



ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

DECREE N 16

October 10, 2015

ON AWARDING INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION TO «VANADZOR STATE UNIVERSITY AFTER H. TUMANYAN» STATE NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

General Information about the Institution

Full name of the Institution: Vanadzor State University after H. Tumanyan

Acronym: VSU

Legal form: State non-profit organization

Official address: 36 Tigran Mets street, Vanadzor, 2001 Lori
Region, RA

Previous Accreditation decree and date: Not available

Guided by the regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” approved by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 N978 decree; by N959-Ն (30 June, 2011) decree on approving RA Standards for Professional Education Accreditation; by the Procedure on the Formation and Functioning of Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (ANQA) as well as by ANQA Regulation on the Formation of the Expert Panel, in the open session held on 10 October, 2015 the Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) discussed the issue of state institutional accreditation of Vanadzor State University after H. Tumanyan (VSU) with the presence of the Chair of the expert panel, ANQA coordinator of the accreditation procedure and VSU representatives.

Having examined the self-analysis presented by VSU, the expert panel report, VSU’s action plan for the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report as well as ANQA conclusion, the Committee stated the following:

The main phases of the accreditation process were carried out within the following periods:

Submission of the application 23 February, 2015

Submission of the self-analysis of the University 15 April, 2015

Site-visit 1-4 June, 2015

Submission of the expert panel report 15 July, 2015
Submission of action plan for the elimination of
shortcomings 24 August, 2015

The expertise was carried out by an expert panel formed according to the requirements of the regulation on “The Formation of expert panel at “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” Foundation”. The evaluation was carried out based on the 10 criteria of institutional accreditation approved by RA Government decree N 959–Ն as of June 30, 2011.

While conducting the evaluation the role of VSU in the Northern part of Armenia was taken into consideration.

According to the resolution of RA government on 30 April, 2014, the Institute was renamed into Vanadzor State University after H. Tumanyan and is considered to be the legal successor of Vanadzor State Pedagogical Institute after H. Tumanyan.

Currently the main mission of the University is

1. To ensure stable development and to be integrated into the common European education area, the University pursues the policy of meeting the needs of the stakeholders as the basis for realization of its educational and scientific activities.
2. To educate competent specialists with fundamental and applicable knowledge and practical skills, the University is creating a student-centered atmosphere.
3. To contribute to the ongoing development of the individual, to create a favorable environment for educating a comprehensively developed person by accepting its responsibility towards the society.

The current process of accreditation was the first attempt of the University to conduct self-analysis of institutional capacities. The aim of the self-analysis is the thorough evaluation of VSU’s activities.

VSU is the first educational complex in region which carries out a four-level education: Specialized Secondary Education (since 2010), Bachelor’s and Master’s (since 2008) and PhD (since 2006).

VSU has the right of providing 28 Bachelor and 13 Master programs and in 2015 there was an admission with 3 new specialties.

Based on tuning methodology VSU has developed program specifications with precisely defined learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) and educational-methodological packages where teaching, learning and assessment methods are clearly described. The academic programs were compared with other universities’/Armenian and foreign/ similar programs. Labor market analysis is represented in academic programs. The material and technical base of the University and the building conditions not always contribute to the application of various teaching and learning methods stated in the academic programs.

There are certain mechanisms of recruitment and admission of students at VSU, but the University has not evaluated their efficiency yet. In recent years, the number of students has the tendency to decrease. VSU carried out activities to successfully create a student-centered

environment. Various mechanisms facilitate the identification of students' needs. The institute of Academic Advisers was established to support the students.

The University has a qualified teaching staff, but there are some problems in ensuring generation change in some specialties. VSU regularly conducts trainings and qualification development activities for the teaching staff. It encourages teaching staff's professional growth and in recent years the number of lecturers with academic titles and degrees has increased, but the University does not still have enough potential for the internationalization of research.

Most of the objectives of VSU defined for the field of research are extremely ambitious in comparison to the existing resource base and financial resources. Research priorities of the University are not clarified.

