

SALEIE – Policy in Higher Education

A Study Case – Slovenia

CRITERIA FOR THE ACCREDITATION AND EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND STUDY PROGRAMMES

The below text is based on legal acts of Slovenia as well as documents of Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (SQAA)

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1 Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (SQAA)

The Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (Agency) is a public body established by the Republic of Slovenia to assure quality in higher education and to carry out development and consulting activities in this field. The Agency took over the tasks of the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia and started operations on 5 March 2010. SQAA encourages the quality of higher education

Mission

The Agency provides for development and operation of the quality assurance system in the Slovenian higher education area. It operates responsibly, both formally and contextually, and counsels all stakeholders and participants in tertiary education in line with European and global development trends.

Vision

The Agency shall, with its system of quality assurance development, contribute to higher education in Slovenia being of high quality in terms of education and research, internationally recognisable, competitive and equally integrated in the global higher education area.

Values:

- independence,
- responsibility,
- being public and transparent,
- professionalism,
- efficiency,
- commitment to progress.

Strategic objectives:

- development and functioning of the quality assurance system;
- monitoring of progress and strengthening of higher education quality culture;
- presenting the role, importance and quality of operation of the Agency in the public for better recognition;
- co-creating and developing higher education policy in the field of quality;
- promoting the quality of transnational education;
- admission of the Agency to international associations (ENQA and EQAR);
- providing high quality consulting services of the Agency by professionally qualified personnel.

1.1 GENERAL PROVISIONS

According to these Criteria, the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter the Agency), shall assess compliance with the conditions for the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes. They comply with the quality assurance standards and guidelines that apply in the European Higher Education Area.

The main duties of the Agency shall be to establish whether higher education institutions observe the provisions of the legislation from the field of higher education, these Criteria and other regulations of the Agency, and to assess the quality system of higher education institutions.

The objective of the Agency shall be regular cooperation with stakeholders in higher education, counselling in the establishment of quality assurance systems of higher education institutions and continuous promotion of quality in higher education.

The Agency) shall apply these Criteria to perform its duties consistent with:

- the act regulating the field of higher education,
- the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ENQA; hereinafter the European standards),
- the General Administrative Procedure Act,
- the act regulating professional and academic titles,
- the act regulating research and development activity,

and with:

- the Criteria for the Allocation of Credits to Study Programmes under the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System,
- the Criteria for Transferring Between Study Programmes,
- the Minimum Standards for the Election to the Title of Higher Education Teacher, Researcher and Faculty Assistant at Higher Education Institutions,
- the Criteria for Entry in the Register of Experts,
- the Criteria for the Accreditation of Study Programmes for Teacher Education.

In the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes, the Agency:

- shall adopt decisions autonomously and independently, with the consistent use of the Criteria;
- shall guarantee objectivity in the assessment of all higher education institutions and study programmes;
- shall prescribe the structure of reports to be prepared by groups of experts from which the strengths and possible non-compliances in the operation of a higher education institution are evident, and in particular which list recommendations for remedying any weaknesses;
- shall regard the self-evaluation reports of higher education institutions as the basis for external evaluation for the purpose of re-accreditation;
- shall maintain constant cooperation with quality assurance agencies of other Member States and their experts, and follow European guidelines and standards in this field;
- shall publish its decisions, annual reports and analyses;
- shall maintain publicly available records of accredited higher education institutions and study programmes.

The Agency shall decide on the:

- accreditations of higher education institutions;
- accreditations of study programmes: first-, second, third-cycle, joint study programmes and supplementary study programmes;
- transformation of higher education institutions;
- changes of compulsory components of study programmes of private higher education institutions.

Accreditations in higher education are as follows:

- initial accreditation of a higher education institution or study programme;
- re-accreditation of a higher education institution or study programme;

An initial accreditation and each re-accreditation shall have a maximum validity of seven years.

A condition for the re-accreditation is the external evaluation of the higher education institution or study programme, to be carried out before the expiry of accreditation validity.

The external evaluation may be carried out also in the form of extraordinary evaluation any time during the accreditation validity.

2 INITIAL ACCREDITATION

Higher education institutions shall be assessed by the following areas:

1. integration with the environment,
2. functioning of the higher education institution,
3. human resources,
4. students,
5. material conditions,
6. quality assurance, innovation and development orientation.

Study programmes shall be assessed mainly according to:

7. composition and contents.

Other areas of assessment of a study programme shall be identical to those referred to in the first paragraph, except that only individual criteria specified in Chapter 2.2.4 shall be taken into account in relation with some areas.

2.1 Initial accreditation of a higher education institution

2.1.1 Integration with the environment

1. The founder demonstrates cooperation with business and non-business sector in the fields of study, science and research, and arts, for which the higher education institution is being established, and plans the enrolment of students accordingly.
2. Employment opportunities for graduates based on professional analyses, the Employment Service, relevant chambers, associations, etc. have been established.

