aveiro, Portugal.	
CEENQA – Bi-monthly meeting	Presentation of the <i>Guide to External Assessments</i> .	
ECA winter seminar	Participation at the ECA winter seminar in Paris.	
Project collaboration	Participation in projects, involvement in projects related to the preparation of micro-credentials.	International
Communications and public relations	Activities related to the ongoing and two-way communication and information to the public (higher education stakeholders) on the activities of the Agency.	Communication
Internal communication	Regular internal communication on the Agency's operation and planned activities: iNakvis upgrade in internal communication.	
Developing a communication plan – disseminating the self-evaluation results	Organisation of meetings with key stakeholders for the dissemination of the self-evaluation results (NAKVIS SER); several meetings were organised with relevant stakeholders for the dissemination of the Agency's self-evaluation results.	
Informing students about the usefulness of the Agency's websites	Informing prospective students every year about the usefulness of the Agency's website and of the presentation films of higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges.	
Article 38 of the ZViS	Drafting answers to journalists' questions on Article 38 of the ZViS (enrolment conditions).	
Making presentation films of higher vocational colleges	Organisation, filming, production and editing of short presentation films of higher vocational colleges for publication on the Agency's website or YouTube channel.	
Making animation films	Making educational animation films on quality assurance in higher education or the Agency's work.	
Protocol of communication in Agency's procedures	Preparation of a protocol for communication in the Agency's procedures, defining the channels of communication and the responsibilities of	

	stakeholders in the Agency's procedures, as well as the handling of cases of undue pressure (published on the Agency's website).	
Website and social media management	Keeping the website up-to-date (Slovenian and English versions – ensuring translations of content) and publishing and following the latest posts.	Communication
News and publishing key messages, multimedia content production and processing	Preparing and publishing news and other documents on the website, updating and adapting the website as needed, publishing key information and other interactive content on social media (X and Youtube), preparing and processing various multimedia content (video, images, logos etc.).	
Publication of expert reports and decisions	Regular updating of the website where the final decisions (decision, recommendation letter, opinion of the HVC) and the final reports of the experts (individual HEI) are published.	
E-newsletter	Monthly preparation and publication of an e-newsletter on the Agency's website and electronic communication to stakeholders.	Communication
Preparation and distribution of the e-newsletter (last week of the month)	Monthly production of an online e-newsletter, publication on the Agency's website and distribution through online communication channels.	

Explanatory note to the overview of work by departments

Most of the tasks set out in the department-specific action plan have been completed. The remaining tasks, such as accreditation and evaluation procedures, thematic analyses, legal support to the Agency Council and staff in the management of the procedures, organisation of meetings with higher education and higher vocational education stakeholders, maintenance of the IT system and budget implementation, are part of the Agency's permanent tasks, which are implemented on an annual basis.

Activities on the Act on Quality in Higher and Higher Vocational Education have come to a standstill following a working group meeting in January due to the change of government. They were continued in the framework of the ZViS amendment. Most of the Agency's legislative work in 2023 was therefore devoted to the overhaul of the ZViS, in the context of which it also made proposals to improve the provisions on quality assessment, accreditation and evaluation procedures together with appeals, to regulate the possibility for the Agency to participate in foreign accreditation procedures, etc.; at the same time, it argued for the need for a separate Quality Act, which it will continue to actively pursue.

Outside the Action Plan, a new revision of the job classification was prepared and adopted in December 2023, which introduced some new jobs and resulted in new employment contracts for some employees.

Amendments and updates to the Quality Manual, which defines the Agency's functioning, responsibilities, quality areas, indicators, measures and quality standards, are planned for 2024. The Agency waited for the report of the ENQA panel of experts and the decision on the renewal of its membership of ENQA and EQAR.

The Agency's annual end-of-year consultation, traditionally dedicated to the presentation of the Agency's work report, is planned for 2024.

In 2022, the Agency started to intensify its activities to obtain data on the employment of graduates of Slovenian higher education institutions, which continued in 2023.

The review of work by departments in 2023 shows that the Agency carried out all the planned tasks and spent all the financial resources, which we consider to be very good. The Agency systematically sought the opinions of various higher education and higher vocational education stakeholders and carried out a thorough self-evaluation including a visit and review by a panel of ENQA experts in March 2023. By renewing its membership of ENQA and EQAR, the Agency has already laid a solid foundation for its work in 2024.

