



Annual Activity and Economy Report of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education 2023

Bratislava, May 2024

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FOREWORD

Dear readers,

we present to you the annual report of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education for 2024. In it, the Agency launched an assessment of internal systems and their implementation with standards at all higher education institutions. Systematic preparation in the previous period clearly demonstrated the abilities of the entire team to handle even such a challenging task.

I am particularly pleased with the successes in the field of internationalisation. We have successfully completed the difficult external assessment processes resulting in our Agency's registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). An important milestone has thus been achieved on the path of the Agency's European integration and international recognition of its processes and procedures. In this area, the Agency also has other challenges for the future period.

The fulfillment of the stated goals, as well as many others, would not have been possible without systematic improvement of the internal system and the contribution of all employees and their professional approach.

I believe that the Agency's activities and the results achieved in 2023 contributed to improving the culture of quality in higher education, thus meeting the expectations of partners and the public.

*Robert Redhammer
Chairman of the Agency's Executive Board*

1. INTRODUCTION

The year 2023 was particularly significant for the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as “SAAHE” or “the Agency”). In the area of the main activity, which is, according to the law, external quality assurance of higher education, the Agency started 33 proceedings on the assessment of the internal system and its implementation with standards at all higher education institutions. It was a task of an unprecedented scale from a technical point of view, but especially from an organisational point of view. A well-prepared system and its structures handled the most fundamental challenges of this complex task without complications and created all the prerequisites for its successful completion by issuing relevant decisions within the limit set by law.

For the Agency, the year 2023 was also particularly important in the field of internationalisation. The Agency’s external assessment by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was successfully completed. The visit of the ENQA expert panel to the Agency’s seat in March 2023 was the final stage of the evaluation and resulted in the publication of a positive evaluation report. Based on it, the Agency was registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in December 2023. An important milestone on the way to the Agency’s European integration and international recognition of its processes and procedures was thus achieved. The Agency subsequently applied for full ENQA membership, which is expected in early 2024.

With the aim of further increasing international prestige, and thus the prestige of accredited higher education institutions, the Agency decided to apply for recognition and registration in the database of the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). The major steps leading to this registration, including a visit of WFME expert reviewers, took place in November 2023.

As part of its internal activities, the Agency produced two thematic reports and fulfilled all the tasks specified in its work plan. In the field of internal legislation, two new directives were issued in 2023 and 16 of them were amended. These were mainly directives related to management and economic principles. The Agency also continuously adjusted and developed its information system with regard to reducing the administrative burden of higher education institutions, improving user comfort, protecting personal data and increasing cyber security.

The submitted *Annual Activity and Economy Report of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education 2023* is a fulfillment of § 4 par. 2 letter g) point 3 of the Quality Assurance Act and contains all data pursuant to § 20 par. 8 of this Act.

2. ABOUT THE AGENCY

2.1. Legal definition and mission

The Agency is a public institution which carries out external quality assurance activities in higher education. It was established on 1 November 2018 by Act No. 269/2018 Coll. on Quality Assurance of Higher Education and amending Act No. 343/2015 Coll. on public procurement and on the amendment of certain acts as amended (hereinafter referred to as “the Quality Assurance Act”) and has its seat in Bratislava.

The mission of the Agency is to contribute to the improvement of the quality of higher education in the Slovak Republic with external quality assurance tools according to the principles of ESG 2015 and in accordance with the expectations of stakeholders involved in education. The Agency provides higher education institutions with a professional and

independent view on the quality of education and strengthens the culture of quality. As an independent public institution, it mainly decides on matters related to the granting of authorisations to higher education institutions based on their requests and also performs other related tasks.

2.2. Structure and composition of the Agency's bodies in 2023

The Quality Assurance Act, § 5 – § 18, sets out in detail the method of election, appointment, terms of office, rights and obligations, remuneration and other details for the members of the Agency's bodies. They are:

- a) Chairman of the Executive Board,
- b) Vice-Chairman of the Executive Board,
- c) the Executive Board,
- d) the Board of Appeal,
- e) Auditor,
- f) Head of Office.

2.2.1. Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Executive Board

The Chairman of the Executive Board is a statutory body of the Agency, manages the Agency, acts on its behalf and represents it externally. The Chairman of the Executive Board is represented in his/her absence by the Vice-Chairman of the Executive Board. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Executive Board are appointed and dismissed by the Minister for Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as the "Minister"). In 2023, these positions were held by:

prof. Ing. Robert Redhammer, PhD., Chairman of the Executive Board,
prof. RNDr. René Matlovič, PhD., LL.M., Vice-Chairman of the Executive Board.

2.2.2. Executive Board

The Executive Board has nine members, including the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman. The members of the Executive Board are appointed and dismissed by the Minister – two members on the proposal of the Council of Universities of the Slovak Republic and two members on the proposal of the Slovak Rector's Conference from persons who are internationally recognised experts in the field of their activity, two members on the proposal of the Student Council for Higher Education and two members on the proposal of employers' representatives. The 9th member is the Chairman of the Executive Board.

In 2023, the Executive Board worked in the following composition:

prof. Ing. Robert Redhammer, PhD., Chairman,
prof. RNDr. René Matlovič, PhD., LL.M., Vice-Chairman,
prof. Július Horváth, PhD., member – until 14.3.2023
MUDr. Ljuba Bachárová, DrSc., MBA, member – from 15.3.2023
prof. RNDr. František Kačík, DrSc., member,
Ing. Viliam Kupec, PhD., member,
Mgr. art. Bálint Lovász, member,
prof. PaedDr. Vladimír Patráš, CSc., member,
prof. MUDr. Iveta Šimková, CSc., member,
prof. JUDr. Ivan Šimovček, CSc., member.

To two members of the Executive Board, prof. Julius Horváth, PhD. and prof. RNDr. František Kačík, DrSc. term expired on 14.3.2023.

The Council of Universities confirmed prof. RNDr. František Kačík, CSc. also until the following six-year term of office, to which he was appointed by the Minister on 15.3.2023. MUDr. Ljuba Bachárová, DrSc., MBA was nominated as a member of the Executive Board by the Student Council for Higher Education and appointed by the Minister on 15.3.2023.

2.2.3. Board of Appeal

The Board of Appeal examines the procedures of the Executive Board and the review panels of the Executive Board of the Agency on the based on objections submitted by participants in the proceedings to the decisions or statements of the Executive Board. Pursuant to § 20 par. 8 of the Quality Assurance Act, the Board of Appeal has five members and two alternates appointed and dismissed by the Minister based on the results of the selection process.

In 2023, the composition of the Board of Appeal was as follows:

prof. Ing. Jozef Mihok, PhD., Chairman – until 29.7.2023

JUDr. Peter Štrpka, PhD., member,

JUDr. Marcel Jurko, PhD., member,

Mgr. Roman Oleksik, LL.M., member,

prof. JUDr. Margita Prokeinová, PhD., member.

The death of prof. Ing. Jozef Mihok, PhD., as of 29.7.2023, the Board of Appeal had only four members, which does not meet the minimum number of five members stipulated by the Quality Assurance Act. At the beginning of August 2023, the Agency asked the Ministry to resolve this situation, which, however, did not change until the end of 2023.

2.2.4. Auditor

Based on the results of the selection process, the auditor is appointed for a term of office of four years and dismissed by the Minister. In 2023, this position was held by **Ing. Ivan Hargaš**. Pursuant to the relevant provisions of the Quality Assurance Act, the auditor commented on the financial statements and the Annual Activity and Economy Report before submitting them for approval to the Executive Board.

2.2.5. Head of Office

The Head of Office mainly ensures the proper operation of the Agency, including administrative, technical, spatial and personnel security of the Agency, manages the Agency's office to the extent determined by the Chairman of the Executive Board. The Head of Office is appointed and dismissed by the Chairman of the Executive Board based on the results of the selection process. In 2023, this position was held by **Ing. Dušan Faktor, PhD.**

2.3. Organizational structure and human resources

The performance of the Agency's mandate and the full security of its activities is tied to the staffing of the Agency with qualified employees. As of 31 December 2023, the Agency had a total of 29 employees in permanent employment, of which 15 were women. Nine employees were working on a part-time basis. There were a total of 59 persons who performed activities on the basis of agreements executed outside the employment relationship (the work agreement – 53 persons; employment agreement – 6 persons).

The increase in the number of employees who performed work on the basis of agreements performed outside the employment relationship (59 compared to 17 in 2022) was determined by filling the positions of secretaries of individual review panels. The average recalculated number of agency employees increased slightly in 2023, to 28.3 (compared to 26,035 in 2022).

The basic division of the Agency and its structure is already determined by the Quality Assurance Act by establishing the Agency's bodies and defining their rights, obligations and basic ties. Pursuant to the valid organizational rules, the agency is divided into:

- Department of Accreditation Activities;
- Analytical Department,
- Economics and Operations Department,
- Legislative and Legal Department,
- Internal Quality Assurance Department.

The main tasks, duties and responsibilities of each department are listed in the Organisational Rules. At the head of each section is its head/leader, who is responsible for his/her activities to the Head of Office. The Legislative and Legal Department provides cooperation to other organizational departments of the Agency according to the needs and instructions of the Chairman of the Executive Board. The work of the Internal Quality Assurance Department is ensured by the Internal Quality Assurance Coordinator, who is appointed and dismissed by the Chairman of the Executive Board.