2.1.2 Functioning of the higher education institution

1. The mission and vision are defined and clearly show educational, scientific-research or artistic and professional objectives.
2. The strategy of the higher education institution contains a plan and methods for the realisation of the set objectives.
3. The plan of internal organisation of the higher education institution, which must be consistent to ensure successful performance of the institution, clearly shows the defined responsibilities, tasks and duties of the management, all employees and students.
4. The fields for which the institution is being established or to which study programmes belong have been defined:
 - fields of study or artistic fields according to the ISCED and KLASIUS classifications,
 - academic disciplines under the Frascati classification.
5. Scientific-research or artistic and professional activity of the founder in the fields in which the institution will perform educational and research work has been demonstrated by means of research, scientific or artistic programmes and projects which are recognised by the relevant branch as such and are being implemented in the time of the assessment.
6. Educational contents based on the achieved and actual scientific-research or artistic and professional work of the lecturers have been specified.
7. Planning of the quality of learning outcomes and competences that mean that graduates will be employable or able to continue education.
8. Scientific-research or artistic and professional cooperation of the founder has been set up in the fields for which it is being established with other higher education institutions, institutes, companies or other organisations in Slovenia and abroad.
9. The founder has concluded agreements with companies or other organisations and mentors therein on practical training of the anticipated number of enrolled students, if this is an integral part of the study programme; higher vocational colleges must also have a plan for such training in place (professional practice).

2.1.3 Human resources

1. Adequate number and structure of the participating higher education teachers, researchers and associates who perform scientific-research or artistic and professional work in the fields in which study programmes are planned have been demonstrated by means of a staffing plan and evidences on the forms of their cooperation.
2. All higher education teachers and associates have been validly elected to titles or have evidence of being in the process of election.
3. The draft criteria for the election to titles of higher education teachers, researchers and associates observe the minimum standards of the Agency for the election to titles.
4. The number of higher education teachers and, if so provided by the statute, of researchers, is sufficient to form the senate of the higher education institution.
5. The rules for the election of senate members provide for equal representation of all study fields, scientific disciplines or artistic fields of the higher education institution.
6. The structure and number of support staff – i.e. professional, administrative and technical staff – ensure quality support for the provision of study programmes.
7. A person responsible for student affairs will be employed at the higher education institution.

2.1.4 Students

1. Counselling services related to enrolment and study information will be provided.
2. Direct involvement of students in professional, scientific-research or artistic work will be ensured.
3. Suitable student organisation and their participation in management bodies will be provided.

2.1.5 Material conditions

1. Premises and equipment that are suitable for the provision of planned study programmes and other related activities of the institution corresponding to the envisaged number of enrolled students have been ensured.
2. Premises are suitable (adapted) for students with special needs.
3. Proofs of the ownership or tenancy of premises and equipment at a location allowing for undisturbed provision of study programmes and the scientific-research or artistic and professional activities of the higher education institution have been enclosed.
4. An estimate of financial resources necessary for the founding and operation of the higher education institution has been prepared and the envisaged sources of financing have been provided; funds have been guaranteed for all study programmes which the institution intends to implement at least for the accreditation period.
5. The founder has up-to-date information and communication and other equipment necessary for the provision of planned study programmes and scientific-research or artistic and professional activity.
6. The library of the higher education institution provides appropriate librarian information services in the fields of the planned study programmes and the scientific-research or artistic and professional fields the institution develops; study materials and electronic databases comply with the contents and cycles of study programmes.

2.1.6 Quality assurance

1. The founder of the higher education institution has a plan in place establishing the internal quality assurance system of the higher education institution, which observes these Criteria and European standards:
 - through regular collection and analysis of data on the learning outcomes of students and overall education and other related activities;
 - through inclusion of all staff, students and other stakeholders in assessing the quality of performance;
 - through identification of weaknesses in the implementation of activities and deviations from planned activities and achievements;
 - through regular informing of students and other stakeholders regarding the measures to improve quality;
 - through the planning of periodic self-evaluations.
2. The quality manual clearly specifies the self-evaluation procedures enabling regular monitoring and improvement of quality, competitiveness and efficiency of scientific-research, artistic and professional work. It also specifies the stakeholders who will participate in this process and their role.

2.2 Initial accreditation of a study programme

2.2.1 Composition and contents of first- and second-cycle study programmes

1. The study programme has been designed in accordance with legal requirements so as to correspond in terms of form and contents to the fields of study and academic or artistic disciplines for which the institution was founded.
2. The study programme is professionally sound and consistent, modern in contents and congruent with the defined objectives, expected learning outcomes of students and competences of graduates.
3. The study programme contains general data such as:
 - a recognisable and characteristic name, which must correspond to the classification of the field of study as per the ISCED and KLASIUS classifications and of the academic discipline as per the Frascati classification or the artistic field; in the case of interdisciplinary study programmes, fields of study have been classified in descending order of extent;
 - cycle, type and duration of the programme;
 - branch of study or modules.
4. The fundamental objectives and learning outcomes of the programme are congruent with its contents and level; general and course-specific competences must be defined separately for each study programme.
5. The study programme is internationally comparable; comparison is carried out with at least three related foreign programmes from different countries, of which at least two are EU Member States; the programmes have been appropriately accredited or recognised in the countries where they are provided; comparability is demonstrated through learning outcomes or competences, the form and contents of the programme, the duration of studies and opportunities for international cooperation; the comparison also describes and justifies differences between the proposed programme and related programmes.
6. The higher education institution must demonstrate the conformity of study programmes leading to qualifications for regulated professions with relevant European Union legislation.
7. The curriculum corresponds to the objectives of the programme and leads to the acquisition of the defined learning outcomes and competences.
8. Study requirements have been evaluated according to the Criteria for the Allocation of Credits to Study Programmes under the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (hereinafter ECTS), the percentage of elective components in the programme has been defined and syllabuses have been enclosed.
9. The following has been defined:
 - number, name, type and share of learning units (courses, branches of study, modules, etc.),
 - ratio of lectures, seminars, exercises, other forms of contact hours and individual work by the student,
 - share of practical training in the programme and the manner of its provision,
 - vertical and horizontal connection of the courses of the programme,
 - the allocation of credits to the overall programme and individual learning units, annual and total number of hours of student workload in the programme, annual and total number of organised group or contact hours in the programme (lectures, seminars,

