

# GUIDELINES FOR DISTANCE EVALUATION



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Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije  
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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education

## **GUIDELINES FOR DISTANCE EVALUATION**

### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The declaration of state of emergency over COVID-19 has affected the operation of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency (SQAA) and its accreditation and evaluation procedures. Due to the pandemic outbreak all site visits of expert groups at higher education institutions and vocational colleges have been cancelled. In order to resume its work, the SQAA prepared the guidelines for distance evaluations. This document follows ENQA recommendations and is aligned with the yearly plan of sample evaluations of study programmes and external evaluations of vocational colleges. SQAA should therefore resume its work in a different manner. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist all stakeholders (agency employees, expert groups, institutions and colleges) in planning, organizing and conducting evaluations and for preparing reports.

These guidelines can also be used in other SQAA's procedures.

### GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING A DISTANCE EVALUATION

In individual cases the evaluation of a higher education institution/vocational college can be conducted exclusively at a distance with the use of online tools (for example, the Zoom platform). In 2020, test evaluations should be conducted in the evaluation procedures of study programmes and vocational colleges, where the primary task of SQAA is to consult institutions and colleges, and in other cases.

In order to conduct a distance evaluation, the agency provides a virtual conferencing platform.

### **PRIOR TO THE EVALUTION**

The planning of distance evaluation requires mainly the following:

1. In order to participate in evaluation discussions, the expert group, the institution/college and all participants are required to provide themselves with functioning equipment (microphone, camera) and a good internet connection. Use of headphones and a headset microphone is recommended.
2. Prior to the actual evaluation the coordinators at the institutions/colleges examine the preparedness and skills of all participants involved in discussions for the distance evaluation at institutions/colleges. 5 days prior to the evaluation the agency employee and the coordinator test the online platform (e.g., Zoom). Several potential participants should participate in a test meeting. In this meeting the agency employee presents the course and dynamics of the distant evaluation to the representatives of the institutions/colleges. The purpose of the test meeting is mainly to check the operation of online platforms and discuss the issues related to the technical part of the evaluation and to prepare the participants for it.
3. In case of technical issues with the online platform Zoom an alternative online platform (Google Meets or Skype) should be verified and provided. All the participants should be informed about this prior to the actual evaluation.

4. Schedule preparation: Considering the dynamics and the way a distance evaluation is conducted, careful and prudent planning is needed. The discussion with each group is expected to last about 90 minutes, followed by a 25-minute break in order to summarize the findings and prepare for the next discussion. Between the first and the second day of the evaluation one day should be dedicated to the review of the additional documentation, available databases, fact-checking, updating of the draft report and preparation for the final day of the evaluation. Up to 8 interlocutors can participate in each discussion. A discussion should be held with all relevant stakeholders in order to evaluate the compliance with the quality standards and provisions of assessment. The chair of the group agrees with the agency employee on the agenda. The initial and final discussions are to be held with the management of the institution/college.

5. In order to agree on the content and solve any technical issues the agency employee organizes a preparatory meeting with the expert group at least a week prior to the evaluation.

6. Before the evaluation the expert group prepares a comprehensive draft report based on documentation and discusses the remaining issues. The group can prepare a list of additional documentation which the institution/college provide on the first day of the evaluation. Together with the agency employee of the agency the group revises the draft report, questions and potential additional documentation.

For the technical part cameras and microphones of all participants need to be tested as well as the functioning of an alternative online platform.

## **DURING THE EVALUATION**

1. Slovenian experts gather together with two agency employees at the agency's meeting room. One employee is responsible for the procedure and the other for providing technical support. If attendance is not possible due to health or other reasons, they should meet online via video conference. During the entire evaluation the foreign expert participate via video conference.

2. In order to ensure smooth notification and prompt response (in case of technical difficulties or non-attendance for exceptional circumstances) the agency employee and the coordinator at the institution/college maintain contact by phone if needed.

