

Guidelines for Distant Evaluation.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG or ESG Standards	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
MIZŠ	Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Republic of Slovenia
NAKVIS or Agency	Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
ZViS	Higher Education Act



ABOUT THE AGENCY

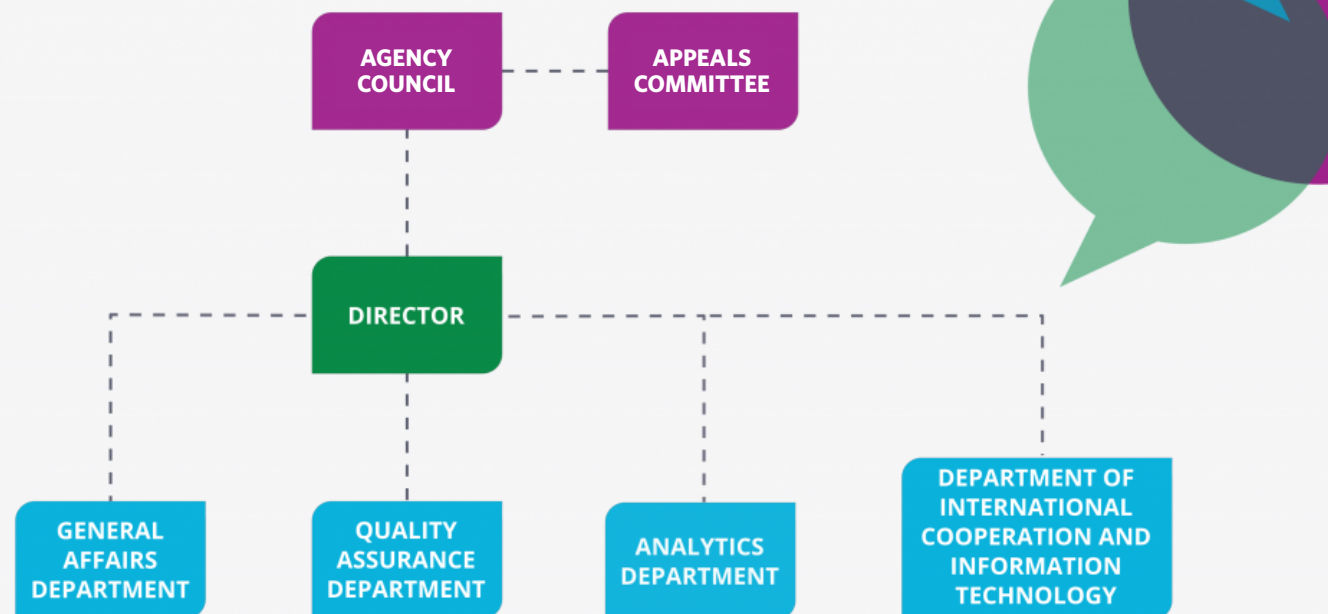
Since quality higher education is the foundation of every modern society, the signatories of the Bologna Declaration committed themselves in the 1990s to make their efforts to improve and ensure the quality of higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and study programmes their ongoing task. We are talking about the European dimension of the quality assurance system in higher and higher vocational education, which means: self-evaluation and accreditation or external evaluation of higher education institutions, their study programmes and higher vocational colleges with a mandatory visit of a group of independent experts to assess compliance with the prescribed quality standards. External evaluations and accreditations are the responsibility of independent institutions (agencies).

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Agency) started operating in 2010, when it assumed the tasks previously carried out by the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education (hereinafter: the Council for Higher Education). Accreditations in higher and higher vocational education, of which an independent external quality assessment is a mandatory part, have been, namely, performed in Slovenia in one form or another since 1994.

The establishment of the Agency was a decisive step towards recognising and understanding the importance of independent quality assessment in higher and higher vocational education and deciding on accreditations and opinions on the achievement of quality standards. After a few years of good work, it has established itself well in the international arena and achieved full international recognition by being registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in 2013 and joining the European Association of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education – ENQA in 2015. External assessment of the quality of higher and higher vocational education has constantly evolved and partly changed, both in Slovenia and internationally. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG as well as the Higher Education Act have been amended; especially important amendment to the latter is the ZViS-K adopted at the end of 2016, which increases the autonomy of higher education institutions in assessing the quality of study programmes, as it eliminates their reaccreditation, which was within the competence of the Agency. On the other hand, it emphasises the development and consulting work of the Agency, which is also made possible by the evaluations of samples of study programmes focused on such work.