- exercises and other modes of delivery) and independent work by the student in accordance with law and ECTS,
- syllabuses by individual learning units with indication of conditions for the start of work or completion of study requirements, a description of the contents of the unit, an indication of the basic bibliography and sources, a description of objectives and expected learning outcomes, methods of teaching and learning, and methods of testing and assessing of knowledge.
10. Admission requirements and selection criteria in the case of limited enrolment are in accordance with law.
 11. The higher education institution recognises knowledge, qualification or abilities that candidates have obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning which correspond in full or in part in terms of contents and difficulty to the general or course-specific competences defined by the individual study programme, as a successfully completed study requirement accredited under ECTS.
 12. The methods of assessment have been defined in such a way as to enable the appropriate verification of the achieved learning outcomes and competences and allow the student on-going study and effective monitoring of his or her progress.
 13. Conditions for advancement through the programme have been defined.
 14. Criteria for transferring between programmes are in accordance with higher education legislation, criteria for transferring between study programmes and the statute of the higher education institution.
 15. The methods and forms of the provision of the study are in accordance with the content area of the study programme.
 16. Conditions for completion of studies or individual parts of the programme, if contained by the programme, are in accordance with higher education legislation and the statute of the higher education institution.
 17. The professional title and its abbreviation are formed in accordance with the law governing professional and academic titles.
 18. Projects in the working environment or basic, applied or developmental research projects are a compulsory constituent element of second-cycle study programmes.

2.2.2 Third-cycle study programmes

1. Doctoral study programmes offer academically or artistically based mentorship and provide students with the following:
 - deeper understanding of theoretical and methodological concepts;
 - skills to independently develop new knowledge and solve the most challenging problems through testing and improving knowledge and the discovery of new solutions;
 - the ability to manage the most challenging work systems and scientific, research or artistic projects across a broad professional or scientific field.
2. Basic and applied research tasks are a mandatory component of third-cycle study programmes.
3. The academic title and its abbreviation have been formed in accordance with the law governing professional and academic titles.

For the doctoral study programme, the entire area of assessment referred to in Chapter 2.2.1, except for point 16 (in the part relating to the completion of individual parts of the programme if the programme has them) and point 18 shall be considered.

2.2.3 Supplementary study programmes

In supplementary study programmes the compulsory contents referred to in Chapter 2.2.1 shall be defined, except those from points 5, 6, 14, 16 and 17, which must be defined if so provided by the statute of the higher education institution.

2.2.4 Other areas of assessment

For the initial accreditation of study programmes, the areas of assessment specified for the initial accreditation of the higher education institution and listed under the first paragraph of Chapter 2 of shall be considered. The difference is that study programmes in some fields shall only be assessed according to individual criteria as follows:

1. integration with the environment (Chapter 2.1.1)
2. functioning of the higher education institution (Chapter 2.1.2: points 5 to 9);
3. human resources (Chapter 2.1.3: points 1 and 2);
4. students (Chapter 2.1.4: points 1 and 2);
5. material conditions (Chapter 2.1.5: points 1, 2, 5 and 6);
6. quality assurance, innovation and development orientation (Chapter 2.1.6).

The criteria referred to in the preceding paragraph shall be observed by the higher education institution and not by the founder as applicable for the initial accreditation of the institution.

2.2.5 Joint study programmes

Joint study programmes are study programmes leading to a qualification which a higher education institution adopts and provides together with one or several other higher education institutions from the Republic of Slovenia or another country.

For the accreditation of a joint study programme, the criteria for the initial accreditation of a study programme shall apply *mutatis mutandis*.

Additional criteria for the assessment of joint study programmes

1. A foreign higher education institution taking part in the provision of a joint study programme has been accredited or suitably recognised in the country in which it operates and has also commenced the procedure for the accreditation or recognition of the joint study programme in its own country.
2. The cooperation of higher education institutions in the provision of a joint study programme has been defined in accordance with these Criteria, in particular in connection with the fundamental objectives of the programme, the enrolment of students, the progression of studies, teaching languages, learning outcomes and the completion of education, and self-evaluation.
3. The shares of the study programme provided by higher education institutions from the Republic of Slovenia are relevant and have been justified in terms of contents and provision.

The provision of a joint study programme shall be defined by higher education institutions in a special agreement.

3 RE-ACCREDITATION

3.1.1 Re-accreditation

In the procedure for re-accreditation of a higher education institution or study programme, the assessment and evidence procedure shall be carried out by means of external evaluation and concluded with a decision on re-accreditation.

3.1.2 External evaluation

External evaluation is the process of complete assessment of the performance of a higher education institution or the provision of study programmes.

In particular, progress and development since the last accreditation in all areas of assessment shall be assessed, primarily the internal quality system of the higher education institution.

The basis to assess progress and development shall be the self-evaluation report of the higher education institution, which shows that the institution monitors its performance in all areas of assessment referred to in these Criteria.

3.1.3 Areas of assessment

The areas which are subject of assessment of quality of a higher education institution are the following:

1. integration with the environment;
2. functioning of the higher education institution;
3. human resources;
4. students;
5. material conditions;
6. quality assurance, innovation and development orientation.

Quality of study programmes shall be assessed mainly according to their:

- organisation and provision.

The basis to assess organisation and provision shall be an accredited study programme and all its changes since the last accreditation.

