



ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

DECREE N 14

3 July 2015

On Accreditation of Institutional Capacities of “Yerevan Agrarian University” LLC

General Information about the Institution

Full name of the Institution:	“Yerevan Agrarian University” LLC
Acronym:	YAU
Official address:	27/5 Fuchik str., 0048, Yerevan, Armenia
Previous Accreditation decree and date:	Certificate N 091, 14.01.2004 without validity period

Guided by the regulation on “State Accreditation of RA Institutions and their Educational Programs” approved by the RA Government on 30 June, 2011 N 978-Ն decree; by RA Government decree N 959-Ն (30 June, 2011) on “Approval of 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 27 June, 2015, the Accreditation Committee of “National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance” foundation (hereinafter Committee) discussed the issue of state institutional accreditation of Yerevan Agrarian University (hereinafter YAU) with the presence of the Chair of the Expert Panel, ANQA coordinator of the accreditation procedure, and YAU representatives.

Having examined the self-analysis presented by YAU, the expert panel report, YAU’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	13 June 2013
Submission of the self-analysis of the University	12 December 2013
Site-visit	12-16 May 2014
Submission of the expert panel report	1 September 2014
Submission of action plan for the elimination of shortcomings	6 October 2014

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 carrying out the evaluation the Committee has taken into consideration the fact that “YAU strives to prepare competent specialists with BA and MA qualifications to the benefit of the development of agrarian sphere in Armenia”. Currently there are 235 full-time and 668 part-time BA students and 6 full-time MA students studying at the University.

YAU has undergone accreditation in accordance with the state accreditation standards and regulation which were operating before 2011. The current accreditation of institutional capacities is the second experience of the University. In 2012 on the basis of YAU application the institutional accreditation was carried out but no decision was made because after receiving the Expert Panel report YAU applied to ANQA for the termination of the process.

Currently YAU is authorized to provide education in 5 professions. The academic programs (hereinafter APs) are partially in compliance with the mission of the University. There is no generic approach to the development and implementation of the APs and curricula in particular as well as to the selection of teaching and learning methods.

The University has adopted the student-centered approach, however, the transition to it is yet incomplete. It should be mentioned that with the aim to achieve intended learning outcomes (hereinafter LOs), standardized teacher-centered methods of teaching and learning are mainly used at the University which hardly foster the implementation of student-centered education. The University still has much to do in terms of defining LOs of APs. The LOs are described too generally and they do not comprise thorough mapping which hinders the activities to be more coordinated. Neither the link between LOs and assessment, nor the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods for the acquisition of LOs are clear. Although the majority of YAU teaching staff and students are satisfied with the current assessment system, the lack of student assessment based on LOs and the unclearness of mechanisms for the prevention of plagiarism cannot guarantee the objectiveness of assessment, neither foster the formation of fair academic environment. The University gives importance to the review of APs and courses, however, YAU has not carried out activities regarding improvement of APs, and it has no policy on monitoring, evaluation of effectiveness and improvement of APs except for class observations.

YAU does not carry out research activities which negatively influence the teaching and learning activities. YAU lacks in comprehensive policy which would include research and scientific approach within the frame of APs.

The teaching staff of the University is mainly recruited by means of interviews. The teaching staff currently teaching at YAU is employed on contractual main and external double jobbing bases. Currently YAU does not have clearly defined requirements set for professional qualities of teaching staff for APs. The Expert Panel concerns more about the fact that there are few specialists at YAU who have respective qualifications for provided professions; one and the same teacher has several classes (3-9) which definitely influences the quality of teaching. The evaluation of YAU teaching staff is carried out by means of class observations and surveys being held among students. So far no trainings for development and modernization of teachers’ professional competences have been organized at YAU. The teaching staff mainly participates in trainings that are organized by other higher education institutions or organizations.

The facilities (classrooms) are sufficient to have theoretical and some practical classes, and though the classrooms are full of audiovisual equipments, the internet is not available to students. The existing equipments

at YAU laboratories are outworn and cannot contribute to the acquisition of LOs sufficiently. The library and information center are vital for the creation of research atmosphere and culture, while the level of resource provision is rather low at the University.