2.4. Professional development of employees

The Agency strives to create an optimal and pleasant working environment for its employees since its inception, as it is one of the important and key factors that affects the performance of individuals and later the performance of the entire team. It has created an optimal working environment with both office and technical equipment, which it regularly improves and adapts to the needs of employees.

In addition to technical equipment, the Agency also emphasizes the education and personal growth of its employees. The training, as well as the working environment, adapts to their needs, reflecting the job position, job description and their expectations. The goals are focused on final results and the quality of work in the public interest.

Professional development and training of employees does not leave to chance, but regularly monitors employees' requirements for their self-education and adapts them to the work activities planned in advance. Employees can learn not only in domestic training, but also participate in various foreign educational seminars and projects. The Agency is of the opinion that education and development are both key priorities and at the same time a key tool for the personal and professional growth of its employees, as the positions in the Agency are specifically unique within the labour market. Specific expectations and work activities are also associated with this. As a rule, the Agency creates cumulative positions with a broader focus, in which it is necessary to regularly educate yourself, expand your knowledge, skills, competences, and knowledge.

Upon joining, each employee undergoes mandatory entrance training focused on health and safety, occupational health and safety and internal regulations, as well as education in the field of legislation and important legal regulations. Adaptation of a new employee may vary from one department to another. Employees individually supplement

their knowledge and skills according to the nature of their work in areas necessary for the performance of activities and related to their job classification and description of work activities. At the same time, transfer and expand the acquired knowledge and insights to each other at regular team meetings, or at joint agency meetings of all teams, together with the management of the Agency.

An overview of the educational and development events of the Agency's employees in 2023 is in the following three tables.

1. Training of newly recruited employees, the content of which was focused on:

Date	Training content
Continuously as needed	Training – Protection and safety of health at work and fire protection Trained by: Ing. Eva Hlivová – bezp.sk
Continuously as needed	Training – use of information system for registry management – employees of the company Trained by: employee of A.V.I.S.

2. Training sessions focused on:

Date	Training content
10.1.2023	Training: Seminar Registry administration for 2023 Trained by: Seminaria, s.r.o.
30.1.2023	Training on the use of a company motor vehicle Trained by: Milton, s.r.o.
9.2.2023	Training: Consolidated financial statements Trained by: EDOS-SMART, s.r.o.
16.3.2023	DAA Training – Legislative regulations of the assessment process of IQAS of HEI's Trained by: JUDr. Gewisslerová
20.3.2023	Training DF IRT models and statistics Trained by: ACREA ČR, spol. s.r.o.
24.3.2023	DAA Training – Assessment process and IQAS of HEI's – basic tasks of the DAA, subject of the assessment of IQAS of HEI's Trained by: prof. Redhammer, prof. Matlovič
18.4.2023	DAA Training – Proposal of an assessment plan during a visit to a university within the framework of the IQAS assessment Trained by: Ing. Zacharová
19.4.2023	GDPR training Trained by: JUDr. Vojtech Milošovič, securion, s.r.o.
3.5.2023	GDPR training Trained by: JUDr. Vojtech Milošovič, securion, s.r.o.
15.5.2023	DAA training – Preparation of evaluation report – content and form of ER Trained by: Ing. Zacharová, JUDr. Gewisslerová
17.5.2023	DAA training: Assessment of IQAS – process of assessment of IQAS of HEI's Trained by: prof. Redhammer, prof. Matlovič
25.5.2023	VEMA Training – Wages Trained by: Martina Kovaľová – VEMA
8.6.2023	Etiquette and diplomatic protocol training for the work of an assistant Trained by: Seminaria, s.r.o.

8.6.2023	Training VEMA DCH/PER Trained by: Martina Kovaľová – VEMA
20.6.2023	DAA Training: Case studies from proceedings within the framework of the IQAS assessment, preparation of the schedule for autumn 2023 Trained by: Ing. Zacharová
22.6.2023	Training – Complaint handling Trained by: Slovak Government Office
28.6.2023	Training – Personal file of an employee in the public sector Trained by: Slovak Government Office
14. — 25.8.2023	Training – Wages and HR / Accredited continuing education program Trained by: JASPIS, s.r.o.
22.8.2023	Training – Basics of accounting Trained by: JASPIS, s.r.o.
12.9.2023	DAA Training: Case studies on on-site assessment of IQAS of HEI's Trained by: Dr. Zacharová
19.9.2023	Training – Budget management rules according to Act No. 523/2004 Coll. and violation of financial discipline in theory and decision-making practice Trained by: PROEKO s.r.o.
20.9.2023	Training – Modern registry administration – new regulations in the administration of documents and registry regulations with effect from 1.9.2023 and 1.1.2024 Trained by: PROEKO s.r.o.
9.10.2023	Training – Management training of senior state and public administration employees Trained by: PROEKO s.r.o.
11.10.2023	Training – A new approach to the development of management and communication skills – Lumina Spark personality portraiture Trained by: PROEKO s.r.o.
16.10.2023	Training – Occupational psycho-hygiene - How to handle emotionally demanding situations at work Trained by: PROEKO s.r.o.
18.10.2023	Training – Low value contracts, rules for awarding them, transition to a completely new EPVO electronic platform Trained by: PROEKO s.r.o.
10.11. — 8.12.2023	Training – Professional assistant director Trained by: Seminaria s.r.o.

3. Professional training abroad:

Date	Training content
24. — 26.5.2023	ENQA Leadership Development Programme – Seminar I (Lisbon, Portugal)
20. — 22.9.2023	ENQA Leadership Development Programme – Seminar II (Oslo, Norway)
3. — 9.11.2023	ENQA General Forum (Dublin, Ireland)
15. — 17.11.2023	ENQA Leadership Development Programme – Seminar III (Brussels, Belgium)

In 2023, the Agency provided the following social benefits, in accordance with the applicable internal and legal regulations:

- flexible working hours;
- employee meal allowance;
- contribution to supplementary pension savings.

It also provided specific benefits, in particular:

- individual education;
- domestic and foreign courses and workshops.

2.5. Spatial and material equipment of the Agency

The Agency's spatial and material background and facilities remained unchanged in 2023. The Agency is based in an administrative building on Freedom Square 11 in Bratislava, where it has rented office space and used the entire 5th floor and the entire 3rd floor during 2023. The total area of the leased space is 520 m². The Agency has 9 parking spaces, 3 indoors and 6 outdoors. All offices and meeting rooms are equipped with office furniture and IT infrastructure owned by the Agency. A total of 14 offices are available, of which 3 rooms are used by the management of the Agency (Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Head of Office) and 11 offices are available to other employees. The Agency also has 2 meeting rooms equipped with audio-visual technology and used for meetings of the Executive Board, the Board of Appeal, external visits, training, and working meetings. In connection with the more frequent use of online (or combined) meetings, the audio-visual technology in one of the meeting rooms has been significantly upgraded. Employees on each floor have a kitchenette equipped with daily necessities and sanitary facilities.

There is a reception in the building on the ground floor, which is provided and operated by the landlord. The reception serves all companies located in the administrative building. The vicinity of the agency's headquarters has very good civic amenities and accessibility from all directions, as it is located almost in the center of Bratislava.

As of 2022, the Agency has a reference service vehicle, which was fully used by employees for business trips in connection with higher education institutions' accreditations.

2.6. Agency Information System and Cybersecurity

In connection with its activities, the agency in 2023 paid a lot of attention to improving the functionalities of the information system, both in terms of complementing the necessary functionalities and increasing cybersecurity. These activities were initiated in 2022 in connection with the preparatory phase of proceedings for assessing the internal systems of higher education institutions. Their aim was to contribute to the simplification and automation of processes on the part of higher education institutions and to facilitate their further processing on the part of the Agency. Furthermore, the processes for processing applications for the accreditation for study programme were unified with the processes for processing applications for assessment of the internal quality assurance system.

This activity was followed up in 2023 by modifications and additions to the information system. These were mainly changes in relation to the agenda of the mandate contracts of members of review panels and the subsequent settlement of their financial requirements (remuneration and reimbursement of ancillary expenses), but also the necessary incorporation of requirements arising from GDPR regulations.

An important addition was the implementation of a tool for sending mass e-mails to support the completed doctoral survey.

In order to increase the cybersecurity of SAAHE information systems, an information and cybersecurity audit was prepared in November 2023. On this basis, the Agency, as a public authority, was identified as a so-called "basic service provider" and, at its own request, was included in the register of basic service providers by the decision of the National Security Office dated 22.12.2023 with effect from 1.1.2024. It is therefore covered by complex

legislation regarding information systems and technologies in public administration and cybersecurity.

3. CHANGES IN THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The Agency regularly monitors, evaluates and adapts its processes, procedures and information system. Based on the evaluation of feedback, processes and legislative changes, a substantial part of internal regulations, especially economic regulations, was amended and changed in 2023. By adding new functionalities, the Agency's information system has also been improved, in particular in connection to securing new processes, increasing personal data protection and cybersecurity.