The areas of assessment of the study programme shall be identical to those referred to in the first paragraph of this Chapter. The difference is that study programmes in some fields shall only be assessed according to individual criteria as follows:

1. integration with the environment (Chapter 3.1.4)
2. functioning of the higher education institution (Chapter 3.1.5: points 4, 5, 7 to 10);
3. human resources (Chapter 3.1.6: points 1, 2, 4 and 7);
4. students (Chapter 3.1.7: points 1, 2, 4 to 6 and 9);

5. material conditions (Chapter 3.1.8: points 1 to 3);
6. quality assurance, innovation and development orientation (Chapter 3.1.9).

3.1.4 Integration with the environment

1. The higher education institution is associated with the development of the environment through constant cooperation of its human resources and students with it.
2. The higher education institution monitors employability and employment of its graduates.
3. The higher education institution monitors learning outcomes and acquired competences in order to give its students and graduates the possibility of inclusion in social processes and public life, in addition to employment and continued education.
4. The higher education institution adapts enrolment in study programmes to the needs for graduates of these programmes.

3.1.5 Functioning of the higher education institution

1. The higher education institution has a published mission and strategy of its functioning and development, which clearly show educational, scientific, research or artistic and professional objectives. The strategy is updated on the basis of self-evaluation findings.
2. The achievement of the set objectives is being documented.
3. The higher education institution is organised and functions in accordance with the law and its statute; the responsibilities, tasks and duties of the management, staff and students in the bodies of the institution have been clearly defined; co-determination of all stakeholders has been ensured.
4. Development or progress in the functioning of the institution in the fields for which it was established has been demonstrated:
 - through developed scientific-research or artistic or professional cooperation with other higher education institutions, institutes or other organisations;
 - through scientific-research or artistic and professional work within programmes and projects;
 - through suitably organised provision of these programmes and projects, and
 - publications of the achievements of this work in a manner to which the profession accords scientific, research, artistic or professional relevance.
5. International participation has been demonstrated:
 - in research projects (international programmes, bilateral or multilateral programmes and inter-university agreements, etc.) or
 - in thematic networks, intensive programmes and other projects promoting inclusion in the European Higher Education Area, or
 - in mobility programmes for students, higher education teachers and associates (bilateral or multilateral programmes and inter-university agreements, etc.) or
 - through the enrolment of foreign students at the higher education institution, etc.
6. Universities demonstrate the scientific, research, artistic or professional results of their work in the field of at least three academic disciplines, while faculties do so in the field of at least one academic discipline.
7. The inclusion of findings from scientific-research or artistic and professional work into education has been demonstrated through prompt renewal and updating of learning contents.

8. Written agreements on practical training (if this is part of study programmes) between higher education institutions, companies or organisations and mentors therein and students have been concluded; the higher education institution organises this training in a suitable manner.
9. The planned and achieved learning objectives of students and competences of graduates are being benchmarked; study programmes and their provision are updated on the bases thereof.
10. The advancement of students through study programmes and the duration of study are regularly monitored; measures are adopted in case of insufficient advancement.

3.1.6 Human resources

1. The higher education institution has a sufficient number and structure of higher education teachers and associates enabling successful scientific-research or artistic and professional work in the areas of study programmes, which is demonstrated through appropriate proofs.
2. The higher education institution has proofs of the forms of participation of all higher education teachers, associates and researchers with the institution and of international mobility and the organisation and implementation of sabbatical year.
3. Effective and transparent procedures for election to titles and a field structure for elections guarantee a stable staff structure and the development thereof.
4. All higher education teachers and associates who provide the study programme have been validly elected to titles or have evidence of being in the process of re-election.
5. The higher education institution's criteria for the election to the titles of higher education teachers, researchers and associates observe the minimum standards of the Agency.
6. The members of the senate have been selected in such a way that all areas of study, academic disciplines or artistic fields of the higher education institution are equally represented.
7. The structure and number of support staff – i.e. professional, administrative and technical staff – ensure quality support for the provision of study programmes.
8. The service providing support to the teaching process has been suitably organised; the staff of this service are employed at the institution.

3.1.7 Students

1. The higher education institution involves students in scientific-research or artistic and professional activity of the institution by including them in the work of programme and project groups.
2. Students receive:
 - assistance in the organised acquisition of knowledge and skills at other higher education institutions;
 - recognition of knowledge and skills acquired at other higher education institutions;
 - advisory services connected with enrolment and information connected with the study.
3. The higher education institution is suitably organised to offer assistance in student exchanges, stimulating them and striving to increase their number. 12
4. The institution has an established tutoring system or mentorship in different forms to help with the study, or other forms of learning cooperation of all stakeholders.

5. The number of students per higher education teacher allows for quality provision of the study programme and the achievement of relevant learning outcomes.
6. Students participate in the evaluation and modernisation of the provision of study programmes.
7. Suitable organisation of students and their co-determination in the bodies of the institution and in improving the higher education institution's quality have been ensured.
8. The representation of students in the higher education institution's bodies is in accordance with the law, and their responsibilities, tasks and duties there have been defined.
9. The higher education institution provides vocational counselling to students and informs them on the employability of its graduates.