VII. RESOURCES

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Outturn of the Agency's state budget for 2023 BH	Policy / Main programme / Sub-programme / Budget heading	2023 adopted budget (in EUR)	Valid budget 2023 (in EUR)	Budget outturn 2023 (in EUR)	Budget implementation as a percentage of the adopted budget
1	2	3	4	5	6 = 5 / 4
	02 - Higher education, science, technology and information society				
	0201 - Higher education				
	020101 - Higher education				
9885	Wages and salaries	913,527.00	913,527.00	901,597.83	99%
9886	Material costs	265,156.00	277,592.79	277,588.49	100%
9887	Investments	92,261.00	92,265.39	92,265.39	100%
9888	Quality in higher education	418,056.00	405,614.82	405,614.82	100%
	TOTAL	1,689,000.00	1,689,000.00	1,677,066.53	99%

The **budget's implementation rate as a percentage of the adopted budget** (salaries, material costs, investments, quality of higher education) was **99%** in 2023.

The use of the allocated funds in 2023 was 1% lower than in 2022, i.e. 99%. The under-implementation is mainly due to the maternity leave of a civil servant for whom we were unable to find a suitable replacement and a new recruitment only at the end of the year. Within the available budget, transfers were made during the year according to the urgency of the commitments.

Comparison of resources spent at the Agency from 2017 to 2023

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
INTEGRAL RESOURCES							
Wages and salaries	575,233	625,920	692,304	740,968	775,830.05	826,413.32	901,597.83
Material costs	208,000	269,996	275,863	243,289	219,724.43	247,169.39	277,588.49
Investments	49,013	45,497	99,125	82,321	82,134.82	89,166.75	92,265.39
Remuneration for the work of the members of the Council and the Appeal Committee	32,565	36,979	31,849	35,997.08	38,299.73	34,151.37	45,897.99
Accreditations costs	251,192	121,234	169,939	218,997	328,119.63	304,841.56	237,247.79
Material costs – visibility			54,479	41,580	61,401.24	52,775.82	122,469.04
CF – compensation funds		3,961					
1+2+3+4+5+6+7	1,116,003	1,103,587	1,323,558	1,363,152	1,505,509.90	1,554,518.21	1,677,066.53
EIQAS	4,247						
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	1,120,250	1,103,587	1,323,558	1,363,152	1,505,509.90	1,554,518.21	1,677,066.53
1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8							

VIII. HUMAN RESOURCES

In 2023, the Agency continued to be organised in three departments: the Analytics and Information Technology Department, the Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department, and the General Affairs Department.

The number of employees changed by two civil servants in 2023 compared to 2022, in line with the personnel plan. According to the adopted personnel plan, the Agency had 22 employees at the end of the year: a Director, 6 employees in the Analytics and Information Technology Department, 9 employees in the Quality Assurance and International Cooperation Department, and 6 employees in the General Affairs Department.

In accordance with the Decree on the promotion of public employees to salary grades, annual procedures were carried out to assess and verify eligibility for promotion to higher grades.

The employee training plan for 2023 has been fully implemented. In addition to short, thematic training courses for all employees, the Agency funded doctoral studies for three employees. It will use their newly acquired knowledge to upgrade and improve the Agency's areas of work.

IX. CONCLUSION

In concluding the 2023 report, we highlight our Agency's commitment and performance in achieving the objectives set out in the Action Plan. We are proud of the achievements that have been made possible through thorough self-evaluation and the implementation of accreditation and evaluation procedures for higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges. We would like to highlight the excellent report of the ENQA panel of experts recognising the progress in our operations, which contributed to the renewal of our membership of ENQA and EQAR. By carefully implementing accreditation and evaluation procedures, monitoring changes in legislation, carrying out various types of analysis and organising events such as conferences and seminars, we have strengthened not only the national but also the international reputation of our Agency.

The Agency remains firmly committed to the continuous improvement and quality enhancement of the higher education area and to cooperation at international level, where we have actively contributed to various initiatives and working groups. We believe that we have laid a solid foundation for further work for the benefit of higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and students, opening up new opportunities for quality higher education in the future.