The lack of clear policy on distribution of financial resources for fulfillment of YAU vision and goals, as well as implementation and continuous assurance of APs weaken the targeted and efficient usage of financial resources.

There are standards set for student recruitment, selection and admission, however, the assurance of the mentioned processes is not guaranteed. The survey results mentioned in the self-evaluation report (henceforth SER) are also worrisome; according to them, the 48.75% of students who took part in surveys find that the YAU admission is not transparent. The lack of clear mechanisms for the YAU students' needs assessment and improvement of education process reduces the opportunity to evaluate the performance of the University. Though YAU lacks a clear system of organization of facultative classes and provision of consultancies to students, the Expert Panel positively assesses the non-formal communication between students and teachers. Student coaching or support is not systemized. The students are not involved in research activities irrespective of the fact that there are applied and agricultural professions among the list of professions of the University. YAU does not give any services for students with special needs.

The administration of the University gives importance to the practice exchange, formation of environment fostering development and internationalization, however, it is not clear how the University is going to assure appropriate environment. The University does not provide joint academic and research programs. YAU plans to develop a strategy for internationalization. To carry out academic, scientific-research and scientific-pedagogical internships, the University has signed agreements with a number of laboratories and organizations. Some agreements have been signed with international organizations but nothing has been undertaken within those agreements. The level of foreign language knowledge of students and teaching staff is low which is a serious obstacle for the internationalization of the University's activities, the cooperation with international structures and the mobility assurance.

There is a map of distribution of bodies involved in the organizational structure of the University and respective documents regulating the activities of those bodies. Nevertheless, the whole administration of the University is not based on the principles of quality management. The lack of all kinds of planning and monitoring mechanisms puts the efficiency of management system under risk. The surveys being currently in use are considered to be the main mechanism for the identification of factors having an impact on the performance of the University in general as well as its academic activities. The aims, frequency, and methodology of surveys as well as the scope of respondents do not allow surveys to be viewed as an effective tool for the identification of opinions of internal stakeholders. There are few cases of data collection and analysis on efficiency of professions and academic activities of the University, as well as those of decision making based on those data and respective mechanisms which puts the effectiveness of management under risk. This is conditioned by the fact that without aforementioned information it is impossible to assess the academic activity of the University, the acquisition of the LOs of APs, the effectiveness of teaching method as well as the substantiation of managerial decisions.

All the levels of the University give importance to quality of education and quality assurance though currently it is more conditioned by the external requirements. With the aim to provide education with high quality, YAU presently invests internal quality assurance system which is under process. Human, financial and material resources have been provided to organize respective activities. Although some activities are being processed, it is not clear whether these approaches of internal quality assurance are sufficient and efficient for the whole University. It is obvious that the quality culture is not fully formulated and that the Plan-Do-Check-Act (henceforth PDCA) cycle is not completed yet.

The University is given the following recommendations which should be fulfilled out within its strategy and which are aimed at the solution of problems put forward by the Expert Panel during the accreditation as well as at further improvement of the University:

Mission and purpose

1. To clarify the University mission by making more specification on the levels of learning outcomes and by aligning its activity with the mission (or to rename the University);
2. To invest clear mechanisms on needs assessment and analysis of internal and external stakeholders;
3. To include assessment indicators of achieved strategic goals in the strategic plan;
4. To invest mechanisms and procedures for evaluation and improvement of results of the fulfillment of mission and goals.

Governance and Administration

5. To simplify the organizational structure of the University; to select a flexible option for organizational unit which will continue the collegial academic culture and will contribute to the increase of the level of management effectiveness;
6. To adjust management system in a way that the teaching staff's investment in education policy development, application and review processes will be more significant;
7. To develop job descriptions for the administrative staff by clearly differentiating their authorizations, describing their main responsibilities as well as precise requirements set for the given job;
8. To regulate the decision-making process in a formal way;
9. To develop and invest clear mechanisms for the implementation and monitoring of short-term, mid-term and long-term planning.
10. To invest clear mechanisms which will identify factors having an impact on the University's general and academic activities;
11. To complete the PDCA cycle in all the levels of management to effectively achieving strategic goals;
12. To develop and invest clear mechanisms which will collect, analyze and evaluate the data on the effectiveness of professions and academic processes;
13. To involve external experts in the research of factors having an impact on the University's performance; this will give a clearer and more comprehensive vision about the strengths and weaknesses of the University's activity.

