The differences between the QA procedure proposed by the SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (SQAA), University of Ljubljana (UL), and the QA procedure proposed by MusiQuE

Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, good morning!

In my contribution, which is a team work done together with my colleague from the International Office, Nina Podlipnik, I am going to speak about the differences and similarities, advantages and disadvantages between three types of QA - SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, University of Ljubljana and MusiQuE. I will underline the specific advantages compared to the previously mentioned institutions the QA led by MusiQuE has.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT determines the Slovenian high education legal frame, which also defines SLOVENIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION duties. The Agency ensures the functioning of the quality assurance system in higher education and post-secondary vocational education, describes procedures and criteria for external evaluations and accreditations as well as other criteria and regulations, determines the minimum standards for the appointment of higher education teachers, researchers, and higher education associates at higher education institutions, conducts external evaluations of higher education institutions and study programs, conducts initial accreditations of higher education institutions, accreditations of study programs, renewal of accreditations of higher education institutions, and accreditations of changes in higher education institutions etc. In its English version of the brochure, you can read its mission declaration: Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (SQAA) provides for comparability and international recognition of Slovenian higher education area and strives for continuous improvement of its quality. It operates with substantive and formal responsibility in an expert, professional, and independent manner and provides counselling for all stakeholders in tertiary education by the European and global development orientations. Its vision is to change the national and international higher education area by implementing processes to ensure and improve quality in higher education.

The fundamental approach to ensuring quality at the University of Ljubljana (UL) is what is called the PDCA cycle, i.e., plan-do-check-act, which constitutes a four-step method of management that covers planning, implementing the planned measures, watching over and checking the appropriateness of implementation, and taking action based on experience obtained from implementation.

UL systems of quality are therefore based on a closed feedback loop, with transparent processes of identifying objectives and priorities, planning measures and operation, implementing planned activities, and monitoring and evaluating activities and measures implemented, including an assessment of the effects, which serves as input information for a new cycle of planning.

Until now, everything seems great. Slovenia, in its frame, the University of Ljubljana, has a well-functioning and well-thought QA system that meets European values and standards. It's time for a few details.

UL consists of 23 faculties and three art academies, and it is the most prominent university in Slovenia. When I asked ChatGPT, it said it is in the first third of the largest universities in Europe.

SQAA guides the re-accreditation process at UL; it usually chooses the programs (not the faculties) that will participate in the evaluation process. For eleven years, I've taken part in the leadership of UL AM, four years as a vice dean for studies, and seven years as dean. We've passed the evaluation three times.

I forgot to mention that we have two ways of evaluation: the re-accreditation process and the so-called sample evaluation. In the last few years, whenever UL takes part in sample evaluation, one of the academy programs has been chosen to be evaluated! The evaluation committee comes from SQAA and consists of at least three members, one coming from another country (usually Croatia) and one being a student. If you are lucky, one could be from the music field.

Regarding the QA of the University of Ljubljana, it's clear that finding the common denominator of all its members is challenging. The good part of the process is that it has become more transparent over the years. Still, especially when it comes to student surveys, we cannot get the form that would give us relevant feedback because the number of students from specific fields is usually too small. And in the frame of UL, achieving the changes needed for it is tough.

It's time to ask the following question: What are the specific advantages of being evaluated by MusiQuE? Talking just about standards, we can realize that differences in the sets of standards of different mentioned institutions are relatively small. MusiQuE standards are more up-to-date and relevant and follow the EU language.

The first advantage of MusiQuE evaluation is that when you decide your institution wants to be evaluated by MusiQuE, they invite you to their MusiQuE Peer Reviewers Training. You can learn about the evaluation process from the inside.

The SER form is clear, and additional questions and suggestions for evidence allow you to think deeply about the process.

From our point of view, the most significant advantage of the MusiQuE evaluation is how the committee, which consists of international experts from the field of music, is formed. They bring very diverse experiences, most of them being leaders of their institutions. The whole process is oriented more toward peer reviewing than just evaluating. During the process, you feel supported and not just assessed.

An international perspective allows you to compare different experiences.

Subject specificity brings more supportive ideas and problem-oriented solutions. One can get institutional and personal suggestions that help the development of the institution, its staff, and all stakeholders.

Additionally, the MusiQuE accreditation encourages increased international collaboration and networking. UL AG has strengthened its relationships with other

prestigious music institutions across Europe and beyond by engaging with global peers. These collaborations offer invaluable opportunities for faculty and students, including exchanges, joint research projects, and shared artistic initiatives. Participation in such international networks, particularly in platforms like AEC (European Association of Conservatoires) and ELIA (European League of Institutes of the Arts) in the future, further enhances UL AG's visibility and influence in the global music education community. This expanded network also positions UL AG as a leading institution within the field, allowing it to attract top international talent and foster a globally-minded academic environment.

Another essential dimension of the MusiQuE accreditation is the emphasis on stakeholder engagement. The review process has highlighted the importance of maintaining strong connections with alums, industry professionals, and cultural organizations. By strengthening these ties, UL AG ensures that its educational programs remain relevant to the evolving demands of the music profession. This engagement also helps the Academy to better prepare its students for successful careers by connecting them with real-world experiences and opportunities. Alums, in particular, play a key role in mentoring current students and supporting the institution through their professional networks. By fostering these relationships, UL AG can build a vibrant and supportive community that enhances the educational experience for both current and future generations of students.

Furthermore, the MusiQuE review encourages the institution to integrate **new long-term growth and excellence strategies**. For instance, the feedback has inspired the Academy to focus more on building sustainable and structured alum networks, engaging tutors more effectively in student mentorship programs, and establishing ongoing relationships with Erasmus students after they complete their exchange programs at UL AG. These initiatives are designed to create a lasting impact, ensuring that the Academy remains a dynamic and innovative institution in the years to come.

In conclusion, the overall impact of the MusiQuE accreditation process on UL AG is profound. It has facilitated continuous quality improvement within the institution and reinforced its role in the international higher music education landscape. By fostering deeper collaborations, enhancing institutional accountability, and strengthening engagement with key stakeholders, the accreditation has positioned UL AG to thrive globally, elevating its profile and ensuring long-term success.