The research component is expressed in MA program. One of the main priorities of VSU was Armenian Studies and the University has great number of research in this field. VSU plays a significant role in Pedagogical Science too. The creation of necessary conditions and funding in other fields will allow the teaching staff to match with the rank set by VSU. In order to accomplish these goals, the University should make certain financial investments, but as it is evident from the self-analysis of the University, they are insufficient and the research activities do not ensure any kind of financial flows.

There are certain shortcomings in the management system of the University which hinder the efficiency of the activities of the University. Great work is being done at the University in terms of needs assessment of internal stakeholders but there is an apparent tardiness in terms of meeting the identified needs of the stakeholders.

Mechanisms of plan-do-check-act are not fully invested in the management system. Collegial management is still behind the sole decision making. The University does not have a policy of effective management of financial resources, which hampers the creation of learning environment and efficient implementation of mission and goals of VSU.

VSU takes active steps in terms of external relations and internationalization. The experience gained through international relations fosters the development of the University; elaboration of academic programs through tuning methodology, introduction of network model of quality assurance, involvement of students and lecturers in mobility programs. The internationalization of HEI is hampered by the limited knowledge of foreign languages. VSU organizes trainings, founded the Language Center, but still has not achieved great success in this field.

The lack of knowing a foreign language hinders the internationalization of the University. The University organizes trainings it has established a Language Center however great success has not been made in this aspect yet. The University recognizes its responsibility to the society of Lori region and tries to meet the demands of the region.

VSU conducts activities in creating quality assurance network system. Due to the effective functioning of QA Center many awareness-raising seminars, trainings, discussions with stakeholders, surveys for revealing the needs are conducted. Due to that daily work the quality assurance processes and the attitude towards QA Center are gradually changing for the better at the University. The activities of QA Center at VSU contribute to the continuous improvement of all the

processes, timely identification of stakeholders' needs and solution of problems. Nevertheless, there is a need to clarify the relations between governing bodies and QA Center as well as to strengthen the links. Cyclical style of quality assurance activities is not yet adopted by all the subdivisions of VSU.

The University is advised to follow the below mentioned recommendations within the framework of its strategy. The recommendations are meant to assist the University in coping with the issues and problems revealed by the expert panel during the accreditation procedures and foster the further development of the University's activities.

Mission and goals

- The University should seek ways to resolve the tensions inherent in its short term purpose (employability upon graduation) and a longer term purpose of seeking to develop of “a comprehensively developed person”.
- The University should develop a mechanism for defining quantitative targets in relation to goals (e.g employment of graduates) so that improvements can be identified and initiatives evaluated.

Governance and Administration

- The University should enhance its ranking becoming a fully inclusive institution. It should ensure all the students' rights and needs regardless their abilities and disabilities. This can be ensured by involving students with special needs and students from other ethnic groups in the Student Council and the councils of the University. The University should take into account all the ways that will foster satisfying the needs of students with special needs and improving the physical environment. The first step towards this can be the development of the policy of inclusive learning.
- The University should have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are quantitative and tangible and were revealed as a result of the cooperation with the structural units of the University in order to ensure the involvement and responsibility of both internal and external stakeholders in the implementation of the University activities. Recommendations and meetings with target group of stakeholders will give opportunity to the University to show the improvement of the activities carried out in terms of University mission and goals.
- The University should consider how to use data collection more effectively to identify the tendency towards the development and to set new targets. The expert panel suggests setting such targets as students' enrollment, research outcomes, students' achievements, students' satisfaction as well as the quality of education.

Academic Programs

- The University should start to create virtual learning environment to enrich its material resources as it is usually done in European universities. Virtual learning environment provides students with online access to course materials, program information and university

regulations. It will create efficient ways of communication with students and will enhance students' experience. VSU has good opportunities to develop a pilot project of virtual learning environment, building it on the bases of Moodle. The information technology skills of staff and students ought to be exploited in order to create a new 'blended' learning approach that is found in many European universities nowadays.

- Further work is needed to ensure that MA thesis papers meet international standards, particularly with respect to the ways in which students demonstrate their understanding of methodology and justify the choice of methodological approaches to reveal the research issues.

Students

- The data provided by the University show that most students at VSU study with part-time system. It also turned out that because of the economic conditions of the region, this tendency may well continue. The University is urged to ensure the experience of part-time students is equitable to that of the full-time peers and that inconsistencies identified in relation to access to guidance and support are eliminated. Virtual learning Environment has great potential to improve communication with part-time students and to enhance face-to-face teaching (see 'Academic Programs').