Academic Programmes

14. To review academic programs (to clearly define learning outcomes) making them in compliance with the University mission and taking into account the stakeholders' opinions;
15. To invest policy on selection and evaluation of teaching and learning methods;
16. To improve the system assessing students' knowledge in a way that it reflects the acquisition of learning outcomes;
17. To invest interactive, student-centered teaching methods in more practical courses;
18. To improve mechanisms preventing plagiarism at technical (if possible, by using respective computer programs) and education (exception of plagiarism within the framework of academic honesty) levels;
19. To carry out targeted benchmarking with similar academic programs of other higher education institutions at national and international levels;
20. To develop policy and procedures on monitoring, evaluation of effectiveness and improvement of professional academic programs.

Students

21. To review the policy on student recruitment, selection and admission by ensuring transparency and honesty of the processes;

22. To regulate the process of students' academic needs assessment and make it more coordinated;
23. To develop clear mechanisms and toolset for students' academic needs assessment;
24. To regulate the process of delivering facultative classes and providing consultancy;
25. To develop regulation and time-schedule for applying to the administrative staff;
26. To clarify the functions of the Career Center and to integrate it in education processes by activating the Center's activity and expanding its scope; this should be aimed at the assurance of alumni's employability as well as their feedback;
27. To organize a process for involving students in scientific-research activities, and to direct it to the formation of students' knowledge, skills and competences (this can foster the formation of Education Scientific Center);
28. To increase the effectiveness of Student Council's activity, in particular from the perspective of improving relations between Student Council and students;
29. To develop and invest quality assurance mechanisms which will evaluate educational, consultancy and other services being delivered to students.

Teaching and Support Staff

30. To develop clear indicators set for the categories of teachers' recruitments;
31. To define clear professional qualities set for the teaching staff in accordance with education requirements;
32. To improve mechanisms of evaluation of teaching staff;
33. To study the effectiveness of surveys and apply their results with the aim to guide and individualize qualification enhancement programs;
34. To improve training system of beginner-teachers;
35. To improve the knowledge of teachers' foreign language;
36. To provide trainings for the teaching staff on such vital academic issues as compliance of teaching & learning methods and assessment system, organization of student-centered education, interlinking learning outcomes of the course to assessment system;
37. To interlink professional development courses to qualifications set for academic programs;
38. To invest policy and procedures which are aimed at assurance of professional development of the teaching staff;
39. To develop professional standards and improvement mechanisms for the attestation of administrative and support staffs.

Research and Development

40. To develop strategy reflecting the University's interests and ambitions in research by actively involving teaching staff and students in scientific research activities;
41. To develop mechanisms and tools of research strategy implementation and quality control;
42. To develop mid-term and short-term plans on the basis of the strategy which reflects the University's interests and ambitions in research;
43. To take steps towards internationalization of planned research activities, including improvement of foreign language knowledge of teaching staff and students;
44. To ensure a larger number of teaching staff members with scientific degree in education process;
45. To interlink research with education process, including respective policy, procedures and mechanisms.

Infrastructure and Resources

46. To find external financial sources to fully achieve goals planned by academic programs (consultancy, other services);

47. To improve the University's educational-material basis, infrastructure, equipment of laboratories with the aim to assure academic environment necessary for the implementation of professional academic programs;
48. To make annual estimate of budget inflows and outflows which will significantly increase the efficiency and expedience of expenses throughout financial year;
49. To develop mechanisms of needs assessment directed to the fulfillment of goals of academic programs;
50. To create and invest policy on efficient allocation of financial resources;
51. To develop clear mechanism to assess the efficiency of budget expenses;
52. To develop clear policy and procedures for management of information and documentation related processes;
53. To invest electronic paperwork management system which will be in compliance with information management policy and respective procedures;
54. To make an analysis to what extent the existing resources ensure an environment necessary for the implementation of educational activities derived from the strategic goals;
55. To develop mechanisms for the assessment of application, availability and effectiveness of resources provided to students and teaching staff.

