*The spoken word applies.*

***Prof. Dr. Andreja Kocijančič***

Dear Rector, Members of the Senate and distinguished guests,

It is a great honour to be invited to the formal sitting of the Senate upon this year’s anniversary. The University of Ljubljana is also my Alma mater, my very dear Alma mater.

Allow me to say a word or two about different aspects of quality in higher education. I spoke a lot about quality when I was still at the University, and have continued to do so since my departure from it, as I am now a part of the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

To relate to the quality of scientific research, my University is ranked relatively high, also internationally. It may be said that our University is internationally successful in scientific research. To be more precise, only some members of this University have shown success in scientific research. These are primarily members that connect with scientific and research institutes. Most researchers at these institutes are also professors at our faculties. And these researchers are by far the most successful. Let me mention medicine. Medicine contributes to the quality of scientific research at our University because it incorporates institutes that primarily deal with scientific research and attract clinical workers who give true sense to scientific research and its application.

This has led me to believe that University relations with institutes dealing with scientific research are vital. If we only keep doing what we do, we will stay where we are. Perhaps we should reconsider ways to connect the University of Ljubljana with research institutions that are here, in the centre of Slovenia. In doing so, the University should be careful and considerate; it should find a way to attract research institutions in a partnership and bring them under one roof without putting the independence of individual partners in danger. I believe that integration with research institutes would build the University’s reputation in the world, giving it a solid research character and more proven research credentials.

The quality of the University (not according to the Shanghai ranking) is most certainly expressed in the quality of teaching and through the achievement of student competences which make our graduates competitive at home and abroad. A modern university should be open outward and inward to be successful. Since introducing the Bologna reform, we have become comparable to foreign universities. Our professors and students have been given the chance to visit foreign universities. Foreigners come here and do a part of their pedagogic activity, while foreign students attend our lectures. The Bologna reform has partially internationalised the University in terms of pedagogy. However, it remains to be seen how open we really are on the outside, to other universities in Slovenia and abroad; this will be revealed in how we attract foreign professors and foreign students, and how we encourage ours to do a part of their studies abroad. Erasmus grants have become inadequate for our students. The University will have to find further funds. If we wish to be international, a share of lectures will have to be performed in English, which is understood by all foreign students. In doing so, we must be careful not to neglect or set aside our own language and culture. If internationalisation can be boasted in research, it is that much harder to accomplish in teaching. Yet the quality of teaching partly depends on internationalisation.

Like in the Bologna Process, in the words of Seneka, an incentive always comes from the outside, while findings come from the inside; however, development only occurs when both of them coincide. The incentive for the Bologna reform came from the outside, but it was not carried forward with findings from the inside and has, therefore, failed to live up to the expectations. We were afraid to take big steps and encroach upon the very essence of teaching. Furthermore, there is the Title Act, which prolonged studies instead of shortening them, which is another requirement of the Bologna reform. The Bologna reform is not to be blamed; we are to blame because we saw and acted on the Bologna reform each in our own way, largely with the misguided priority that none of the professors would be left without their subject. The Bologna reform can and must come to life primarily through the culture of quality and responsibility, i.e. responsibility to students, not professors.

Recently, much has been said about ethics, which is and must affect, to an increasingly large extent, quality in higher education. Ethical relations require upbringing in the key periods of personality development. Education on ethics must also continue at the level of higher education, where more focus is placed on professional ethics and ethics in scientific research – beyond mere abstraction or theory. This is why every university should set up an Ethics course and appoint an ethics committee, which has already been done by this University. A code of ethics should be drawn up and abided by. Every person with higher education should be able to make an ethical judgement and take an ethical stand.

The Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education deals with all aspects of quality. It assesses the scientific research and teaching programme. The most difficult cases involve deviations from ethics in higher education. The Higher Education Act fails to mention ethics, and the same goes for our Accreditation Criteria. Hence, it is difficult to do the right and proper thing. Nevertheless, ethics must be embedded in every higher education student and teacher.

Everyday work at the Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education involves granting accreditations to institutions and first programmes. It so happens that an application for accreditation involves only contracted teachers without involving a single permanently employed teacher. And yet there is no obstacle in the Higher Education Act or the Accreditation Criteria, which exist merely as executive regulations, to establishing a school without full-time teachers. How can we then create a culture of quality if teachers merely come, give a lecture and leave? Such institutions cannot provide a culture of quality in higher education.

Every higher education institution must also be re-accredited. The Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education must take sufficient time to examine the operations of an institution, also focusing on selected, mostly problematic, programmes. It would be only right if all programmes at a higher education institution were to be confirmed upon that institution’s re-accreditation.

It is highly unpleasant when already accredited programmes are simply re-accredited. Programme re-accreditations are pointless. A higher education institution must provide the quality of the implementation of its programmes on its own. It must upgrade and adjust them to the current needs of the environment. Ordinarily, an institution is accredited first and then each programme is accredited separately. After all these years, I still fail to see what happens if an institution is re-accredited first, but a certain programme of the institution is not. Would this also stall the re-accreditation of the institution? In any case, the matter should be regulated.

As long as the Higher Education Act is not amended, we will be obliged to carry out programme re-accreditations instead of making analyses and assessments to raise the quality of higher education. The Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education should be a consultant for quality growth.

A culture of quality and responsibility should be built. We have only started, but we will succeed in a few years. The quality loophole will be closed, and genuine quality will reflect both in teaching as well as research. Do not let anyone overtake you on the right path. For a small nation, Quality is the only right approach to future challenges. And it is up to us to rise to those challenges.