3. A moderator is selected; this is the chair of the experts' group or a person temporary selected by the chair. The moderator allocates and monitors time, assigns the floor to the individual participant and ensures compliance with the principles of professional and respectful communication.

4. Every participant is required to join the meeting 5 minutes prior to its beginning. Use of Zoom's waiting room is recommended to enable the participants to join the meeting in order and according to schedule. The expert group and the agency employee are present in the online conference room throughout the conversations. Participants involved in discussions join them individually. For the purpose of discussions participants should use full and proper names as their user names.

5. All participants in the conversation follow the rules of respectful conduct and online communication (raising hand before speaking, turning off the microphone when not speaking, being tolerant and respectful in communication). All participants as well as the members of the expert group are required to have their cameras on throughout the discussion.

6. Assessment of material conditions: according to instructions of the agency employee and the expert group, the higher education institution records a video of premises used for delivery of the study programme, premises of the whole institution/school (laboratory, library, the premises for students and equipment for delivery of the study programme) when assessing material conditions. The video should be 5-10 minutes long. During the distance evaluation in the presence of the representative of institution/school the expert group reviews the video and resolves the open questions. The whole or part of the expert group can physically visit the premises if necessary. The visit of the premises and equipment is conducted for the study programmes and institutions/schools which operate in areas 05,06,07,08 and 09 according to Klasius-P-16 classification.

7. On the final day of the evaluation the discussions are held only in the morning. The afternoon is intended for finalizing the joint report. It is recommended that the Google Docs application is used for drafting and updating the report.

## SCHEDULE IN THE PROCEDURE OF SAMPLE EVALUATION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME: THE FIRST DAY

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Hour</b>	<b>Attendees</b>
Preliminary meeting of the expert group/ contact with institutional management and review of potential difficulties	The expert group	7.40–8.00	
A short virtual visit of the premises and equipment at institution/in relation to the study programme evaluation	Representatives of institution (management, coordinator)	8.00–8.25	
Participants of the first discussion join the meeting		8.25	
<b>Discussion with higher education teachers</b>	Discussion with higher education teachers (employed and contracted - all titles + faculty assistants)	8.30–10.00	
Break		10.00–10.25	
Participants of the second discussion join the meeting		10.25	
<b>Discussion with students and graduates</b>	Discussion with students of all grades + graduates	10.30–12.00	
Lunch break		12.00–13.25	
Participants of the third discussion join the meeting		13.25	
<b>Discussion with the evaluation group</b>	Discussion with the evaluation group+ head of the study programme	13.30–15.00	
Break		15.00–15.25	
Participants of the fourth discussion join the meeting		15.25	
<b>Discussion with representatives of the external environment</b>	Discussion with representatives of external environment, mentors of practical training	15.30–17.00	
Final meeting of the group and preparation for the second evaluation day		17.00–17.30	

\* When looking and choosing the participants (students) which are not student representatives the institution/school should cooperate with the student council.

## THE SECOND OR INTERIM DAY

A day after the first evaluation day the expert group reviews available databases, minutes of the institutional/school bodies, diploma theses, project assignments, requested documentation (reports, decisions, financial records etc.). In addition, the expert group prepares concluding remarks, designs thematic questions for the second evaluation day and supplements a draft report.

## THE THIRD EVALUATION DAY or THE SECOND EVALUATION DAY\*

Meeting	Participants	Hour	Attendees
Preliminary meeting of the expert group	The expert group	8.00–8.25	
Participants of the fifth discussion join the meeting		8.25	
<b>Discussion with the specialist services</b>	Discussion with the representatives of support services	8.30–10.00	
Break		10.00–10.25	
Participants of the sixth discussion join the meeting		10.25	
<b>Discussion with the institutional management, the heads of programmes</b>	Discussion with the institutional management +if needed also the heads of departments, chair of the evaluation group...	10.30–12.00	
Lunch break		12.00–13.25	
<b>Drafting a joint report</b>		13.30–15.30	
The final presentation to representatives of higher education institution		15.30–16.30	

\*Upon the expert group decision, a site visit of particular premises and equipment might be needed and scheduled for the second evaluation day. It is conducted to a minor extent (the agency employee and the chair of the group) whereby instructions and recommendations to prevent spread of infection are considered. After the evaluation the expert group continues with video call discussions (in a safe location of institution or in the agency premises).