3.1. External legislative changes

The legislative environment within which the Agency carries out its activities is formed mainly by the Quality Assurance Act, which was not amended during the year of 2023.

From the point of view of the Agency's remit, Act No. 131/2002 on higher education institutions, as amended, is also essential. It was amended by Act No. 412/2022 Coll. from 8.11.2022, effective from 1.1.2023. However, it was only a matter of specifying the competences of the administrative board of a public higher education institution in the process of approving the annual activity report of the public higher education institution and the annual report on the management of the public higher education institution submitted by the rector before its approval in the academic senate. That amendment did not affect the Agency's remit in connection with the performance of its activities.

3.2. Internal legislation of the Agency and its amendments

The Agency relies on a system of internal regulations and internal legislation in the performance of its mandate and consistent application of the authorizations it has. By the end of 2023, it consisted of 35 directives, regulations and other types of standards that regulate the Agency's internal and external procedures. This internal legislation was also gradually adapted to new external and internal conditions in the course of 2023. At the beginning of the year, the Agency approved two new internal regulations. It also amended its statute and 15 other directives that together form the principles of the Agency's management.

A detailed overview of the new and amended internal regulations can be found in the following two tables.

1. New internal regulations:

Number	Title of the internal regulation	Date of approval
1/2023	Directive on the use of a company vehicle SAAHE	approved on 26. 1. 2023
2/2023	Rules for conducting business activity of SAAHE	approved on 29. 9. 2023

2. Amended internal regulations:

Number	Title of the internal regulation	Date of approval
2/2019	SAAHE Statute	approved on 26. 1. 2023
3/2022	Directive on the remuneration of members of the review panels of SAAHE's Executive Board and the reimbursement of related incidental expenses	approved on 26.1.2023
5/2019	Management of the conflict of interests of members of collective bodies, members of review panels of the Executive Board and employees of SAAHE	approved on 16.2.2023
8/2019	Internal Labor Rules of SAAHE	approved on 14.3.2023
5/2020	Directive on establishing procedures for public procurement of the procuring entity SAAHE	approved on 14.3.2023
12/2019	SAAHE Accounting Directive	approved on 18.5.2023
13/2020	Directive on the procedure for financial control of SAAHE	approved on 18.5.2023
14/2019	Directive on the circulation of accounting documents of SAAHE	approved on 18.5.2023
10/2020	Directive on the handling of complaints by SAAHE	approved on 31.8.2023
16/2019	Directive on the provision of meal tickets for SAAHE employees	approved on 29.9.2023
11/2019	Directive on the creation and use of the Social Fund for SAAHE employees	approved on 29.9.2023
7/2020	Directive on travel compensation of employees of SAAHE	approved on 29.9.2023
8/2020	Directive on the internal system for the screening of whistleblowing by SAAHE	approved on 19.10.2023
4/2020	Directive on the use of payment cards of SAAHE	approved on 19.10.2023
10/2019	Directive on expenses and management of budgetary resources for representational and promotional purposes of SAAHE	approved on 19.10.2023
8/2019	Rules of Procedure of SAAHE	approved on 14.12.2023

4. AGENCY REVIEWERS AND REVIEW PANELS

The year 2023 was marked by day-to-day work with a list of reviewers and continuous interaction with them, in connection with the launch of internal systems assessments and

their implementation at all higher education institutions. The parallel course of assessments of internal systems at all 33 higher education institutions in Slovakia also meant the need to supplement and update this list.

This is also why the method of acquiring new assessors continued in 2023. In particular, an active approach, which started already in 2022, was applied. For those areas identified as insufficiently covered, candidates were targeted, especially among prominent experts in the relevant field. At its meetings in 2023, the Executive Board approved the entry of 17 reviewers on the list of reviewers, of which 9 were foreign. 36 student reviewers have also been added to the list of reviewers. In 2023, the Executive Board also approved the removal of 26 reviewers. The most common reason was the incompatibility of the reviewer's position with his/her current function at the workplace or the failure to comply with the requirements for the reviewer (especially the completion of the student's studies – 7 cases).

For individual reviewers, the Agency records their professional focus, profile (higher education teacher, practitioner, internal system expert, student, etc.) and other data about their professional activities. Based on the evaluation of this data, the Agency may propose a reviewer to a review panel to assess the specific activity of the higher education institution. In 2023, a total of 33 review panels were created to assess internal quality assurance systems in higher education.

Review panels for assessing internal systems were created in accordance with the Quality Assurance Act and in accordance with the internal regulation of the Principles for inclusion in the list of reviewers, removal from this list and creation of review panels of the Executive Board of SAAHE. In order to assess the internal system of each higher education institution, it was necessary to appoint a chairman of the review panel, at least one member of the review panel as an internal system expert, an expert in each field of study, a representative of practice and a representative of students. The number of members of the review panel increased with the growing size of the higher education institution and took into account its structure, the number of components, the number of study fields, the number of study programmes in each field of study and the number of habilitation procedures and inaugural procedures. In total, more than 300 reviewers were involved in all 33 proceedings, of which more than 100 of them more than once. Six reviewers were members of a review panel more than three times. Multiple involvement of reviewers has benefited from a more consistent approach in assessments.

Much attention was also paid to the internationalisation of review panels. Of the total number of reviewers involved, over 130 were foreign, which is more than 43 %. More than 50 reviewers were involved in two or more review panels. As the internal system assessments were not completed in 2023 and there have been changes in their composition during the work of some review panels, the exact number of reviewers in individual functions will only be known after the completion of all proceedings.

In 2023, the Agency conducted several types of training for reviewers, mainly in connection with their preparation for assessing the internal systems of higher education institutions. In February 2023, a two-day in-person training aimed at future chairs of the review panels for assessing internal systems was held. The training focused on the main goals and purpose of the internal system assessment, the legislative framework and assessment procedures, the planned course of proceedings, the creation and composition of review panels and the preparation of evaluation reports.

Online training for foreign assessors was held three times in 2023, focused mainly on the specifics of the legislative framework in the Slovak Republic, a description of the

functioning of the higher education system and on individual types of assessment. Online training was also held for reviewers from practice and student reviewers. It was mainly devoted to the most important standards for the internal system from the perspective of the two stakeholders. For the new role of review panel secretaries, a series of three online training sessions focused on individual parts of the assessment followed. The creation of review panels was followed by a series of online meetings and training sessions specifically aimed at assessing the relevant higher education institutions.

The first online meeting of the members of each review panel included training regarding the actual assessment of the internal system itself, the individual processes and stages of the assessment, the expected outputs of the process and the information system of the Agency. Its second part focused on the individual functions of review panel members. Its goal was to prepare reviewers for their specific function in the review panel – an internal system expert, an expert in the field of study, a representative of employers and a student representative. For each function, at least one training or more was carried out, depending on the size of the review panel. The specific documents for the request, their meaning and importance for the assessment of individual articles of the standards for the internal system, the distribution of the importance of individual articles of the standards for the individual functions of the review panel members, the division of tasks during the on-site visit and the preparation of questions for its individual blocks were reflected upon. The third online meeting of the review panel members took place just before the on-site visit and was therefore focused on the progress of the visit, the distribution of tasks during the visit and the subsequent development of the relevant parts of the evaluation report. The on-site plan for the assessment, the different parts of the visit and the expected outcome from them, the types of questions and how they were asked, the formulation of findings during and after the on-site visit were discussed with the members of the review panel. The second part focused on the development of the evaluation report and its parts according to the function of the members and according to the structure of the higher education institution. The way in which the report was written, the articulation of shortcomings and their justification and the formulation of recommendations were clarified.

The Agency shall pay close attention to the list of reviewers, its up-to-date nature and its work with reviewers, regularly update it and publish it on its website.

5. MEETINGS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

In 2023, 15 meetings of the Executive Board were held, with 2 meetings held online and 1 external meeting. The date of the proceedings and the brief content of each meeting are given in the following overview.

53rd session of the Executive Board 26. 1. 2023

The main points of the first meeting of the Executive Board in 2023 were the update of the plan for thematic analyses and reports for 2022-2025, the proposal to amend internal regulation No. 2/2019 SAAHE Statute and the proposal to amend internal regulation No. 3/2022 on the remuneration of members of the SAAHE Executive Board review panels and the reimbursement of related ancillary expenses. At that meeting, the Executive Board also approved draft of the new internal regulation No. 1/2023 Directive on the use of a professional motor vehicle and approved candidates for inclusion on the list of reviewers. At the same time, they removed two members from the list of reviewers. This meeting further approved the

actual implementation of the 2022 budget of SAAHE and the transfer of unspent items to the following year under the subsidy contract with the Ministry. The Executive Board also approved the composition of five review panels for periodic review procedures of the internal system.