From 2017 to 2021, the Agency focused on improving professional and development work, strengthening the culture of quality, its own independence and authority, renewal of regulations, computerisation and reorganisation. In cooperation with external stakeholders, it adopted new criteria and various regulations, taking into account both new laws and revised European standards. A thorough revision of the Accreditation Criteria in 2017 was followed by amendments in 2019, 2020 and 2021. During this period, the Agency also revised the Criteria for External Evaluation of Higher Vocational Colleges, the Criteria for Agency Experts, the Criteria for Transferring Between Study Programmes and the Criteria for the Allocation of Credits to Study Programmes. In order to adapt to the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in the spring of 2020, it also adjusted the Minimum Standards for Appointment to Titles of Higher Education Teachers, Scientific Staff and Higher Education Staff at Higher Education Institutions for a limited period. It supported the changes to the regulations through training, consultations, interpretation of accreditation criteria and guidelines for assessment according to quality standards, revision of the Quality Manual, guidelines for distance evaluation and recommendations for work in emergency situations during the pandemic. The Agency also established information system and reorganised its work.

ORGANISATION CHART



The Agency's departments perform all tasks in the basic areas of its 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 Appeals Committee. One of the basic activities is constant international cooperation with related agencies and associations of agencies, as well as development and consulting work. Detailed overview of tasks related to the external quality assessment of higher and higher vocational education by departments:

QUALITY ASSURANCE DEPARTMENT

- criteria and other provisions from the field of quality;
- accreditations and evaluations;
- modifications of study programmes;
- cooperation with stakeholders (institutions/colleges, experts);
- keeping and updating records (on accreditations, evaluations, modifications, transnational higher education ...);
- archiving applications and other documents.

ANALYTICS DEPARTMENT

- plans and reports (annual work and financial plan and report on the work and operation 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);
- establishment of databases;
- translation.

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- international cooperation;
- organisation of annual international conference;
-

The **AGENCY COUNCIL** is the highest decision-making body. Its composition enables decision-making independent of the politics and ensures the participation of all important 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 implementation of study programmes.

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 determined by the criteria:

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 PROFESSIONAL COLLEGE
1. Operation of the higher education institution 2. Human resources 3. Material conditions	1. Operation of the higher education institution or higher vocational college 2. Human resources 3. Students 4. Material conditions 5. Internal quality assurance and improvement, modification, updating and implementation 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 2. Study programme	

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE AGENCY'S WORK IN 2020

In 2020, the Agency completed all important tasks from the action or work plan for the year, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which completely changed the working conditions; in some cases, the Government even temporarily suspended accreditation and evaluation procedures. In addition to the planned tasks, it had to perform a number of others to adapt all or part of its activities to the situation. It had to examine the changed way of working of the Agency Council and the Appeals Committee (videoconference sessions), the method of implementing procedures (what

In 2020, 37 visits took place in procedures of reaccreditation of higher education institutions, transformations of higher education institutions, accreditation of study programmes and sample evaluation of study programmes (35 in 2019).

The Agency examined and recorded 400 modifications of study programmes (656 in 2019).

Higher vocational education

- site visits: 13 in 2019, 4 in 2020;
- opinions on the achievement of standards prescribed by the law: 15 in 2019, 8 in 2020.

In 2020, the Agency carried out more procedures or reaccreditation of higher education institutions than in 2019; these procedures are the most complex and often include two site visits.

In 2020, the Agency Council did not grant accreditation to one higher education institution, one study programme and one transformation of a higher education institution. One decision is still not final. The number of negative decisions in 2020 is therefore the same as in 2019.

The Council determined that the sample of study programmes for external evaluation in 2021 will contain programmes in the field of teacher training, and coordinated its decision with higher education institutions.