Teaching and support staffs

- The university has significant human resource and it is recommended that it seeks ways to further invest in the development of staff through systematic and target professional development. Targets may include the improvement of language skills of the staff (so that they can fully participate in international activities) and the enhancement of knowledge and skills of administrative staff in the spheres of education management and quality assurance so that they build a sustainable workforce which has the capacity to achieve success in the implementation of long term plans of internationalization.

Research and Development

- The panel wants to urge the university to extend its research activities in a systematic and targeted way. This could be done by focusing its efforts primarily on a limited number of carefully chosen centers of excellence. VSU has the potential to develop research centers in the field of tertiary education andragogy alongside pedagogical research. These centers can stimulate innovation and generate new knowledge and information about teaching and learning processes within the university. This approach has the potential to stimulate more interdisciplinary research.

Infrastructure and Resources

- The university needs to make significant investment in teaching resources and the physical environment if it wants to ensure safe and healthy learning environment for all students. In particular, the resources for physics, biology and chemistry need further updating to enable students to access an appropriate curriculum.

Internal Quality Assurance System

- QA Center has a significant role in ensuring the protection of rights of both staff and students. In particular, the university should develop clear guidelines for assessment practices to ensure academic integrity and honesty. It can be a student handbook explaining the essence of academic honesty and unfair practice; how it can be avoided; and which are the likely sanctions for transgressing agreed regulations. Regulated and consistent processes of cross checking or peer-to-peer moderation of assessment practices will give an opportunity to protect the teaching staff's academic judgments being questioned by students.

Having examined the presented package of documents, having heard the opinions of the head of the expert panel and the representatives of the University, the Committee finds that Vanadzor State University after H. Tumanyan adequately accomplishes the primary goals set before the institution. The provided academic programs with clearly defined learning outcomes, thoroughly described teaching, learning and assessment methods, ensure a good methodical basis for quality education. QA system forms a sufficient learning environment to ensure the provision of professional education in line with National Qualifications Framework.

Though the shortcomings revealed in the fields of “Governance and Administration”, “Research and Development”, “Infrastructure and Resources” do not put in a danger the preparation of necessary specialists by the University, they make the process of meeting the revealed needs slow as well as hinder the internationalization and enhancement of the competitiveness of the academic programs.

The University should take serious steps towards the improvement of the above mentioned fields. The elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report as well as accomplishment of recommendations will ensure student-centered and research nature of the provided education services and their compliance with international standards.

Accepting all the recommendations mentioned in all 10 criteria, the University has developed an Action Plan for the elimination of the shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report which is realistic (in spite of some shortcomings) and does not contain any risks. The implementation of the abovementioned Action Plan will foster the development of the University. However, in order to ensure the control over the implementation of the Action Plan some outputs and performance indicators should be reviewed.

Taking into consideration that methodically using its internal QA mechanisms the University will manage to eliminate the shortcomings mentioned in the expert panel report as well as implement the recommendations, as a result of voting the Committee

DECIDED

1. To award Vanadzor State University after H. Tumanyan an **Institutional Accreditation with a 4 /four/ year period.**
2. Within two months after the publication of the Decree on Awarding Institutional Accreditation to submit a reviewed action plan and corresponding time-schedule to ANQA taking into account:
 - a. the necessity of finding solutions primarily to the problems existing in the fields of “Governance and Administration”, “Research and Development” and “Infrastructure and Resources”;
 - b. the results and recommendations of the peer-review according to international standards.
3. In order to improve the activities of the University in line with current demands it is necessary to pay special attention to the improvement of management system, the refreshment of appropriate technical resource base required for the implementation of the academic programs, the assurance of the competitiveness and attractiveness of the academic programs, the mobility of teaching staff and students as well as the strengthening of the link between teaching and research.
4. According to the requirements of clause 12 of the Regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” every two year to submit a written report to ANQA on the results of the carried out activities

Chairman of the Accreditation Committee

V. Urutyanyan

October 10, 2015
Yerevan