54th session of the Executive Board 16. 2. 2023

At this meeting, the Executive Board approved the composition of eight review panels on regular review procedures for the internal system. Also, based on the requests from higher education institutions, they decided to cancel the accreditation of the habilitation procedure and the accreditation of the inaugural procedure in the relevant fields. At this meeting, the Executive Board adopted a resolution on the verification of compliance with the legislation and internal regulations of the Technical University in Košice. It also approved the opinion of SAAHE on the Ministry's initiative to verify compliance with the conditions and compliance of the submitted proposals for the title "professor" with legislation and standards for habilitation and inauguration proceedings. At that meeting, the accounts of SAAHE for 2022 and the draft budget of SAAHE for 2023 were approved. The proposal to amend internal regulation No. 5/2019 on conflicts of interest of members of collective bodies, members of review panels of the Executive Board and employees of SAAHE was also approved.

55th session of the Executive Board 14. 3. 2023

At this meeting, the Executive Board approved the proposal to include candidates on the list of reviewers and the composition of four review panels on procedures for the periodic assessment of the internal system. The Executive Board decided to grant accreditation of study programmes and to cancel the accreditation of habilitation and inaugural procedures based on applications from the relevant higher education institutions. The proposal to amend Internal Regulation No. 8/2019 of the SAAHE Rules of Procedure and the proposal to amend Internal Regulation No. 5/2020 of the SAAHE contracting authority have also been approved.

56th session of the Executive Board 6. 4. 2023

At this meeting of the Executive Board, which took place in an in-person form with one member connected online, approved the composition of the eight review panels for the regular review procedures of the internal system and decided on the merits of the plea of bias raised against a member of a review panel.

57th session of the Executive Board 20. 4. 2023

At this meeting, the Executive Board approved four review panels on the procedures for the regular assessment of the internal system. Furthermore, the Executive Board decided to refuse accreditation of the study programme and approved the opinion of SAAHE on the initiative of the Ministry concerning the verification of compliance with the conditions and compliance of the submitted proposals for the award of the title "professor" with the legislation and standards for habilitation and inaugural procedures. At this meeting of the Executive Board, the SAAHE draft of the procurement plan for 2023 was approved.

58th session of the Executive Board 18. 5. 2023

At the May meeting of the Executive Board, the proposal for the inclusion of candidates on the list of reviewers and the proposal to remove members from that list were approved. Furthermore, the Executive Board approved two review panels on procedures for the periodic

review of the internal system and gave its prior consent to the modification of the study programme. At this meeting, the SAAHE Workin Plan 2023 with an outlook to 2024 and the SAAHE Annual Activity and Management Report 2022 were approved. The Executive Board also approved the proposal to amend three internal regulations, namely regulation No. 14/2019, the Directive on the circulation of accounting documents of the SAAHE, No. 13/2019 on the procedure for the performance of financial control of SAAHE and No. 12/2019 the SAAHE Accounting Directive.

59th session of the Executive Board 1. 6. 2023

At that meeting, the Executive Board, which took place in a combined form with four members connected online, approved the composition of the two review panels for the regular assessment procedures of the internal system.

60th session of the Executive Board 15. 6. 2023

At that meeting, the Executive Board approved the composition of one review panel on the procedure for the periodic review of the internal system and gave its prior consent to the modification of the study programmes. Furthermore, the Executive Board took note of the opinion of the SAAHE Board of Appeal and decided to submit a request for the inclusion of SAAHE in the database of agencies recognised by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) and associated expenditure, and agreed to its inclusion in the Agency's budget for 2023.

61st session of the Executive Board 13. 7. 2023

The first online meeting of the Executive Board in July discussed an objection of bias against a member of the review panel, which was assessed as well-founded. At that meeting, the Executive Board also approved the composition of one review panel on the procedure for the periodic assessment of the internal system.

62nd meeting of the Executive Board 27. 7. 2023

At the second July meeting, which took place in a combined form, the Executive Board addressed, in particular, a letter from the Ministry concerning the list of legal entities that are members of ENQA or registered in the EQAR register and their evaluation reports for the purpose of assessing the compliance of the internal system and its implementation with the SAAHE standards.

63rd session of the Executive Board 31. 8. 2023

In addition to approving proposals for the composition of two review panels on procedures for the regular assessment of the internal system, the Executive Board also approved at this meeting the opinion of SAAHE on the initiative of the Ministry to verify compliance with the conditions laid down in the Act and the compliance of the submitted proposals for the title "professor" with the legislation and standards for habilitation and inaugural procedures. Furthermore, the Executive Board also approved the internal regulation No. 10/2020 Complaints Handling Directive of SAAHE on a proposal to amend this internal regulation.

64th session of the Executive Board 28. 29-29. 9. 2023

At the 64th external meeting, the Executive Board approved the composition of three review panels on internal system assessment procedures. It also approved proposals to amend three internal rules, internal regulation No. 16/2019, the Directive on the provision of meal tickets for SAAHE employees, internal regulation No. 11/2019 on the creation and use of the Social Fund for SAAHE employees, and internal regulation No. 7/2020 on the travel compensation of SAAHE employees. The Executive Board also approved the draft of new internal regulation No. 2/2023 rules for the conduct of business activities of SAAHE.

65th session of the Executive Board 19. 10. 2023

At this meeting, the Executive Board approved the proposal to amend internal regulation No. 8/2020 Directive on the internal system for the screening of whistleblowing reports of SAAHE, as well as the amendment to internal regulation No. 4/2020 Directive on the use of payment cards and Directive No. 10/2019 on expenditure and management of appropriations for representative and promotional purposes of SAAHE. At the meeting, the Chairman of the Executive Board reported on the cancellation of the SAAHE Board of Appeal's meeting and the validation of the ENQA Panel evaluation report.

66th meeting of the Executive Board 30. 11. 2023

At its 66th meeting, the Executive Board approved the composition of two review panels for the periodic review procedures of the internal system. It also approved the modification of the Agency's budget for 2023. The Chairman of the Executive Board reported on the state of play of ongoing procedures in the framework of the assessment of the internal systems of higher education institutions and on the timetable and planned on-site visits until the end of 2023.

67th session of the Executive Board 14. 12. 2023

At the last meeting of the Executive Board in 2023, one review panel was approved for the procedure for the periodic review of the internal system. At this meeting, the Executive Board agreed to register two legal entities on the list maintained by SAAHE pursuant to § 4 par. 2 letter c) point 2 of the Quality Assurance Act, namely: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres). At this meeting, the Executive Board approved two thematic reports – “First analysis of universities' internal assessment reports on the implementation of the internal quality assurance system of higher education” and, with comments, the “Thematic Report on the Initial Findings of Students' Views on the Quality of Doctoral Education”. The Executive Board also approved the proposal to amend internal regulation No. 8/2019 of the Internal Labour Rules of SAAHE and finally adopted and approved the calendar of meetings of the Executive Board for 2024.

Within the meaning of the Quality Assurance Act, the Executive Board's resolutions are published on the Agency's website.

6. PERFORMANCE OF THE AGENCY'S SCOPE

Pursuant to the Quality Assurance Act, the performance of the Agency's competence is ensured primarily through procedures that are initiated on the basis of an application from

a higher education institution, an applicant for state approval or on the Agency's own initiative. In 2023, the Agency implemented actions in the areas listed below.

6.1. Procedures for granting accreditation of new study programmes

The Act on Quality Assurance allows higher education institutions to submit applications to the Agency for the granting of accreditation of new study programmes in the field of study and degree in which they are not yet authorised to conduct study programmes. In 2023, higher education institutions submitted 2 such applications in the field of informatics (at the 3rd level). Both proceedings were not completed in 2023.

For the purposes of assessing applications of higher education institutions for the accreditation of study programmes, the Executive Board formed review panels of at least five members from the list of reviewers; at least one member of the review panel had the status of student at the time of the assessment.

6.2. Procedures for granting accreditation of joint study programmes

The Quality Assurance Act allows higher education institutions to submit applications to the Agency for accreditation of joint study programmes until 31 December 2024, if the higher education institution in the relevant field of study and degree conducts a study programme that is not a joint study programme. In 2023, higher education institutions submitted 5 such applications – 2 in the field of teaching and pedagogical sciences (at level 1), 1 in economics and management (at level 2), 1 in the field of cybernetics (at 2nd level) and 1 in food industry (at level 2). None of these proceedings were completed in 2023.

For the purposes of assessing the applications of higher education institutions for accreditation of joint study programmes, the Executive Board formed at least review panels from persons on the list of reviewers, at least one member of the review panel had the status of student at the time of the assessment.

6.3. Internal system assessment procedures

Higher education institutions were obliged to harmonize their internal system with the Quality Assurance Act and Standards for the Internal System within 24 months of their entry into force, and they were obliged to inform the Agency this without delay. All higher education institutions fulfilled these obligations within the legal deadline.

After the alignment, higher education institutions were required to ask the Agency for a first assessment of the internal system by 31 December 2022. By 31 December 2022, all 33 higher education institutions fulfilled their obligation to request the Agency for a first assessment of the internal system. After receiving the applications, the Agency checked their completeness. The Agency evaluated the applications of three higher education institutions as incomplete and called on the schools to supplement the documents for the given applications. All three schools completed their applications within the deadline. With the subsequent payment of the fee for the assessment of the internal system, in accordance with the approved schedule of fees, proceedings began at all 33 higher education institutions. One internal system assessment procedure was launched at the end of 2022, all others started in 2023.