NUMBER OF ACCREDITED STUDY PROGRAMMES ACCORDING TO KLASIUS-P-16 – COMPARISON BETWEEN 2019 AND 2020		
2019		
ISCED-F 2013 / KLASIUS-P-16	No. of accredited programmes	% of accredited programmes
(01) Education	1	3
(02) Arts and humanities	4	14
(03) Social sciences, journalism and information	2	7
(04) Business, administration and law	3	10
(05) Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	0	0
(06) Information and communication technologies (ICTs)	3	10
(07) Engineering, manufacturing and construction	0	0
(08) Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	0	0
(09) Health and welfare	12	41
(10) Services	0	0
Interdisciplinary	4	14
Total	29	

In the autumn of 2020, the Agency management formulated strategic objectives until 2025. These were the basis for the document: Strategic Development of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education for the 2021–2025 Period (strategy). The Agency Council adopted it at the December session in 2020. The strategic goals for the new period are focused primarily on the adoption or enforcement of an independent Agency act – the act on quality assurance in higher education, the improvement of quality assessment, further development of the information system, as well as sustainable development. The full text of the Strategy is published in the next

The analytical work of the Agency in 2020 was focused on a thorough review of contents and analysis of the final reports of groups of experts for the accreditation and evaluation of study programmes and reaccreditation of higher education institutions. The Agency determined whether the quality standards prescribed for an individual type of accreditation or evaluation were properly assessed, especially in terms of in-depth content, in accordance with all the provisions of the criteria. The result was an extensive analysis of the characteristics of assessments, deviations from high-quality assessment or analysis according to quality standards with the presentation of inadequate or deficient assessments and findings of experts; the results were used in the draft guide to external assessments.

The consultations also covered topics such as the issue of blind and partially sighted students and students with disabilities in higher education, or the Slovenian higher education area – on the way to excellence. The anniversary consultations, the symposium on the occasion of the second and the conference on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Agency also featured a reflection on the operation of the Agency and a discussion on its future. The Agency exchanged views, experiences and open issues with participants at each consultation. In 2018 and 2019, it organised two consultations for commissions for quality at higher education institutions and individuals involved in self-evaluation at

The new Criteria were created on the basis of the old Accreditation Criteria from 2004 and the Evaluation Criteria from 2006, as they enabled the assessment of all important areas of a higher education institution, study programme and higher vocational college, also taking into account the ESG. The first Agency criteria entitled Criteria for the Accreditation and External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes were adopted in November 2010 and entered into force in early December 2010. In June 2014, the Agency Council adopted new criteria with the same title, which was repeated in 2017 – therefore the

NUMBER OF EVALUATIONS BY YEAR, SITUATION ON 31 DECEMBER 2019

When the Agency was established, there were four universities and 38 independent higher education institutions. While two universities were formed over a 10-year period, which now makes six in total, the number of independent higher education institutions fluctuated considerably, also due to the fact that they later merged into two universities. Six universities and 40 independent higher education institutions are accredited in 2020.

With five thematic analyses, the Agency focused on selected topics, including the characteristics of decision-making practices of the Council and the Appeals Committee, quality of staff in Slovenian higher education, and the opinion of stakeholders on the work and reputation of the Agency, its contribution to quality, as well as on the concept of quality and quality-related expectations among different groups of stakeholders and their views on the strategic orientations of the Agency. One of the thematic analyses addresses the transition from minimum standards to excellence. The analytical work of the Agency is developing towards more quantitative and statistically supported research. It is based on the publicly available methodology and procedure for the preparation and dissemination of analyses. In the future, the Agency intends

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE 2021-2025 PERIOD

I. INTRODUCTION

The period in which the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) has set medium-term strategic goals from 2017

It has updated and published the methodology and procedure for the production and dissemination of systems and thematic analyses.

In order to improve self-evaluation and its work, the Agency has also amended its *Quality Manual, Rules of Procedure of the Agency Council* and other internal acts. It also responded quickly to the COVID-19 epidemic by adapting accreditations and evaluations to the situation. It has developed guidelines for distance site visits and published recommendations during the COVID-19 related emergency.

A database on spatial capacities and equipment of higher education institutions will also be established. These bases can be of great help to experts and the Agency Council in assessing the quality of higher education institutions and study programmes. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, a database on the employability of students by higher education institutions and study programmes is also planned, taking into account the cycle, type or nature of the latter.