3.1.8 Material conditions

1. Premises and equipment are suitable for the implementation of all activities of the institution, they are being modernised and are appropriate for the number of enrolled students. The higher education institution has proofs of the ownership or tenancy of premises and equipment, which are located so as to enable undisturbed provision of study programmes and operation of the institution as a whole.
2. All stakeholders, particularly students, have available up-to-date information and communication equipment and other educational technology or equipment necessary for the provision of study programmes and professional, scientific-research or artistic activity.
3. The library of the higher education institution provides appropriate librarian information services in the fields of the study programmes and scientific-research or artistic and professional fields of the institution; study materials and electronic databases comply with the contents and cycles of study programmes.
4. Library staff have proper qualification to counsel and assist students and other stakeholders.
5. Premises are suitable for students with special needs.
6. The higher education institution regularly prepares plans for the provision of financial, material and other resources (inputs) necessary for the operation of the institution for the accreditation period, and verifies their implementation.
7. Funds have been guaranteed for all study programmes provided by the institution and all related activities of the institution (scientific-research or artistic and professional work) and other support activities.

3.1.9 Quality assurance

1. The internal quality assurance system of the higher education institution has been specified, is suitable, effective and comparable within the European Higher Education Area; it includes all processes important for the improvement of quality of institution's operation and the provision of study programmes, and provides for making an effective quality loop. The functioning of the institution is subject to permanent and comprehensive planning; the implementation of plans is regularly monitored, errors and weaknesses are being remedied.
2. The higher education institution regularly performs self-evaluation according to all areas of assessments from the Criteria covering:
 - evaluation of all activities of the higher education institution;
 - evaluation of teaching, based on the response of students and other stakeholders from the environment;

- evaluation of sufficiency and diversity of resources and financial performance;
 - documentation of the development of the higher education institution in connection with the development of the environment;
 - finding errors and weaknesses, and remedying them, and improvement of study programmes and all activities;
 - documentation of weaknesses and errors, proposals for improvement and improvements;
 - analysis of achievements.
3. Self-evaluation findings are shared with students, higher education teachers, associates and other stakeholders, and everyone has the possibility to propose measures for improvement and to monitor their realisation.
 4. The documented findings on the quality of institution's performance, analysis of these findings and proposed measures for improvement are available in self-evaluation reports and are published.

Through quality assurance, the higher education institution directs and develops culture of quality.

3.2 Transformation of a higher education institution

The following is considered transformation of a higher education institution:

- transformation into another type (e.g. of a college into a faculty);
- change of location within Slovenia.

The application to obtain consent to compliance with conditions for transformation into another type of higher education institution shall be dealt with according to the criteria for the accreditation of higher education institutions. If the transformation concerns a university member, the application must include the opinion of the university senate.

3.2.1 Change of location within Slovenia

The following is considered change of location:

- introduction of a new location to provide the entire study programme outside the head office of the higher education institution (branch);
- additional premises or their replacement to provide a part or the whole study programme if it is not a branch of the institution.

The higher education institution may file the application for the accreditation of the branch after the initial accreditation of the institution. When assessing a branch, compliance with the following criteria is being checked:

1. suitability of premises, equipment, library and access to relevant literature and information and communication technology;
2. adaptation of premises and equipment to students with special needs;
3. provision of staff who are, in terms of number and quality, suitable for teaching, scientific-research, artistic or professional work associated with study fields and study programmes the higher education institution intends to provide at the branch;

4. provision of counselling services related to enrolment and of other information related to the study at the branch;
5. provision of financial resources for the branch;
6. functioning of the quality system at the main higher education institution.

The application to obtain consent to compliance with conditions for additional premises or their replacement to provide a part of the whole study programme shall be dealt with in accordance with the criteria for the initial accreditation of higher education institutions, assessing only the fulfilment of criteria referred to in Chapter 2.1.5.

4 PROCEDURE

4.1 Initiation of the procedure

The procedure to obtain accreditation or re-accreditation, except in the case of extraordinary evaluation, shall be initiated on the applicant's proposal.

The application for an initial accreditation or re-accreditation shall be prepared in accordance with the act regulating higher education and with these Criteria.

The applicant shall submit the Accreditation Proposal on the prescribed form and enclose the prescribed annexes as defined by these Criteria.

The Accreditation Proposal shall be submitted in Slovene. If the annexes are in another language, the Agency may request that the applicant submit a partial or full translation. In disputed cases, the Agency shall request from the applicant a certified translation.

4.2 Annexes to the Accreditation Proposal

The following documents shall be annexed to the Accreditation Proposal:

A./Initial accreditation of a higher education institution:

1. The opinion of the founder, in the case of the establishment of a public higher education institution;
2. The opinion of the senate of the university, in the case of the establishment or transformation of a university member institution;
3. The mission, vision and strategy of the higher education institution, the draft establishment act or the establishment act, the draft statute of the higher education institution and the draft quality manual;
4. The international cooperation plan of the higher education institution, in particular with regard to the common European higher education area;
5. Information on research programmes, projects and research groups;
6. The staffing plan, details and proofs relating to higher education teachers, researchers and associates, declarations of cooperation and agreements of employers by whom the staff are employed;
7. Draft criteria for the election to titles;

8. Proofs relating to premises and equipment: suitable proofs of ownership or tenancy agreements, operating licenses, safety declarations, inventory of equipment;
9. A plan for the provision of the study programme when premises are at different locations;
10. Proofs of the funding provided;
11. Opinions of the relevant professional chamber (employers' association) or other institutions responsible for the areas covered by the study programmes;
12. Agreements with companies or other organisations and mentors therein on practical training of the anticipated number of enrolled students.

The agreements with companies referred to in point 12 shall be enclosed for professional higher education study programmes or study programmes under which the practical training of students is envisaged.