For the purpose of assessing the request of higher education institutions for the assessment of the internal system and its implementation, the Executive Board formed at least five review panels from the persons listed on the list of reviewers according to the

structure of the higher education institution, the number of study fields and programmes. Several review panels had more than 20 members, with the largest review panel having up to 62 members. Each review panel had a chairman, other members included experts in the internal system, experts in the field of study (at least one per field in which the higher education institution conducts study programmes), practice representatives and student representatives. The number of experts per field, the number of practice representatives and the number of members with student status depended on the size of the higher education institution assessed.

At the end of 2023, the internal system assessment and implementation procedures were still ongoing. The first decisions of the Executive Board were planned for February 2024.

6.4. Requests for prior approval to modify a new study programme

In the event that the higher education institution is not entitled to modify the relevant study programme and intends to modify it, it is obliged to ask the Agency for approval for its modification, pursuant to § 30 par. 9 of the Quality Assurance Act.

In the request for prior approval, the higher education institution briefly states the characteristics of the study programme modification pursuant to § 2 letter h) of the Quality Assurance Act:

- addition or deletion of compulsory objects or compulsory optional subjects;
- a change in the conditions for proper completion of studies; or
- modification of the information sheet of a compulsory subject or a compulsory optional subject, except
 1. teacher updates,
 2. recommended literature and
 3. type, scope and methods of educational activities

and the expected impact of the study programme modification on meeting the related standards for the study programme.

In 2023, higher education institutions submitted 8 requests to the Agency for granting prior approval to modify the study programme. Based on the prior approval of the Agency, higher education institutions may make adjustments to the relevant study programme. However, granting the Agency's approval does not mean confirmation of compliance of the mentioned study programmes with the standards for the study programme. Referring to the relevant provisions of the Quality Assurance Act and standards for the study programme, the university was obliged to harmonize the study programmes with the standards for the study programme by 1 September 2022.

7. THE WORK OF THE BOARD OF APPEAL

In 2023, the Board of Appeal had one meeting. On 10.07.2023, it evaluated the objections of the Pan-European University in Bratislava against the decision on the amount of the fee for applying for the assessment of the internal quality assurance system of higher education as prematurely submitted. The request for payment of the fee does not have the nature of any decision, and therefore the Board of Appeal could not examine the objections filed.

On 29.7.2023, the activity of the Board of Appeal was fundamentally affected by the death of its chairman, prof. Ing. Jozef Mihok, PhD. Since then, the Board of Appeal has had

only four members. The meeting of the Board of Appeal was called for 18.10.2023, at which the objections of the University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy in Košice were planned to be discussed in two proceedings. The meeting was cancelled due to the absence of the required number of members of the Board of Appeal, which is stipulated in § 9 par. 2 of the Quality Assurance Act to five members and two alternates.

At the beginning of August 2023, the agency asked the ministry to resolve this situation, which, however, did not change by the end of 2023.

8. THEMATIC REPORTS OF THE AGENCY

In 2023, the Agency developed and published two thematic reports. Both were approved at the meeting of the Executive Board on 14.12.2023.

The first was the Thematic Report *First Analysis of Higher Education's Internal Assessment Reports on the Implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System for Higher Education*. It provides an initial summary view of the higher education institutions' internal evaluation reports (self-assessment reports) submitted for applications for the first assessment of the internal system. These reports were supposed to be one of the key communication tools to ensure that the structures and processes for quality assurance in higher education established at the school function optimally, are monitored and create space and conditions for their improvement. An analytical view of the internal evaluation reports of higher education institutions was processed mainly on the basis of their structure and content, in relation to the Agency's manual for their processing and in relation to the general characteristics usual for self-assessment reports. The report does not avoid critical discursive analysis in order to provide a summarizing evaluation view of all internal evaluation reports submitted by higher education institutions. Such a comprehensive view made it possible to generalise some of their common characteristics and indicate possible room for improvement of this important part of the external evaluation of quality assurance of higher education.

The second publication was a *Thematic Report on the initial findings of a survey of students' views on the quality of education in doctoral studies*. The aim of the survey, supported by the ministry, was to find out the perception of the quality of education by students at the 3rd level of higher education in the Slovak Republic. In accordance with the principles of quality assurance in Europe, it was not only a matter of finding out their views on the fulfillment of educational goals, but also about the experience of doctoral students and graduates of doctoral studies with the education itself. The thematic report delivers the first results on the perception of the quality of the doctoral studies provided from the student perspective, the evaluation of answers to closed questions and, in some cases, in the second-level sorting. Once all replies have been fully processed, the Agency will draw up and publish a summary report with further sorting and processing of open questions replies, i.e. freely formulated answers.

Both of these thematic reports were prepared by the Agency in accordance with the provisions of Article 3.4 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and in accordance with § 4 par. 2 letter g) point 2 of the Quality Assurance Act and are the fulfilment of the role of the Plan of Thematic Analyses and Reports for 2022-2025, as amended, and are published on the Agency's website.

9. COOPERATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Even in 2023, the Agency paid a lot of attention to partnership and cooperation with stakeholders. The key areas of cooperation related mainly to the Agency's activities in connection with its assessment process for ENQA and EQAR membership and, in this connection with the visit of ENQA reviewers to the Agency's seat in March 2023. On this occasion, the cooperation was also the subject of an external assessment, and all stakeholders had the opportunity to evaluate it.

The Agency has strong relations with stakeholders, in particular with the ministry, especially in the field of fulfilling the tasks from the renewal plan and specification of new functionalities of the registers of study fields and study programmes, which are implemented in the ministry's management.

The agency's cooperation with stakeholders representing higher education institutions - the Slovak Rector's Conference, the Council of Universities and the Student Council for Higher Education - was also important. Agency's representatives were regular guests at meetings and conferences organised by the above-mentioned representations, which deepened the discussion and cooperation on problem solving. In 2023, two members of the Executive Board were also nominated by the Council of Universities and the Student Council for Higher Education.

Employers, either directly or through their representative associations, entered into discussions with the Agency in specific areas related to quality assurance in higher education. On 28 February 2023, the Agency held a meeting with representatives of the Alliance of Sectoral Councils and Employers' Organisations regarding the upcoming higher education institutions' accreditations. The aim of the meeting was mainly to exchange information on cooperation with higher education institutions. The subject of employers' interest was not only the prepared accreditation mechanisms, review panel structure or professional study programmes, but mainly the issues of employability of graduates. The Agency was also interested in employers' real experience from cooperation with higher education institutions and their meaningful involvement within the structures of internal systems at individual higher education institutions.

10. INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND INTERNATIONALISATION OF SAAHE

In the area of internationalisation and anchoring of the Agency in international coordinates, 2023 was exceptionally important, in particular in the context of the Agency's ambitions for international anchoring and the recognition of its quality assurance practices in higher education.

10.1. Registration of SAAHE in the EQAR register and membership in ENQA

The agency's priorities in the international field include achieving membership in ENQA and registration in the EQAR register. These tasks are also contained in the Quality Assurance Act, but they have become significant management priorities since its inception. In 2023, the Agency successfully completed the external assessment by ENQA, which began in 2022 with the development of a self-assessment report, continued with a visit of the ENQA Panel of Experts at the Agency's seat on 29.-30. March 2023 and resulted in the publication of the

evaluation report. The positive evaluation was subsequently attached to the Agency's application for registration in the EQAR register. The Agency received a positive decision on 15 December 2023 and subsequently applied for full ENQA membership, which is expected in early 2024.

10.2. Registration of SAAHE in WFME organisation

In order to increase the international prestige of the Agency and thus also the prestige of accredited higher education institutions (especially their medical faculties), SAAHE decided to be recognised and registered in the database of the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). It is a non-governmental global organisation whose mandate includes, among other things, the standardisation of medical education in a global context. As part of its activities, the organisation evaluates (assesses) the accreditation agencies that apply for it (WFME Recognition Programme) and assigns recognition status to those meeting the WFME standards in the field of medical education. This status as an accreditation agency (recognition) will be a condition for recognition of undergraduate medical studies in some countries (USA, Canada) from 2024.

Based on suggestions from the environment of medical faculties, the Executive Board of SAAHE decided at its meeting on 15.6.2023 to take the necessary steps towards its registration and recognition by WFME organisation. This activity was also supported by the Ministry. The first step was to prepare and submit a preliminary application (Eligibility Application), which was sent on 28 June 2023. Soon, the WFME officially confirmed SAAHE's eligibility to apply for Recognition Status.

Immediately after the eligibility was confirmed, work began on the complete application and on the specification of a specific on-site visit where WFME assessors would be present to monitor the procedures, rules and processes of SAAHE in a specific assessment. For this purpose, the Jessenius Faculty of Medicine of the Comenius University in Bratislava was selected and on 29 November 2023, together with the SAAHE review panel, a group of expert reviewers from WFME also participated.

The next stage will be the monitoring of the process of drafting the evaluation report and, in particular, the decision-making process of the Executive Board on the compliance of the internal system with the standards at Comenius University and on the compliance of the study field of general medicine with the standards for the study programme. We anticipate a final decision on the inclusion of SAAHE in the WFME database in the second half of 2024.