Social Responsibility

56. To assess the effectiveness of in-process internal accountability system and invest external accountability system;
57. To assure transparency of internal processes of the University for external stakeholders;
58. To enrich information of the website and make it more usable;
59. To develop policy, procedures and clear mechanisms for the establishment of feedback fostering public relations;
60. To analyze the efficiency of existing mechanisms of assuring feedback of stakeholders;
61. To develop mechanisms for the transition of knowledge in agrarian sphere to the society.

External Relations and Internationalization

62. To develop policy and procedures which will be directed to the creation of environment which fosters experience exchange, development and internationalization of the University;
63. For the internationalization of the University to establish a structural unit or to recruit a respective responsible staff member together with clear regulations on the scope of his/her activity and respective functions;
64. To activate the external relations with local higher education institutions, the signed international agreements as well as to sign new realistic agreements;
65. Within the framework of the curricula to review:
 - subject plans of foreign language teaching with emphasis on teaching of foreign language for the professional field;
 - teaching methods giving importance to the development of foreign language skills necessary for the professional field.
66. To review the training courses of foreign language organized for the administrative and teaching staffs and to enlarge the scope of their participation.

Internal Quality Assurance

67. To review the YAU policy of internal quality assurance making more clarifications in terms of actions/;
68. To improve QA mechanisms reviewing the toolset;

69. To evaluate the efficiency of the QA Center activity (to elaborate scheme/methodology of data collection, what kind of survey is necessary to develop, what target groups will be chosen, how frequent the surveys will be held, etc.);
70. To develop a comprehensive QA manual;
71. To involve stakeholders (especially external ones) in QA processes;
72. To evaluate the efficiency of stakeholders' participation in QA processes;
73. To monitor QA processes;
74. To complete the PDCA cycle in all the management levels of YAU

Accepting the revealed shortcomings and given recommendations, the “Action plan for the elimination of shortcomings mentioned in the Expert Panel” was developed. The Expert Panel evaluates the implementation of the main part of the plan as risky as the resource equipment for the activities is insufficient, and the deadlines are clear but not realistic in all cases. Besides, a number of urgent problems were not given much importance to in the spheres of improvement of academic programs, assurance of academic environment necessary for their implementation, recruitment of teaching staff, etc. The activities and actions towards the improvement are partially in line with the requirements of the Expert Panel. The examination of the plan shows that the University gives more importance to the regulation of the documentation, i.e. the development of policy, procedures and mechanisms rather than their implementation and study of their impact in line with the goals.

Observing the presented package of documents and considering the opinions of head of the Expert Panel and YAU representatives, the Accreditation Committee finds that the identified shortcomings are highly risky. According to the Expert Panel evaluation, the most crucial fields of the University's activity – **“Governance and Administration”**, **“Academic Programs”**, **“Teaching Staff”**, **“Students”**, **“Infrastructure and Resources”**, and **“Internal Quality Assurance”** do not meet the requirements of institutional accreditation criteria, and they do not create sufficient institutional academic environment for the provision of academic programs in accordance with the NQF.

The steps towards improvement mentioned in the action plan do not guarantee the improvement and efficient implementation of main activities as far as the problem is not just the formation and improvement of documentation base but the readiness to put it into practice and the opportunity to objectively evaluate the current potential.

As a result of voting the Committee:

DECIDED

1. **To reject the Institutional Accreditation of** Yerevan Agrarian University.
2. After the elimination of shortcomings and fulfillment of recommendations the University can apply for the institutional accreditation in accordance with the defined regulation.

Chair of ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

V. Urutyán

10 July 2015
Yerevan