B./Initial accreditation of a study programme:

1. The decision of the senate of the university or independent higher education institution on the proposed study programme;
2. Syllabuses;
3. At least three foreign recognised or accredited study programmes from different countries; in the case of regulated professions, a comparison with the provisions from the relevant European Union directives or proof of conformity, above all with regard to the prescribed number of hours, the contents of the programme and the knowledge or skills acquired through both theoretical and practical education;
4. Proofs on higher education teachers, researchers and associates: proofs of valid election to titles for all lecturers (or of initiation of the procedure for re-election or subsequent election) in accordance with the Minimum Standards of the Agency (biographies, bibliographies, projects, patents, publications, awards, etc.), declarations of cooperation, agreements of employers by whom staff are employed;
5. Details of the total highest permissible direct and additional weekly teaching load;
6. International cooperation plan (in the field covered by the study programme);
7. The proofs of the established conditions for scientific, research, artistic or professional work: bibliographic information, a website from which scientific-research projects or programmes, research groups or industrial research are evident;
8. The proofs relating to premises and equipment and a plan for the provision of the study programme;
9. Agreements or contracts with companies or other organisations and mentors therein on practical training of the anticipated number of enrolled students.
10. The quality manual;
11. The self-evaluation report of the institution if it already provides other accredited study programmes.

The agreements or contracts with companies referred to in point 9 shall be enclosed for professional higher education study programmes or study programmes under which the practical training of students is envisaged.

C./Accreditation of a joint study programme:

1. A contract, agreement or other officially approved form of reciprocal definition of the cooperation of higher education institutions in the provision of a joint study programme, to be signed by all higher education institutions. The contract must contain in particular data on the following:
 - all participating higher education institutions with an indication of their status under national legislation, their accreditation or other relevant public recognition and a brief presentation of their functioning,
 - the shares in the provision of the joint study programme that are assumed by individual participating higher education institutions, and in particular the shares assumed by higher education institutions from the Republic of Slovenia,
 - the accreditation of the parts of the joint study programme provided by participating higher education institutions from other countries,
 - the principles and methods of joint quality monitoring, improvement and assurance,
 - admission requirements for students in the joint study programme,
 - the use of teaching languages,
 - financial obligations relating to the provision of the joint study programme,
 - the contents and form of the diploma and the method of awarding diplomas,
 - the contents and form of the diploma supplement and the method of awarding diploma supplements,
 - other mutual rights and obligations of participating higher education institutions in the provision of the joint study programme with special emphasis on the rights of students;
2. The diploma form and the diploma supplement form;
3. Information on all providers of the study programme, including those parts of the programme provided at participating or foreign higher education institutions.

D./ Re-accreditation of a higher education institution:

1. The establishment act and the statute of the higher education institution;
2. The self-evaluation report of the higher education institution for the academic year before which external evaluation was carried out, and analysis of all the areas of functioning of the higher education institution from all the years since the last accreditation, with identified weaknesses and measures to remedy them;
3. The mission, vision and strategy of the higher education institution;
4. The annual work programme of the higher education institution for the last calendar year before the external evaluation and for the calendar year in which the external evaluation takes place;
5. The financial report of the higher education institution for the last calendar year;
6. The quality manual;
7. The proofs of the quality of higher education teachers, researchers and associates as recognised by the profession;
8. The analyses of the results of student surveys or other forms of monitoring the opinion of students on the quality of the provision of study programme(s) for the last three academic years; if less than three years have passed since the last accreditation, for the entire period since the last accreditation;

9. The analyses of the results of surveys and other forms of monitoring graduates of the higher education institution;
10. A list of records kept by the higher education institution.

E./ Re-accreditation of a study programme:

1. The self-evaluation report of the higher education institution for the academic year before which external evaluation was carried out, and analysis of all the areas of functioning of the higher education institution related to the study programme from all the years since the last accreditation of the study programme, with identified weaknesses and measures to remedy them;
2. The proofs of the quality of higher education teachers, researchers and associates as recognised by the profession;
3. The analyses of the results of student surveys or other forms of monitoring the opinion of students on the quality of the provision of the study programme for the last three academic years; if less than three years have passed since the last accreditation, for the entire period since the last accreditation;
4. The analyses of the results of surveys and other forms of monitoring graduates of the study programme;

4.2.1 Jurisdiction

The accreditations and external evaluations of higher education institutions and study programmes shall be carried out by the Agency.

First instance decisions on the accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes shall be taken by the Agency Council.

Appeals shall be decided by the Appeal Committee of the Agency.

4.2.2 The position of party to the procedure and the right to inspect documents

The applicant shall have the character of party to the procedure; other persons shall have the position of party to the procedure if the Agency grants them this position by means of a special decision on the basis of a demonstration of legal interest.

An appeal against a decision refusing the position of party to the procedure shall not delay its implementation and shall not interrupt the accreditation procedure.

The right to inspect documents – the Accreditation Proposal and annexes, reports and other documents in the individual case – shall be held by the applicant and persons to whom the Agency grants the position of party to the procedure.

4.2.3 Application

An application for the initial accreditation of a higher education institution shall be submitted by the founder.

An application for the initial accreditation of a study programme shall be submitted by:

1. A university;

2. A private higher education institution.

4.2.4 Completeness of the application

The application shall be submitted to the Agency.

The Agency shall deal with applications in the order in which they were submitted.

Notwithstanding the provision of the previous paragraph, procedures for extraordinary evaluation shall have priority.

An application is complete when the prescribed Accreditation Proposal form has been properly completed and all the prescribed annexes have been enclosed and properly completed.

If an application is not complete, its completion shall be requested.

4.2.5 Appointment of experts

When an application for initial accreditation is complete, the Agency Council shall appoint a group of experts not later than within one month.