10.3. V4QA Forum

In 2023, the Agency was also an active member of the V4QA Platform – Forum for Quality Assurance of Higher Education in Visegrad Group (V4) countries. The main goals of the Forum are the regular exchange of experience in the field of quality assurance, the development of an international network of experts and the exchange of assessors and employees of agencies of the V4 countries.

From 11 to 12 October 2023, the V4QA Forum was held in Prague, hosted by the Czech accreditation organisation – National Accreditation Office for Higher Education (NÁÚ). In addition to the exchange of experience in the field of quality assurance in higher education, other topics included planned changes and innovations in accreditation and evaluation processes, as well as future tasks and challenges related to quality assurance in higher education.

10.4. Other international activities

Within European organisations, the Agency has been a member of ENAI (European Network for Academic Integrity) since its inception. Its goal is to transfer European principles and experience with the development of academic integrity to the higher education environment in the Slovak Republic. In 2023, the focus was mainly on solving problems in cases of improper behaviour and unethical practices in research and education.

The Agency also regularly participates in the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF), which took place in 2023 on 23.- 25. November in Aveiro, Portugal. The main topics were internationalisation in a changing world and new trends and challenges in the field quality assurance.

In order to make a list of legal entities pursuant to § 4 par. 2 letter c) point 2 of the Quality Assurance Act, whose evaluation reports are automatically recognised by the Agency for the purposes of assessing the compliance of the internal system and its implementation with the standards for the internal system, agreements (memorandums) were signed with the agencies: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres). The Executive Board subsequently decided to include these organisations in the list according to § 4 par. 2 letter c) point 2 of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Act.

11. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE AGENCY'S ACTIVITIES

Already in 2022, the Agency formulated its strategic goals until 2027 in the adopted SAAHE Development Strategy for the years 2022-2027, which defined the basic principles it upholds in fulfilling its mission. This is the accreditation activity itself, international cooperation and the enhancement of quality culture. Strategic goals in these three areas and their concretization in the annual plans are evaluated annually by the Agency on the basis of its internal quality assurance system for SAAHE activities. Such an evaluation was also carried out for 2023.

In terms of the evaluation of the internal quality assurance system, 2023 was exceptional for the Agency. Once every five years, the Agency undergoes an external evaluation by ENQA and prepares a self-assessment report in accordance with the guidelines and in accordance with the requirements of the ESG. This cycle started for the first time in 2022, in which the Agency carried out the first self-assessment of its activities and produced the first self-assessment report. The process continued with the nomination of a four-member Expert Panel by ENQA, which reviewed the Agency's processes with an on-site visit on 29.-30. March 2023. During this visit, the Panel of Experts conducted 15 scheduled discussions with representatives of the Agency and all representatives of stakeholders. The external assessment process was completed with the elaboration and validation of the evaluation report – ENQA External Review Report, published in September 2023.

The ENQA evaluation report resulted in a positive evaluation, which was subsequently presented as the basis for a request for a positive decision by the Registration Commission on the registration of the Agency in EQAR on 15 December 2023. As of this date, the Agency's decisions for individual higher education institutions will also be published in the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR). Following the successful registration in EQAR, the Agency subsequently applied for full ENQA membership, which is expected in early 2024.

Part of the ENQA evaluation report, which is published on the SAAHE website, were also recommendations and proposals for further improvement measures which the Agency will incorporate into its work plan for the next period.

12. FINANCING AND MANAGEMENT OF THE AGENCY

The method of financing the Agency is defined in § 19 par. (1) – (5) of the Quality Assurance Act. Pursuant to its § 20 par. (1) – (8), the Agency has a clearly defined form of management. Financial resources are kept in accounts with the state treasury, while each source of income is in a separate account and accounting is kept in accordance with Act No. 431/2002 Coll. on accounting as amended.

In the course of 2023, the Agency managed, according to the income and expenditure budget, which was approved by the Executive Board by resolution No. 54/19 at its meeting on 16 February 2023 and updated with resolution No. 66/4 on 30 November 2023.

12.1. Financial statements for 2023

The Agency's financial statements were drawn up in accordance with the relevant regulations and approved by the Executive Board at its meeting on 29 February 2024. The financial statements also include the statement of the Agency's auditor, Ing. Ivan Hargaš, who in his statement dated January 30, 2024 stated that: *"The financial statements provide a true and fair picture of the economic and financial situation of the independent public institution of SAAHE as of 31 December 2023, and the results of its management for the year ending on that date are in accordance with the Accounting Act No. 431/2002 Coll., as amended."*

In his comments, Ing. Ivan Hargaš further states:

"Based on the verification of the budget management captured in the financial statements, I conclude that I have not identified significant facts that would question the results reported."

The financial statements for the year 2023 were also made available for comments by the newly appointed auditor Ing. Zora Dobříková, who was appointed to this position from 1 February 2024 onwards. Her statement on the financial statements of SAAVŠ for the year 2023 in the form of an amendment was part of the complete financial statements submitted to the Executive Board of the Agency for approval. In her statement dated 21.2.2024, Ing. Zora Dobříková stated:

"As a newly appointed auditor of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, I studied the documents submitted by Ing. Ivan Hargaš, namely the statement on the financial statements for 2023 of the non-profit accounting unit – the independent public institution of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education established under § 4 par. 1 of Act No. 269/2018 on Quality Assurance of Higher Education and amending Act No. 343/2015 on public procurement dated 11. 9. 2018, which contains the balance sheet as of 31 December 2023, the profit and loss statement for the year ending on the said date and notes containing a summary of significant accounting principles and accounting methods as well as other explanatory information. On the basis of the above, I can state that the statement on the Agency's draft financial statements was prepared within the prescribed deadline and in the appropriate quality, and therefore I recommend the Executive Board to approve the Agency's financial statements for 2023."

12.2. Settlement with the state budget

The source of the Agency's income in 2023 was earmarked funds from the state budget, provided through the ministry's budget, in accordance with § 19 par. 5 of the Quality Assurance Act for the material and financial security of the Agency's activities hereinafter referred to as "the purpose"), subject to the fulfillment of the conditions specified in the concluded Agreement on the provision of financial resources No. 0086/2023, as amended by amendment No 1. The total amount of funds provided was EUR 1 218 967,- for current expenditure.

Funds were provided to the Agency in terms of the cited contract in three instalments as follows:

- first instalment of EUR 547 518,50 in the form of current expenditure;
- second instalment of EUR 547 518,50 in the form of current expenditure; and
- third instalment of EUR 123 930,00 based on the signed amendment to the contract.

Funds provided to SAAHE in 2023	1. and 2. instalment	Adjustment of the budget – amendment No. 1	Together
Total expenditure (600 + 700)	EUR 1 095 037,00	EUR 123 930,00	EUR 1 218 967,00
Current expenditure (600)	EUR 1 095 037,00	EUR 123 930,00	EUR 1 218 967,00
Wages, salaries, service income and other settlements (610)	EUR 621 000,00	EUR 39 889,00	EUR 660 889,00
Insurance premiums and contribution to insurance companies (620)	EUR 217 039,50	EUR 14 041,00	EUR 231 080,50
Goods and services (630), including	EUR 250 240,00	EUR 5 000,00	EUR 255 240,00
Regular transfers (640), including	EUR 6 757,50	EUR 65 000,00	EUR 71 757,50
Capital expenditure (700)	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00
Procurement of capital assets (710)	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00

The funds were purposefully divided between individual items and sub-items of the economic classification and could be used for:

- a) wage expenditure (610), insurance premiums and contributions to insurance companies (620),
- b) other expenditure under the category of goods and services (630);
- c) current transfers (640), such as membership fees to international organisations.

The Agency's approved budget for 2023, as amended by individual items and sub-items, can be found in the table below:

Funds provided to SAAHE in 2023	Approved budget	Modified in Appendix 1
Total expenditure (600 + 700)	EUR 1 095 037,00	EUR 1 218 967,00
Current expenditure (600)	EUR 1 095 037,00	EUR 1 218 967,00
Wages, salaries, service income and other settlements (610)	EUR 621 000,00	EUR 638 804,25

Insurance premiums and contribution to insurance companies (620)	EUR 220 839,50	EUR 235 180,50
Goods and services (630), including	EUR 246 400,00	EUR 270 372,02
631 Travel refunds	EUR 5 500,00	EUR 20 984,07
632 Energy, water and communications	EUR 21 000,00	EUR 16 657,13
633 Material	EUR 13 000,00	EUR 22 944,71
634 Transportation	EUR 0.00	EUR 1 471,30
635 Routine and Standard Maintenance	EUR 0.00	EUR 1 690,56
636 Rent for rent	EUR 51 500,00	EUR 49 813,53
637 Services, including	EUR 155 400,00	EUR 156 810,72
637027 Remuneration of employees outside employment	EUR 50 000,00	EUR 39 888,52
637200 Other services	EUR 105 400,00	EUR 116 922,20
Current transfers (640), including	EUR 6 797,50	EUR 74 610,23
649 Transfers abroad	EUR 6 000,00	EUR 71 000,00
640 Sick leave + membership	EUR 797,50	EUR 3 610,23
Capital expenditure (700)	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00
Procurement of capital assets (710), including	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00
711 Purchase of land and intangible assets (software, licences)	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00
713 Purchase of machinery, apparatus, equipment, techniques and tools	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00
714 Purchase of means of transport of all kinds	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00

For 2023, the Agency did not have capital funds allocated, nor did it have funds allocated for capital expenditures from previous periods.