## RECOMMENDATION TO EXPERTS AFTER THE EVALUATION

It is recommended that after a evaluation the expert group gathers once again (on the same or the following day while impressions are still fresh) and completes the content part of the evaluation report. The expert group has enough time for editing style of the report until the submission deadline.

## SCHEDULE IN THE PROCEDURE OF THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGE: THE FIRST DAY

Meeting	Participants	Hour	Attendees
Preliminary meeting of the expert group/ contact with institutional management and review of potential difficulties	The expert group	7.40–8.00	
<b>A short virtual visit of premises and equipment at higher vocational college</b>	School representatives (management, coordinator)	8.00–8.25	
Participants of the first discussion join the meeting		8.25	
<b>Discussion with the management of higher vocational college/college bodies</b>	Director of institution/company owning the school, school director, chair of the council of the institution, chair of the strategic council, chair of the quality committee, chair of the student committee	8.30–10.00	
Break		10.00–10.25	
Participants of the second discussion join the meeting		10.25	
<b>Discussion with the council of lecturers</b>	Discussion with lecturers/assistants (instructors and laboratory assistants)- all programmes/ employed and contracted teachers and assistants	10.30–12.00	
Lunch break		12.00–13.25	
Participants of third discussion join the meeting		13.25	
<b>Discussion with students and graduates</b>	Representatives of all programmes- full and part time students, including representatives of college bodies	13.30–15.00	

Break		15.00–15.25	
Participants of fourth discussion join the meeting		15.25	
<b>Discussion with representatives of the external environment</b>	Discussion with representatives of mentors and employers + organizers of practical training at college	15.30–17.00	
Final meeting of the group and preparation for the second evaluation day		17.00–17.30	

\* When looking and choosing the participants (students) which are not student representatives the institution/school should cooperate with the student council.

### THE SECOND OR INTERIM DAY

A day after the first evaluation day the expert group reviews available databases, records of the institutional/school bodies, diploma thesis, project assignments, requested documentation (reports, decisions, financial records etc.). In addition, the expert committee prepares concluding remarks, designs thematic questions for the second evaluation day and completes a draft report.

### THE THIRD DAY OR THE SECOND EVALUATION DAY\*

Meeting	Participants	Hour	Attendees
Initial meeting of the expert group	The expert group	8.00–8.25	
Participants of fifth discussion join the meeting		8.25	
<b>Discussion with support staff</b>	Student affairs office, accounting services, IT maintenance services, representatives of other support services	8.30–10.00	
Break		10.00–10.25	
Participants of fourth discussion join the meeting		10.25	
<b>Discussion with members of the quality committee</b>	All members of the quality committee (7), including student representatives	10.30–12.00	

Lunch break		12.00–13.25	
<b>Drafting a final report</b>		13.30–15.30	
Final presentation to school representatives		15.30–16.30	

\*Upon the expert group decision, a site evaluation of particular premises and equipment might be needed and scheduled for the second evaluation day. It is conducted to a minor extent (the agency employee and the chair of the group) whereby instructions and recommendations to prevent spread of infection are considered. After the evaluation the expert group continues with video call discussions (in a safe location of institution or in the agency premises).

#### RECOMMENDATION TO EXPERTS AFTER THE EVALUATION

It is recommended that after the evaluation the expert group gathers once again (on the same or the following day while the impressions are still fresh) and completes the content part of the evaluation report. The expert group has enough time for editing the style of report until the submission deadline.