The Agency will provide access to a variety of data to the general public, especially students and prospective students.

Therefore the Agency will prepare web content following the example of presentation films, which provide in an accessible and popular way information on the operation of the Agency, higher education institutions and the structure of the Slovenian higher education area while guiding visitors towards important contents (e.g. reports of groups of experts) more inherently related to the basic activity of the Agency, i.e. the assessment of the quality of higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges and study programmes. In the coming years, the Agency's website will become the most important information point for students and future students, gathering all information relevant to them and links to other websites in one place. In order to popularise the website, the Agency will further strengthen its cooperation with higher education institutions, higher vocational colleges, secondary school and university student associations, while increasing its presence on social networks.

The achievement of this goal is in accordance with the value of the Agency that commits it to transparency.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the expiring strategic period, the Agency has established a foundation or orientation for further development in 2021 to 2025. Although it concerns different areas of its operation, the biggest challenge among the strategic goals it has set is to improve the assessment of quality standards in accreditations and evaluations. This will help to make meaningful the role played by the Agency under the ZViS, i.e. to provide higher education institutions and higher vocational colleges a professionally substantiated, realistic, true insight into their activity, help them in its development, and strengthen the Agency's reputation as an indispensable partner in improving the quality of higher and higher vocational education. It will also improve and facilitate the decisions of the Agency Council and Appeals Committee.

An independent act on the Agency – the act on quality assurance in higher education – will play an important role in achieving strategic goals. The Agency will strive to enable even more in-depth professional assessment of quality standards and decision-making of the Agency Council by introducing special commissions by fields of study, reorganising appeal procedures and enabling the work of its staff abroad. It will work to harmonise the quality assurance act with all relevant higher education stakeholders, and, moreover, make them identify it as a necessary step to improve as well as facilitate work in the field of quality assurance in higher and higher vocational education.

The text »Strategic development of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education from 2021 to 2025« (Strategy) was written by Tatjana Debevec, Analytics Department. The Strategy was discussed in detail by the Agency's Council at its 156th session on 19 November 2020 and adopted at its 157th session on 17 December 2020.

BACKGROUND FOR WRITING GUIDELINES

In this article we present the proposal of the first CEENQA document: **Guidelines for distance evaluation.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an enormous wave of change in the higher education area worldwide. Despite various new technologies and technological advancements, teaching and learning was mostly still a face-to-face process. However, in 2020, this changed for all stakeholders in the higher

The second appendix presents an example of a schedule that can be modified to serve the specifics of a certain procedure. We emphasise the importance of longer breaks between sessions to allow the experts some additional rest as well as to guarantee a sufficient amount of time to exchange the gathered information, make assessments, ask any follow-up questions, and provide conclusions.

At the end of the introduction of these CEENQA guidelines, we will try to look into the future. Which novelties will we keep and how will we return to pre-COVID-19 times? What will the inevitable hybrid system look like and where

Instead of traditional one-day training sessions, several shorter sessions with further independent and group-work are possible. The experience show that such format is more efficient, but requires clear goal, focus and structure and clear communication concerning expectations on the preparatory work.

Appendix 2

Sample schedule in the procedure of evaluation of a study programme (two-day site visit): day one

NEW ROLE AND PARADOXES OF QUALITY IN THE NATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR HIGHER EDUCATION 2021-2030

I present this paper in the role of a member of the group of experts that, in a complex process lasting more than a year, drafted the new Slovenian National Programme for Higher Education (NPVŠ), which will be valid until 2030. At the time of writing, the document is in the final steps of approval at the highest levels (the Council for Higher Education; it will be later adopted by the National

Finally, in my opinion, the work of the group should be organised so that the days/week of interviews would be immediately followed by the group effort of drafting the report. To be more specific, in spite of how extremely mentally demanding the interviews may be (especially when conducted online, remotely), all the information and impressions are still fresh immediately afterwards. Due to the experienced strain, the majority of the group of experts seem to vanish into thin air for at least a few days and usually several weeks immediately after the evaluation visit. The freshness of memory fades and I believe that if we had all known that a week of interviews would be followed by a day of writing the report together, the latter would have been better, more homogeneous



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za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

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