12.2.1. Utilization of budget funds for the year 2023 until 31. 12. 2023

The total absorption of funds in 2023 amounted to 88.18 %, totaling EUR 1 074 941,49. Current expenditure was implemented, broken down as follows:

Funds provided in 2023 – drawn in 2023	Utilization
Total expenditure (600 + 700)	EUR 1 074 941,49
Current expenditure (600)	EUR 1 074 941,49
Wages, salaries, service income and other personal settlements (610)	EUR 560 365,93
Insurance premiums and contribution to insurance companies (620)	EUR 199 829,72
Goods and services (630), including	EUR 251 211,47
631 Travel refunds	EUR 18 139,62
632 Energy, water and communications	EUR 16 657,13
633 Material	EUR 22 745,71
634 Transportation	EUR 1 471,30
635 Routine and Standard Maintenance	EUR 1 690,56

636 Rent for rent	EUR 49 813,53
637 Services, including	EUR 140 693,62
637027 Remuneration of employees outside employment	EUR 24 241,00
637200 Other services	EUR 116 452,62
Current transfers (640), including	EUR 63 534,37
642015 For sickness benefits	EUR 3 352,37
649003 International organisations	EUR 60 182,00
Capital expenditure (700)	EUR 0.00
Procurement of capital assets (710), including	EUR 0.00
711 Purchase of land and intangible assets (software, licences)	EUR 0.00
713 Purchase of machinery, apparatus, equipment, techniques and tools	EUR 0.00
714 Purchase of means of transport of all kinds	EUR 0.00

610 – Wages, salaries, service income and other personal expenses (OPE)

620 – Insurance premiums and contribution to insurance companies

637027 – Remuneration of non-employment employees

Within the mentioned items, funds were drawn for salaries and contributions to insurance companies, for employees in employment and for employees outside of employment.

631 – Travel refunds

In 2023, employees made business trips to:

- ENQA Leadership Development Programme (Portugal, Norway, Belgium);
- EQAF (Portugal - Aveiro),
- ENQA General Forum (Ireland - Dublin),
- Meeting of V4 Accreditation Agencies (Czech Republic – Prague)
- External meeting of the SAAHE Executive Board (Slovakia – Modra-Piesok)

632 – Energy, Water and Communications

Energy expenditure, telecommunications fees, internet connection and postal services.

633 – Material

Purchase of equipment for new employees, purchase of ordinary consumables (office and hygiene supplies, cleaning and disinfectants, etc.), interior equipment, purchase of computer and telecommunications equipment for employees.

634 – Transportation

Costs related to the use of a company motor vehicle for employees' business trips

636 – Rent for rent

Payment for rent of premises and other services associated with the rental of premises.

637200 – Other services

Personnel expenses – meal vouchers, social fund creation, employee training expenses, etc. Other services ensuring the operation of the Agency, such as software services, the Agency's website, work safety and GDPR, professional PR and cybersecurity consulting services, translations and various fees.

640 – Current transfers

Salary compensation for the first 10 days of sick leave of the Agency's staff and payment of membership fees: ENQA, European Network for Academic Integrity fee and

subscription fee and registration fee to the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) database.

700 – Capital expenditure

Capital funds were not provided to the Agency in 2023 and the capital from previous periods was fully settled.

Budgetary funds, which were earmarked by the Ministry, were provided and implemented in the following breakdown:

a) EUR 30 000,- for conducting a survey among PhD students.

The Agency carried out a questionnaire survey of the opinions and satisfaction of PhD students. The expenditure for its implementation were used to cover the salary of an employee of the Agency's Analytical Activities Department and the related contributions to insurance companies amounting to a real amount of EUR 35 537,65.

b) EUR 65 000 for registration of the Agency in the World Federation for Medical Education database.

In 2023, the Agency applied for recognition of its accreditation procedures and registration in the WFME database. The registration fee was \$60 000 (EUR 56 382,-). As part of the Agency's assessment, the WFME group of expert reviewers joined the review panel of the Executive Board as part of the on-site visit to the Jessenius Medical Faculty of Comenius University in Martin. To ensure the smooth running of the on-site assessment, the services of an interpreter, rental of interpreting equipment, transport and reimbursement of travel expenses of the WFME reviewers were financed, which follows from the rules and procedures of the WFME. The total expenditure in category 637 amounted to EUR 19 553,77. Expenditures exceeding the special-purpose subsidy were covered by the Agency from its own resources (over and above the provided subsidy).

c) EUR 28 930,- for the adjustment of the salaries and levies of the Agency's bodies pursuant to § 17 of the Quality Assurance Act. Every year, the Agency is obliged to adjust the salaries of the members of the Agency's bodies according to the increase in the average monthly salary in the national economy of the Slovak Republic determined by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic for the previous calendar year. The special-purpose subsidy was fully used for that purpose.

Of the total volume provided for 2023, EUR 144 025,51 of the current expenditure was not used. These funds were transferred pursuant to the Budgetary Regulations Act to be used until the end of March 2024. They will be used as a priority for the payment of salaries of employees in a permanent employment relationship and employees on a work performance agreement and an agreement on work activities and payment of invoices for the month of December 2023 due in 2024.

12.2.2. Drawing up of budget funds in 2022

At the beginning of 2023, the agency had the balance of current funds from 2022 in the amount of EUR 99,554.13. Current funds were used up in the first quarter of 2023 pursuant to the contract with the Ministry.

The structure of the 2022 funds and their use is in the following table:

Budgetary funds of 2022 moved to be drawn up in 1Q 2023	Budgetary structure	Utilization
Current expenditure (600)	EUR 99 554,29	EUR 99 554,29
<i>Wages, salaries, service income and other personal settlements (610)</i>	EUR 75 763,48	EUR 48 963,47
<i>Insurance premiums and contribution to insurance companies (620)</i>	EUR 13 444,74	EUR 18 353,89
<i>Goods and Services (630)</i>	EUR 7 662,27	EUR 28 770,93
<i>Current transfers (640), including</i>	EUR 2 683,80	EUR 3 466,00
Capital expenditure (700)	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00
Total expenditure (600 + 700)	EUR 99 554,29	EUR 99 554,29

610 – Wages, salaries, service income and other personal expenses (OPE)

Payment of employee wages for the month of December 2022, due in the month of January 2023.

620 – Insurance premiums and contribution to insurance companies

Payment of insurance premiums related to item 610 – wages, salaries, service income and OPEs.

630 – Goods and services

Goods and services related to the operation of the Agency.

632 – Energy, Water and Communications

Energy expenditure, telecommunications fees, internet connection and postal services.

633 – Material

Purchase of common consumables (office and hygiene supplies, cleaning and disinfectants, etc.).

636 – Rent for rent

Payment for rent of premises and other services associated with the rental of premises.
637200 – Other services

Personnel expenditure – meal vouchers, social fund creation (for December 2022), employee training planned for the end of 2022 and implemented in the first quarter of 2023 and other services providing the Agency’s normal operation.

12.3. Management with own funds

The Agency’s own funds are made up of fees for operations based on the rates in the schedule of fees pursuant to § 21 par. 1 letters a) and b) of the Quality Assurance Act and the scope of the Agency’s actions related to a particular request of a party to the proceedings. Fee rates are taken into account according to § 19 par. 4 of the Act anticipated costs associated with the actions of the agency. Their amount is determined by the expected workload of the proceeding and the estimated cost of the work of the members of the review panel according to the type and scope of the proceeding.

The income of 2023 consisted mainly of the higher education institutions’ fees for assessing their internal system pursuant to the schedule of fees for a total amount of EUR 2 535 376,00. The total amount of spent own funds was EUR 444 927,69. The time discrepancy between the collected funds and the expenditure of the current year (expenses of future periods) is mainly caused by the payment of members of review panels only after the decision has been taken by the Executive Board and will mainly be implemented only in 2024. The Agency must also foresee future expenditure as part of the supervision of the compliance with the standards.

The balance of own funds in 2023 is in the following table:

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
Total income	EUR 2 535 376,00	Total expenditure (600 + 700)	EUR 444 927,69
Fees	EUR 2 535 376,00	Current expenditure (600)	EUR 444 927,69
		Wages, salaries, service income and other persons. (610)	EUR 213 403,68
		Insurance premiums and contribution to insurance companies (620)	EUR 78 582,51
		Goods and Services (63X)	EUR 152 941,50
		Current transfers (640)	EUR 0.00
Expenditure of future periods			EUR 2 090 448,31

610 – Wages, salaries, service income and other personal expenses (OPE)

The agency partially covered the costs of salaries of employees who directly participated in the review panel's activities in the process of assessing the higher education institution's internal system.

620 – Insurance premiums and contribution to insurance companies

Economic classification item directly related to item 610 Wages, salaries, service income and OPEs.

631 – Travel refunds

Travel allowances to the Agency's employees for business trips connected with on-site assessments of the higher education institution, in the capacity of coordinators with members of the working groups of the Agency's Executive Board.