The Agency Council shall appoint at least three members to each group of experts, of which at least one shall be a foreign expert and one a student. With the exception of foreign experts, the members of a group of experts shall be entered in the register of experts.

Foreign experts shall be evaluators from foreign agencies entered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) or experts from the field of quality assessment in higher education.

The Agency shall organise and cooperate in the training of experts.

In cooperation with the Agency, the groups of experts shall carry out site visits at the locations in which the higher education institution intends to provide the study programme. The site visit must be announced at least 15 days in advance. The applicant must enable the group of experts to work efficiently and submit all documentation necessary for the assessment.

4.3 Initial accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes

4.3.1 Report on compliance with the conditions for initial accreditation

The group of experts shall prepare a joint report on compliance with the conditions for initial accreditation (hereinafter the report) not later than within three months of the submission of the complete accreditation proposal. It shall prepare the report by areas of assessment and according to the criteria for the initial accreditation of a higher education institution or study programme on the basis of the submitted proposal with enclosures, other requested documentation and a site visit to the locations in which the higher education institution intends to perform its activity.

A site visit is compulsory in the case of the accreditation of a higher education institution. In the case of the accreditation of a study programme, a site visit shall be carried out when this is necessary for

the purposes of complete assessment of the actual situation (if special equipment, laboratories, etc. are needed to provide the programme).

4.3.2 Sending the report

The report on the initial accreditation of a higher education institution shall be forwarded to the Agency Council to adopt a decision.

The report on the initial accreditation of a study programme shall be forwarded to the Agency Council and to the applicant for comments. The applicant shall communicate its comments within one month of receiving the report.

4.3.3 Deliberation method

The Agency Council shall decide on applications and the appointments of groups of experts in closed sessions.

The Agency Council shall not decide on applications at correspondence sessions.

When applications are being dealt with, representatives of the professional public may also be invited to a session of the Council.

The Agency Council shall decide on applications and the related appointments of groups of experts by majority of votes of all members (those not excluded from an individual procedure because of conflict of interests).

In the case of a conflict of interests (e.g. being employed by or collaborating with the applicant), members of the Agency Council shall be excluded from voting. The decision on the exclusion shall be taken by the president of the Agency Council. In the case of the exclusion of the president of the Agency Council, the decision on exclusion shall be taken by the vice president of the Agency Council.

If the quorum of the Agency Council is not met, the president of the Agency Council shall interrupt or postpone the session.

4.3.4 Decisions by the Agency Council

The report of the group of experts shall be the basis for decisions by the Agency Council.

The Agency Council shall decide on the accreditation of a higher education institution not later than within three months of the preparation of the report.

The Agency Council shall decide on the accreditation of a study programme not later than within three months of the expiry of the deadline for submitting comments on the report.

The Agency Council may grant accreditation for a seven-year period or reject the application for accreditation.

In the case of rejection of an application for accreditation of a higher education institution, the applicant may re-submit the application for initial accreditation of this higher education institution when a period of two years has expired since the decision of the Agency Council has been served.

In the case of rejection of an application for accreditation of a study programme, the higher education institution may re-submit the application for initial accreditation of this study programme when a period of one year has expired since the decision of the Agency Council has been served.

4.4 Re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes

4.4.1 Re-accreditation

The procedure for the re-accreditation of a higher education institution study programme shall begin with the submission of an application by the higher education institution and shall continue with the appointment of a group of experts to prepare the evaluation report.

The procedure for re-accreditation of a higher education institution or study programme shall end with a decision on re-accreditation.

4.4.2 Evaluation report

The group of experts shall prepare a joint evaluation report not later than within three months of being appointed and forward it to the Agency. The group of experts shall prepare the evaluation report by areas of assessment in accordance with the criteria for re-accreditation of a higher education institution or study programme on the basis of the self-evaluation report of the higher education institution, submitted documentation and a site visit to the higher education institution.

4.4.3 Comments on the evaluation report

The Agency shall send the evaluation report to the higher education institution. The latter shall have a maximum of one month from the receipt of the evaluation report in which to communicate its comments on the report.

If the higher education institution communicates comments on the report, the group of experts must examine them and prepare the final evaluation report not later than within one month of receiving them.

4.4.4 Decisions by the Agency Council

The basis for decision-making by the Agency Council are the self-evaluation report of the higher education institution, the final evaluation report and any comments on the report by the higher education institution. The reports and any comments shall be forwarded to the Agency Council not later than within seven days of the preparation of the final evaluation report.

The Agency Council shall decide on re-accreditation not later than within three months of receipt of the documentation referred to in the first paragraph of this Chapter.

The Agency Council:

1. shall grant re-accreditation of the higher education institution or study programme for seven years if it is evident from the reports that the institution meets the requirements of these Criteria and that any minor weaknesses indicated in the final evaluation report do not significantly worsen the quality of the institution's performance;

2. shall grant re-accreditation of the higher education institution or study programme for a shorter period, up to a maximum of three years, if the weaknesses identified in the performance of the higher education institution or the provision of the study programme are such that they can be remedied in less than three years;
3. shall not grant re-accreditation of a higher education institution or study programme in the case of serious infringements of statutory provisions and these Criteria.

When the Agency Council grants the re-accreditation of a higher education institution or study programme for a maximum of three years, it shall set a time limit within which the higher education institution must remedy errors and weaknesses.