633 – Representation

Provision of meals at the meeting of chairs of review panels

637 – Services, including

637001 – Expenditure for the external meeting with the chairs of the review panels

637004 – General services

Accommodation of employees during the assessment of the internal system of higher education institutions within the territory of the Slovak Republic.

637007 – Travel refunds

Reimbursements for transport and accommodation for members of the review panels of the Executive Board of the Agency, linked to the on-site assessment of the higher education institution.

637011 – Rewards

Funds used for the payment of remuneration to members of the review panels on the basis of concluded mandate contracts for assessment activities and the preparation of an evaluation report in accordance with the internal rules of the Directive on the remuneration of members of the Executive Board's review panels.

12.4. Condition and movement of property

12.4.1. Long-term intangible assets

Long-term intangible assets acquired by the Agency are valued at acquisition price less depreciation and accumulated impairment losses. The acquisition price includes all costs directly attributed to the acquired property. Where the use of fixed intangible assets is determined by contract, the term of use shall be determined according to the validity of the contract. In other cases, the provisions of the Income Tax Act, as amended, shall be applied accordingly.

The Agency has included licenses for information systems and software in the register of intangible assets. Its overall movement is shown the following table:

Intangible assets			
	Software	Appreciable rights	Together
Status as of 1. 1. 2023	17 313,08	2 760,00	20 073,08
additions			
losses			
transfers			
Status as of 31. 12. 2023	17 313,08	2 760,00	20 073,08
Corrections as of 1. 1. 2023	11 638,70	1 288,00	12 926,70
additions	1 173,96	552,00	1 725,96

losses			
Corrections as of 31. 12. 2023	12 812,66	1 840,00	14 652,66

Adjustments as of 1. 1. 2023			
additions			
losses			
Adjustments as of 31. 12. 2023			

Residual value as of 1. 1. 2023	5 674,38	1 472,00	7146,38
Residual value as of 31. 12. 2023	4 500,42	920,00	5420,42

12.4.2. Long-term tangible assets

Long-term tangible assets are valued at acquisition price less depreciation and accumulated impairment losses. The acquisition price includes all costs directly attributed to the acquired property. The Agency shall classify separate movable items and sets of separately movable items, the entry price of which is less than EUR 1700 and operational and technical functions longer than one year, as small tangible assets. The provisions of the Income Tax Act, as amended, apply to the depreciation of long-term tangible assets.

In the register of tangible property, the Agency includes mainly computers, notebooks, audio-visual equipment and copying machines. In the register of small tangible assets, the Agency registers some laptops and accessories. Movements of tangible assets of the Agency in 2023 are summarised in the table below:

Tangible assets				
	Separate chattels and sets of chattels	Means of transport	Tiny and other long- term tangible assets	Together
Status as of 1. 1. 2023	28 438,66	25 190,00	4 684,16	58 312,82
additions				
losses			2 437,20	2437,20
transfers				
Status as of 31. 12. 2023	28 438,66	25 190,00	2 246,96	55 875,62

Corrections as of 1. 1. 2023	8 132,21	524,79	1 866,28	10 523,28
additions	6 642,00	6 297,48	1 881,88	14 821,36
losses			2 437,20	2 437,20
Corrections as of 31. 12. 2023	14 774,21	6 822,27	1 310,96	22 907,44

Adjustments as of 1. 1. 2023				
additions				
losses				
Adjustments as of 31. 12. 2023				

Residual value as of 1. 1. 2023	20 306,45	24 665,21	2 817,88	47 789,54
Residual value as of 31. 12. 2023	13 664,45	18 367,73	936,00	32 968,18

13. REPORT OF THE AUDITOR

As an auditor – an Agency body, I prepared a statement to the attached financial statements of the non-profit accounting unit – an independent public institution of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education established pursuant to § 4 par. 1 of Act No. 269/2018 Coll. on Quality Assurance of Higher Education and amending Act No. 343/2015 Coll. on public procurement dated 11. 9. 2018, which contains the balance sheet as of 31 December 2023, the profit and loss statement for the year ending on that date and the notes containing a summary of significant accounting policies and accounting methods as well as other explanatory information.

13.1. Responsibility of the SAAHE Auditor

My responsibility as an auditor at SAAHE appointed according to § 10 par. 1 of Act No. 269/2018 Coll., was to express, in accordance with § 10 par. 2 letter c), an opinion on the financial statements in question based on an inspection – verification.

According to those standards, I should have followed the ethical requirements, planned and performed the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements were free from material misstatement.

The verification involves carrying out procedures to obtain evidence of the amounts and data reported in the financial statements.

The verification also includes the assessment of SAAHE's budget management resulting from Act No. 523/2004 on the budget rules of public administration applicable in the Slovak Republic for public institutions, as amended.

The procedures chosen depended on the auditor's judgement, including an evaluation of the risks of material misstatement in the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error. When assessing this risk, as an auditor, I took into account the internal controls relevant to the

assessment of the accounting unit's financial statements in order to provide a true and fair picture of SAAHE's management in 2023.

The verification further includes an evaluation of the appropriateness of the used accounting principles and accounting methods and the adequacy of accounting estimates made by the statutory body, as well as an evaluation of the presentation of the financial statements as a whole. I am convinced that the evidence of verification that I have obtained provide a sufficient and appropriate basis for my opinion after verification.

13.2. Responsibility of the SAAHE statutory body for the financial statements

The Chairman of the Executive Board of SAAHE appointed according to § 6 of Act No. 269/2018 Coll. is pursuant to § 20 par. 6 of Act No. 269/2018 Coll. responsible for the purposeful and efficient use of funds and their settlement with the state budget and for the management of the Agency's assets. At the same time, he is responsible for preparing financial statements which give a true and fair view in accordance with the Accounting Act No. 431/2002 Coll., as amended, and for internal controls – basic financial controls that the statutory body considers necessary for the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

The Chairman of the Executive Board of the Agency is responsible for compliance with the rules of budgetary management and financing according to Act No. 523/2004 Coll. on the budgetary rules of public administration and on the amendment and addition of certain acts as amended.

13.3. Opinion of the Auditor

In my opinion, the financial statements give a true and fair picture of the economic and financial situation of the independent public institution of SAAHE as of 31 December 2023 and the results of its management for the year ending, as of that date, are in accordance with the Accounting Act No. 431/2002, as amended.

Based on the budgetary management verifications recorded in the Agency's financial statements, I state that I have not identified significant facts that would question the results reported.

30 January 2024

Ing. Ivan Hargaš
Auditor

The financial statements for 2023 were also made available for comment by the newly appointed auditor Ing. Zora Dobříková, who was appointed to the position of SAAHE auditor from 1.2.2024. Her statement on the financial statements of SAAHE for 2023 in the form of an amendment was part of the complete financial statements submitted to the Executive Board of the Agency for approval. In her statement dated 21.2.2024, Zora Dobříková stated:

“As a newly appointed auditor of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, I studied the documents submitted by Ing. Ivan Hargaš, namely the statement on the financial statements for 2023 of the non-profit accounting unit – the independent public institution of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education established according to § 4 par. 1 of Act No. 269/2018 Coll. on Quality Assurance of Higher Education and amending Act No. 343/2015 Coll. on public procurement dated 11. 9. 2018, containing the balance sheet as of 31 December 2023, the profit and loss statement for the year ending on that date and notes with a summary

of significant accounting principles and accounting methods, as well as other explanatory information.”

21 February 2024

Ing. Zora Dobříková
Auditor

14. CONCLUSION

The submitted annual report summarises an overview of the activities carried out by the Agency in 2023 and other activities directly related to the performance of its mandate. It mainly recapitulates activities in the area of the main activity, namely proceedings on the assessment of the internal system and its implementation with standards at all higher education institutions.

The report also reflects significant events of SAAHE in the field of internationalisation. The Agency was registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) in December 2023 and subsequently applied for full ENQA membership, which is expected in early 2024. In order to further increase the international prestige of the Agency and thus the prestige of accredited higher education institutions, the Agency, supported by the Ministry, decided on recognition and registration in the database of the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME). Major steps leading to registration, including a visit by WFME expert reviewers, took place in 2023.

As part of its internal activities, the Agency prepared two thematic reports, issued two new ones and amended 16 internal directives related mainly the economy and management. It also modified and developed its information system and procedures with regard to reducing administrative burden, increasing user comfort and cyber security.

A substantial part of the report is devoted to the economy, the analysis of the financial statements and the management of the Agency's state budget resources as well as its own resources. It also includes the state and movement of assets, an analysis of financial flows and a recapitulation of settlements with the state budget.

The submitted *Annual Activity and Economy Report of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education 2023* is a fulfillment of § 4 par. 2 letter g) point 3 of the Quality Assurance Act and contains all data pursuant to § 20 par. 8 of this Act.

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Bratislava, May 2024

The auditor of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, Ing. Zora Dobříková, commented on the Annual Activity and Economy Report of SAAHE for 2023. The Annual Activity and Economy Report of the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education 2023 was approved by its Executive Board on 16.5.2024.

The report is posted on the SAAHE website www.saavs.sk