After the expiry of the deadline for the remedying of weaknesses, a new external evaluation shall be carried out before the expiry of the period for which the accreditation has been granted for a shorter period. On the basis of the new evaluation, the Agency Council:

1. shall grant the re-accreditation of the higher education institution or study programme for seven years;
2. shall not grant the re-accreditation of the higher education institution or study programme.

If the Agency Council does not grant the re-accreditation, the study programme shall no longer be state-approved.

4.4.5 Extraordinary evaluation

The procedure of extraordinary evaluation of a higher education institution or a study programme shall be initiated by the Agency with a call to the higher education institution to complete the Proposal for Accreditation form and attach the documents required for the re-accreditation of a higher education institution or study programme.

Extraordinary evaluation can be carried out on the initiative of founders, the ministry responsible for higher education, students or other higher education stakeholders when there are reasonable grounds to suspect the existence of serious infringements in the operation of the higher education institution or the provision of a study programme.

Even if the higher education institution fails to provide the documents referred to in the first paragraph of this Chapter, the Agency Council shall appoint a group of experts.

Except for the initiation of the procedure, the extraordinary evaluation shall be carried out using the same procedure as an external evaluation and shall end with a decision on re-accreditation.

4.4.6 Appeal

An appeal against the decision of the Agency Council may be lodged within 30 days after the decision has been served.

The appeal shall be sent to the Agency Council and ruled on by the Appeal Committee.

The Appeal Committee shall decide on the appeal within three months after the complete appeal has been lodged. If the appeal is upheld, the matter shall be returned to the Agency Council for readjudication.

The decision of the Appeal Committee may be challenged by initiating an administrative dispute.

4.4.7 Reapplication for initial accreditation

If the Agency Council rejects an application for initial accreditation of a higher education institution or does not grant it re-accreditation, the applicant may re-submit the application for initial accreditation of this institution when a period of two years has expired since the decision of the Agency Council has been served.

If the Agency Council rejects an application for the initial accreditation of a study programme or does not grant it re-accreditation, the higher education institution may resubmit the application for initial accreditation of this programme when a period of one year has expired since the decision of the Agency Council has been served.

In the cases referred to in the first and second paragraphs of this Chapter, applications shall be dealt with under the criteria for initial accreditation.

In the case of missed deadline to submit the application for the re-accreditation of a higher education institution referred to in the fifth paragraph of Article 14 of HEA (Higher Education Act), the founder may re-submit the application for the initial accreditation of a higher education institution only after its deletion from the register of higher education institutions.

In the case of missed deadline to submit the application for the re-accreditation of a study programme referred to in the third paragraph of Article 32 of HEA, the higher education institution may re-submit the application for the initial accreditation of this study programme only after its deletion from the register of higher education institutions.

4.4.8 Validity of accreditation

The initial accreditation and each re-accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes shall apply for a maximum of seven years. Accreditation shall expire at the end of the academic year in which the period for which accreditation is granted expires.

If the Agency Council grants re-accreditation before the expiry of the period for which the previous accreditation was granted, the seven-year period of validity of the accreditation shall begin again from the date when the decision of the Agency Council has been served.

4.4.9 Consent to the transformation of higher education institutions and changes of the compulsory components of the study programmes of private higher education institutions

Consents to the transformation of higher education institutions shall be issued on the basis of the criteria for re-accreditation.

Consents to the changes of compulsory components of study programmes shall be issued on the basis of the criteria for initial accreditation.

The Agency Council may decide on consents to the transformation of higher education institutions and changes of the compulsory components of the study programmes of private higher education institutions without the assessment of a group of experts.

4.4.10 Changing of study programmes at universities

A university shall change the compulsory components of study programmes on its own.

A university shall inform the Agency on the changes of the compulsory components of study programmes referred to in the preceding paragraph within 30 days by entering the changes in the electronic form Proposal for Accreditation and attaching the copies of the senate decisions on the adoption of these changes, and shall inform the Agency thereof in writing.

4.4.11 Minor changes

The consent of the Agency Council is not required for minor changes.

The higher education institution shall inform the Agency Council in the case of changes to:

1. the name or address of the higher education institution;
2. the names of courses, and
3. the introduction of new elective courses or the discontinuation of old ones promptly.

Transformation into an institution of another type is not considered a changed name, and change of location of the provision of study programmes is not considered changed address.

The Agency Council shall decide on the change of the location of the provision of a study programme on the basis of the criteria specified in Chapter 3.2.1.

The following changes:

1. modernisation of the contents of syllabuses and the list of study literature;
2. distribution of contact hours in a learning unit;
3. replacement of courses between semesters;
4. change of habilitated lecturers, or
5. change of non-compulsory components of a study programme

shall be adopted by the higher education institution itself, and groups of experts shall assess them during external evaluation.

Note: *The Accreditation Proposal form is an annex to these Criteria. The form shall be submitted in electronic and printed form, where the two forms must match each other. An application shall be complete if it contains all the information and proofs required by these Criteria. If an application is not complete, its completion within an appropriate deadline shall be requested.*

References

- 1) Criteria for the Accreditation and Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions and Study Programmes (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, Nos 95/2010, 17/2011, 51/2012, 6/2013 and 88/2013).

- 2) <http://test.nakvis.si/en-GB/Content/Details/8> - Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (SQAA)
- 3) <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO172> – Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia.
- 4) http://www.mizs.gov.si/en/legislation_and_documents/- Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (documents)
- 5) http://www.mizs.gov.si/si/zakonodaja_in_dokumenti/veljavni_predpisi_s_podrocja_izobrazevanja/visokosolsko_izobrazevanje/zakon_o_visokem_solstvu/ - List of documents (also Higher Education Acts - HEA)